

**Thursday
28 February 2019**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Thursday 28 February 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

NEW WRIT

Ordered,

I beg to move that Mr Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a New Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the County Constituency of Newport West, in the room of Paul Phillip Flynn, deceased.—(*Mr Nicholas Brown.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Cross-party Talks

1. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What progress the Government have made on cross-party talks on potential changes to the withdrawal agreement and political declaration. [909487]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): As this is my first opportunity to do so, may I pay my tribute to the former hon. Member for Newport West? Paul Flynn was a true parliamentarian and he was respected across the House.

The Prime Minister, supported by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and others, has met and continues to meet MPs from across the House to understand what will command the confidence of the House. Those discussions are ongoing.

Alex Cunningham: I pay my compliments to Paul Flynn. He was a lovely man. He put his arm around quite a few of us in the early days when we were new Members.

We have had months of no progress or compromise on the deal from either the UK or the EU, but there has been some good news. Donald Tusk said that the letter from the Leader of the Opposition offered a “promising way forward” to solve the Brexit impasse. Surely the Secretary of State agrees that this could be the basis for cross-party talks, and that we could crack the need to protect jobs, trade and rights, and even help the Irish border question, through a comprehensive customs union?

Stephen Barclay: As the shadow spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), said yesterday, there have been discussions between the respective Front Benches. I agree with him that it is right that we do not go into the details of those discussions on the Floor of the House, but there have been discussions and I think that that is welcome. Both the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and other distinguished Members, such as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), noted in the debate yesterday that there had been progress. It is important that we continue to have those discussions, but that those of us on the Government Benches stand by our manifesto commitments in respect of not being part of a EU customs union.

21. [909508] **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I have heard from people from Plymouth living in the rest of the EU who are sick to the stomach with worry about what will happen to them in the event of a no deal. What meaningful changes can the Secretary of State make to the withdrawal agreement or the political declaration to give them the certainty that these people rightly deserve?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to secure change. The Brady amendment showed that in terms of the legally binding change to which the Prime Minister has referred. I am sure the hon. Gentleman's constituents, like mine, also want to see us move on. The way that we do that, and end that uncertainty, is to back the Prime Minister's deal.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm to the House that in the discussions to which he has just referred the EU has made it absolutely clear that the backstop will not be removed from the withdrawal agreement?

Stephen Barclay: The EU has made it clear that it wants a deal that will pass this House. It has heard the concerns about what it says is a temporary agreement—what article 50 says is temporary—and the concern expressed by the Attorney General in his legal advice that it could be indefinite. It has heard the concerns of this House. That has been very much the message that the Attorney General, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I have expressed in those discussions. The EU is engaging in a discussion on how we can address that.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): There is significant cross-party support to ensure we do not leave the EU without a deal. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister promised that if her deal failed to win support by 12 March the Government would give the House a chance to reject no deal the following day. Can the Secretary of State succeed where the Minister for the Cabinet Office failed yesterday, by telling the House how the Government will vote on such a motion?

Stephen Barclay: I admire the way in which the hon. Gentleman asked a question that has been put to the Prime Minister and to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I very much echo the replies that they gave to the House. He also touches on a wider point. The positions of the parties on the winding-down arrangements in the withdrawal agreement are closer than the debate

may sometimes indicate. I think that across the House we agree that we should respect our legal obligations. Across the House there is a shared commitment to avoiding a hard border in Northern Ireland. As we saw yesterday over the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), there is also cross-party support to protect EU citizens' rights and the rights of UK citizens in the EU. There is much on which we agree. The question is whether Members across the House will back the deal to end the uncertainty that businesses and citizens face.

Paul Blomfield: The Secretary of State is right to talk about ending the uncertainty. Frankly, this is not good enough. Business demands certainty and the country needs clarity. This House has already passed a motion expressing our opposition to a no-deal Brexit, so the Government risk being in contempt of the House. Let me give the Secretary of State one more chance: when the motion comes forward, will they vote to reject no deal—yes or no?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman puts the same question a second time—[*Interruption.*] The point is that he talks about ending uncertainty, and the way to end uncertainty is for the Labour party not to go back on its manifesto and have a second referendum, because a second referendum will prolong the uncertainty. We may end up with the same result but just a further level of uncertainty as we go through a second referendum. What we need to do is back the deal, move on and give businesses—as he and I agree—the certainty they need.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Further to the Secretary of State's comments about a second referendum, does he agree that there is considerable cross-party support opposing a second referendum?

Stephen Barclay: As so often on these matters, my hon. Friend speaks a lot of sense. There is no consensus not just about a second referendum, but about what the question would be in a second referendum, because those supporting the second referendum do not even seem able to agree on what question would be put.

European Arrest Warrant

2. **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): If he will hold discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of seeking changes to the political declaration for continued UK access to the European arrest warrant. [909488]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The political declaration provides a basis for agreeing effective arrangements based on streamlining procedures and time limits for the surrender of suspected and convicted persons. That is the operational capability that we want to maintain which is currently in the European arrest warrant.

Alex Norris: It should be a source of great anxiety to all of us in this place that the four Children's Commissioners of the UK have had to write to the Secretary of State expressing their worry about the lack of safety for our children and the clarity in the political declaration. It is very important that we get that clarity. The political

declaration is vague, broad and, frankly, unconvincing. When will the Secretary of State give us clarity? How can we in good conscience vote for the deal when we do not know if we will be as safe afterwards?

Stephen Barclay: On this point, the hon. Gentleman and I agree: we want to be in a position where we can surrender those suspected of crimes in Europe to those countries and they can surrender those individuals to the UK. That is in our mutual interest. The political declaration does not rule that out and it is in both sides' interest. After all, we surrendered far more people—around 8,000—to the EU over the last eight or nine years, compared with around 1,000 that were surrendered the other way. If there is a murderer or rapist who has committed an offence in Germany, the victims of that crime want to ensure that that perpetrator is surrendered there. We also want that to happen. That is why it is in both sides' interest to reach an agreement.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Of course Germany will not allow the extradition of people held there to the United Kingdom if we leave the European Union. Is the Secretary of State aware that Scotland Yard's deputy assistant commissioner, Richard Martin, said yesterday that leaving on a no deal would lead to a significant slowing down of police activities on such things as the European arrest warrant? What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Home Office about what extra resources might be needed by the police to maintain the same level of security in a no-deal scenario as currently applies?

Stephen Barclay: There was a reason that I chose Germany out of the EU27 countries as my example. The point I was seeking to raise is that it is in both the EU's and our interest to enhance our mutual security by having arrangements. Of course, the EU has other arrangements, but the most streamlined way of doing that is to have the operational capability, and that is the point that the Home Secretary is making.

Workers' Rights

3. **Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Trades Union Congress on the protection of workers' rights in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [909489]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): Obviously, the Government's priority is to secure a deal, but it is quite true and correct that Ministers and officials have carried out extensive engagement with trade unions to listen to and reassure them on workers' rights. In fact, we have workers' rights standards that often exceed EU standards. Whatever the scenario, the Government have pledged to maintain those workers' rights, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has committed to giving Parliament, whenever the EU standards on workers' rights change, a vote to keep up with those standards.

Hugh Gaffney: The Government's own guidance states that workers' rights will be maintained at the existing level in the event of a no-deal Brexit, but the TUC and other organisations have expressed concern that future

UK Governments could choose not to enhance workers' rights in line with the requirements of EU employment standards. Does the Secretary of State agree that there should be a dynamic alignment between the UK and the EU on workers' rights in the event of no deal?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I said a moment ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given a categorical undertaking that the House will have an opportunity to vote to keep up with EU standards on workers' rights as they change. Given the hon. Gentleman's reference to the TUC, I should mention that Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, has said:

"A second referendum could damage the UK's democratic fabric."

That is exactly the voice of the TUC. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) is chuckling somewhat with embarrassment, but that is the position of the TUC.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I will be supporting the deal because I think that it is in the best interests of our country and will protect our workers, but can the Minister assure me that the Government are committed to making the United Kingdom a gold standard for workers' rights, not just in Europe but in the world?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I said in my earlier answer, the UK is currently a leader on workers' rights, and there is no reason why that position should change after Brexit. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear on a number of occasions that we do not want to see any diminution—any reduction—in the quality of workers' rights and protections. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we must vote for the deal, and we must move forward.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Can the Minister assure me that, whatever the way in which we leave the European Union, workers will receive protection that is commensurate with, or greater than, that enjoyed by others across the continent of Europe?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I think the hon. Gentleman understands, today the UK enjoys workers' rights protections which in most cases exceed the EU minimum, and there is no reason why they should be in any way diminished after we leave the EU.

Devolved Administrations: Talks

4. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on the UK leaving the EU. [909490]

12. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on the UK leaving the EU. [909499]

18. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on the UK leaving the EU. [909505]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): On Monday I co-chaired the eighth ministerial EU negotiations forum in Cardiff. During the meeting, Jeremy Miles from the

Welsh Government, Graeme Dey from the Scottish Government and I discussed the issue of data in the context of our future relationship with the EU, which I know is very important to the devolved Administrations in the discharge of their responsibilities. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attends the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU negotiations), and, indeed, did so on his first day in office.

Angela Crawley: Does the Minister agree with the submissions made more than two years ago by the devolved Administrations, and confirmed by more recent analysis by his own Government, that staying in the single market and the customs union would be the best outcome for the whole UK economy?

Mr Walker: We have, of course, taken careful note of the submissions from the devolved Administrations, but we have Governments led by different parties with different political positions. We discuss that regularly in the ministerial forum. What we need to do is work together to ensure that our approach works for the whole UK, and that is what we will continue to do, recognising the differences of opinion that exist between the respective Governments.

Martyn Day: Will the Government now admit that if they had engaged properly with the devolved Administrations two years ago and had meaningful discussions with the Scottish Government about their—the Scottish Government's—paper "Scotland's Place in Europe", they would not now be in the position of having to blackmail the House into choosing between a bad deal and no deal?

Mr Walker: We have engaged on those papers, and we have had a range of meaningful discussions over the years, in many of which I have been personally involved. However, we respect the fact that we will take politically different positions on some of these issues. The UK Government believe that they must discharge their responsibility for the UK to leave the EU, and the Scottish Government do not agree with that. Nevertheless, we will continue to work together to find the best approach to these challenges.

Marion Fellows: Given that the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland has supported a differentiated deal for Scotland in the event that Scotland is removed from the single market by the UK, and given that the Government support a differentiated deal for Northern Ireland, will the Secretary of State confirm that a similar option would be possible for Scotland?

Mr Walker: The circumstances of Northern Ireland, with the UK's only land border with the EU, are different in that respect, but more importantly the deal we have negotiated is for the whole of the UK, and it is vital that we recognise that it was a UK-wide referendum and therefore we should deliver on that deal for the whole of the United Kingdom.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): When my hon. Friend meets Members of the Welsh Assembly does he remind them that the people of Wales voted for Brexit with far greater enthusiasm than they voted for a Welsh Assembly? Will he urge them, along with some of

the more recalcitrant members of the Cabinet, to get behind the Prime Minister and deliver Britain out of the EU with or without a deal by the end of March?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend makes his point with his usual force and power, and of course he is absolutely right that Wales did vote to leave the EU. I have indeed in Select Committee sessions at the Welsh Assembly reminded some Assembly Members of that, but the Welsh Government have engaged constructively with us in the ministerial forums and we will continue to work with them to deliver an outcome that works for the whole of the UK.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Last week the Government announced a new fund to help local authorities with ports to manage Brexit. It appears that the fund covers only England, and in Wales the Welsh Government provide no such dedicated ports assistance. Will the Minister please raise this with Welsh Ministers, because information provided by my local authority in Pembrokeshire, with its ferry connections to Ireland, suggests that my county is not getting the assistance it needs?

Mr Walker: My right hon. Friend as always is a champion for his county, and may I in advance wish him a happy St David's Day? I will certainly be happy to take this up with colleagues in the Welsh Government, and I know that my ministerial colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), who is in charge of no-deal preparations, will be looking at that in our overall approach to ports.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): May I remind my hon. Friend that devolved administrations need not only be the nations of the United Kingdom? They could also include the combined authorities, including the one in the west midlands.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I know my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) sitting beside me on the Treasury Bench has engaged in some very useful discussions with the combined authorities, including Andy Street.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have had correspondence from one of my companies, Cladeboye Yoghurt, and had a second meeting last Friday with another of my companies, Lakeland Dairies, both of them concerned about packaging. The issue is clear: the packaging needs to be in order before 12 March—another D-day—so the products are ready to leave on 29 March. They have been in touch with the Northern Ireland devolved Administration Department—the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs—and the Department here; can we have some idea of what is happening?

Mr Walker: I will be very happy to take that issue up on behalf of the hon. Gentleman with the relevant Departments—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for International Trade—and make sure that they are engaging with the Northern Ireland civil service.

Dynamic Alignment with EU

5. Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): If he will hold discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of seeking changes to the political declaration to provide for dynamic alignment with the EU on (a) workers' rights, (b) consumer rights and (c) environmental protections. [909491]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The UK has a tradition of exceeding EU standards, so we do not need to follow EU rules to continue to lead the way. It is a matter for Parliament to decide, and the Prime Minister has signalled her intent to give Parliament more control on these issues.

Jo Stevens: The Secretary of State needs to stop playing games on this, because he knows that even if commitments on workers' rights and other rights are put into primary legislation, once we leave the EU they can be overturned by a future Tory Government, and for years we have heard from those on the Conservative Benches about their aspirations to deregulate the labour market and make it easier to sack people. The single market is the only way of having a binding guarantee on workers' rights; will the Secretary of State accept that?

Stephen Barclay: I think the person playing games, with respect, is the hon. Lady, who is ignoring the fact that in a number of areas we exceed the European standards. For example, on maternity leave the UK offers 52 weeks, 39 weeks of which are paid, whereas under the pregnant workers directive just 14 weeks are paid. I do not accept the paucity of the hon. Lady's ambition: the UK should be looking to go beyond that and provide better workers' rights than she seems to be seeking.

Article 50: Extension

6. Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): What recent discussions he has had with EU officials on extending article 50. [909492]

7. Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on extending article 50. [909493]

10. Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on extending article 50. [909496]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): We do not want to see article 50 extended. Our focus is on getting a deal that Parliament can support and on leaving on 29 March. Extending article 50 simply defers the moment of decision and extends that uncertainty.

Wera Hobhouse: The Prime Minister has, since Tuesday, opened up the possibility of extending article 50, subject to EU agreement. From the UK's perspective, this could be used for three options: to deliver Brexit, a general election or a people's vote. Can the Secretary of State think of any other options?

Stephen Barclay: We are clear that we want to secure a deal and that we do not want to extend. The hon. Lady should really come clean, because she says that she wants to extend but what she really wants is to go back on the largest vote in our country's history and revoke Brexit entirely. She does not want to extend in order to secure a deal; she wants to stay in the EU and go back on the deal. She is praying in aid an extension when that is not really her policy.

Ged Killen: If there is a vote on 14 March, will the Secretary of State vote to extend article 50?

Stephen Barclay: We have already had this question twice, but I am happy to refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a moment ago. We are committed to securing a deal; that is the Government's objective.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Does the Secretary of State really think that, without an extension, he can get the necessary legislation through before we leave the EU? By the way, I am not trying to obstruct us leaving.

Stephen Barclay: I respect the way in which the hon. Gentleman has framed his question, because I know, as he does, that his constituency voted leave and that many of his constituents will be keen, as mine are, to ensure that we get this deal over the line. Clearly, the withdrawal agreement Bill is a significant piece of legislation and we will need to get it through the House, but the key issue is getting the deal through, because once we have done that, we will have the basis for the necessary consensus in the House to approach that legislation.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I entirely agree with the Secretary of State that extending article 50 is a very subtle way of thwarting the will of the 17.4 million people who want to leave. Does he agree that one way of avoiding having to extend article 50 would be to ensure, in the negotiations, that the Malthouse proposals—which he has asked a taskforce to work up into detail—should be put into the legal text of the treaty with a definitive implementation date?

Stephen Barclay: I pay tribute, as the Prime Minister did, to the work that my right hon. Friend and a number of colleagues have done on taking forward the alternative arrangements work. He will be aware of the time pressure relating to the derogations required as part of that, and that is why this is seen as a phase 2 issue by the European Union. He can be reassured, however, that, as the Prime Minister has set out, there is a commitment to £20 million of funding to take that work forward, together with civil service resource. That shows the goodwill and intent of the Government in relation to progressing the alternative arrangements.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Paul Flynn told me that I had star quality, but as my friend, I do not suppose that he was an objective observer. In the event of the withdrawal agreement being defeated a second time, the Government must be committed to voting in favour of a no-deal Brexit; otherwise, they will in effect have taken no deal off the table, won't they?

Stephen Barclay: I am sure that the former Member for Newport West was not the only person to say that my right hon. Friend had star quality. The key issue is that we need to give businesses certainty and we need to

secure the deal. Unlike my right hon. Friend, I am optimistic that there is an opportunity for the House to come together on the areas on which we agree. This is about the winding-down arrangements, but many of the issues on which there is further debate to be held relate to the future economic partnership. We have already signalled that we want to work much more closely across the House on taking that work forward.

Mr Speaker: I am very glad that the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) was heartened by the tribute from Paul Flynn, but it seems to be manifest and incontrovertible that he exhibits star quality. Indeed, it is as manifest, incontrovertible and predictable as the passage of the seasons, for goodness' sake.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): During yesterday's debate, the Minister for the Cabinet Office clarified that, in the event of the House voting on 14 March for an extension to the article 50 process, the Government would be required to bring forward legislation and that the House would have a chance to approve whatever final extension length might be agreed with the EU. I have a simple question for the Secretary of State: do the Government foresee that legislation being primary or secondary, and will it be the means by which the House could express its view on the proposed length of the transition?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is getting slightly ahead of himself. Before the vote on 14 March, we have a vote on 12 March. This Government are committed to winning that vote, and therefore the vote on 14 March will not apply.

Bioethanol Industry

8. **Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): What representations he has received from the bioethanol industry as part of the negotiations for the UK leaving the EU. [909494]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): Of course the Government have engaged extensively on EU exit with businesses and industries across all sectors of the economy and all regions of the UK. I am pleased to tell the House that I visited Tees valley to discuss EU exit issues with representatives of the chemical sector, including the bioethanol industry, and they made it very clear that supporting the Prime Minister's deal is the one way they can get certainty and clarity.

Anna Turley: I thank the Minister for his response but, on behalf of the British bioethanol industry, may I highlight the devastating impact that a zero-tariff regime would have on the industry? Tariffs ensure a level playing field, and the UK industry cannot compete with US bioethanol, which has substantially lower energy costs and feedstock prices. The biofuel plant at Wilton in my constituency is only just about to restart after a production pause, but with reduced operations. British jobs are hanging in the balance.

Will the Minister meet members of the bioethanol industry again to reassure them on this point? Will he assure the House today that a zero-tariff regime for bioethanol will not come into force at any point, deal or no deal?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As the hon. Lady knows, I am of an open disposition. I am happy to meet representatives of any industry, particularly from her constituency. I make it clear that the political declaration clearly states that the EU and UK will agree on a free trade area for goods. There is no question of having damaging tariffs, in the way she describes, on the industries she mentions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Nick Smith. *[Interruption.]* I will give the fellow a chance in due course, but I think there may be some domestic difficulty if I do not call the Front Bench.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

Paul Flynn never told me that I have star quality, but he did say that I might have a fighting chance if I bought his book.

Is the Minister, like me, opposed to unnecessary testing on animals? If he is, will he make sure that, as we seek to replicate regulatory regimes on the chemical industry, not a single unnecessary duplicate test is conducted on animals in this country?

Kwasi Kwarteng: This issue definitely came up in the debates on the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 last summer, and it was very much the Government's position at the time that we would try to maintain standards on the protection of animal rights.

Jenny Chapman: What about the regulations?

Kwasi Kwarteng: And the regulations. I am determined to resist any idea of a second referendum, because that would extend the uncertainty and lack of clarity.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I know my place, Mr Speaker.

Business Community

9. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of the business community on the potential effect on the UK economy of leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement. [909495]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman, my friend, knows his place. If only he could keep his wife's pegs in the Members' Cloakroom as tidy as he keeps his own, all would be well in the world. I thank him for his question.

Getting a deal is the best way to give the business community the certainty and clarity it needs and is asking for. This year alone, we have published over 250 pieces of advice to businesses of all sizes to provide the information they need to prepare for our exit from the European Union. This week alone, Ministers have met businesses from across the economy, including the financial services, energy and automotive sectors, to discuss this plan.

Nick Smith: If we crash out, what will the Minister say to Welsh farmers when they cannot sell their lamb to European markets because they face tariff rates of 46%?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that his constituency is one of the few that voted in greater numbers to leave the European Union than mine did. People took in a whole bunch of factors when they made that decision, and they expect us to deliver on it. The best way to avoid the scenario he outlines is to vote for the deal that is coming before the House.

16. [909503] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Scottish Government analysis published last week highlights the impacts of a supply shock caused by a no-deal Brexit, which include: the destruction of supply chains; restricted supplies; significant restrictions on imports and exports; a reduction in business turnover; companies delaying investment; and the depreciation of sterling. Why does the Minister think this is worth it?

Chris Heaton-Harris: And at the same time, business investment in the UK stood at almost £47 billion in quarter 3 of 2018, which is an increase of 30% on quarter 1 of 2010. The World Bank considers the UK to be one of the best and easiest countries in the world in which to do business, with it ranking ninth out of 190. Last month, London retained its position as the top tech investment destination in Europe. I could go on and on and on.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, star quality personified—Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I feel really sorry for the Secretary of State and his poor little team. It is going to be Shrove Tuesday next Tuesday and my resolution will be to be a little nicer to them every day for the whole of Lent, because they are the carrying the can that has been kicked down the road by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The truth that has not been articulated this morning is that the mess we are in is the Government's mess—it is the Tory party's mess. They called the referendum, they got it wrong and now the British people and the British businesses that I represent are paying the penalty. Why does the Minister not get up, speak up for Britain and sort out our businesses, which are terrified of investing in this country?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is really enjoying himself today.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I should have what he had for breakfast more often, Mr Speaker. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I am pretty aware of what my constituents voted for back in June 2016. I am pretty sure they wanted to leave the European Union. I am pretty sure they are pleased with the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund saying that it is going to invest billions of pounds in our country going forward. He should be positive about the future of the country and not such an Eeyore.

Investment and the UK Economy

11. **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the ongoing negotiations for the UK leaving the EU on investment and the UK economy. [909498]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): The Secretary of State has regular conversations with Cabinet colleagues on all aspects of our EU exit. The UK remains a great place to do business. Only yesterday, INEOS announced £1 billion-worth of investments in the UK oil and chemical industries, something I am sure the hon. Gentleman is about to welcome wholeheartedly.

Mike Amesbury: Yesterday, I met the Cheshire and Warrington local enterprise partnership, which told me how the Government's prolonged approach to Brexit negotiations was already having a major effect on business decisions in our locality—this is a concern spread right across the UK. Will the Government act now to protect jobs in my constituency and elsewhere? Will they remove those red lines and negotiate a customs union, close ties with the single market and proper protection for workers?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I think he can probably guess part of the answer: the best way to do those things that he wants is to vote for the deal. May I gently remind him of something he tweeted in June last year? He wrote:

“I campaigned & voted to remain. As much as I don't like the result of the referendum, as a democrat I have to respect it.”
He should do so.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Can the no-deal Minister confirm to the House that the UK is No. 2 in the whole world for foreign direct investment after only China and that although the doom mongers before the referendum said that by now we should have been in recession, with hundreds of thousands of jobs lost, this year we are going to have the fastest growth in Europe, with record numbers of people in employment?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for his question, and I can confirm that. I can also confirm that the economy has grown continuously for the past nine years and is expected to grow throughout the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast period. There are now 3.3 million more people in work than there were in 2010, and the employment rate is at a record high of 75.8%. This country is doing well—is that despite Brexit?

Reciprocal Healthcare Arrangements

13. Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on reciprocal health arrangements for UK and EU citizens in the event that the UK leaves the EU (a) under the terms of the withdrawal agreement and (b) without a deal. [909500]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The Secretary of State and I have regular discussions with Cabinet members on all EU exit-related matters. The withdrawal agreement safeguards the reciprocal healthcare entitlements of UK nationals in the EU and of EU nationals living in the UK. Although we remain committed to leaving the EU with a deal, as a responsible Government we are preparing for all outcomes, including in respect of reciprocal healthcare. The Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care have written to EU partners to seek to protect healthcare arrangements.

Maria Caulfield: Well done on the 5-1 win last night, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Maria Caulfield: Will the Minister confirm that the Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill will guarantee reciprocal healthcare rights for all citizens? Will it gain Royal Assent before 29 March?

Mr Walker: The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill has completed its passage through the House of Commons and is awaiting Report in the House of Lords. We are confident that we will have the necessary legislation in place, with Royal Assent, by exit day. The Bill will enable the UK to strike the reciprocal deals that will provide the certainty for which my hon. Friend asks.

EU Exit: No deal

14. David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent steps he has taken to prevent the UK from leaving the EU without a deal. [909501]

22. Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What recent steps he has taken to prevent the UK from leaving the EU without a deal. [909511]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): As the Prime Minister said on Tuesday, the only ways to rule out no deal are to revoke article 50, which we will not do, or for Parliament to vote for a deal. We are working to achieve legally binding changes on the backstop, and we have set out commitments to protect workers' rights and the environment and to an enhanced role for Parliament in the next phase of negotiations. We are determined to address the wider concerns of those who voted to leave. We all know that the House needs to support a withdrawal agreement, and we are working hard to deliver that.

David Linden: It is not quite as simple as that. Surely the best way to take no deal off the table is for the Government just to say that they are taking no deal off the table, so why, when the SNP put an amendment to Parliament last night, did the Government whip their MPs, including Scottish Tory MPs, to walk through the No Lobby and not take no deal off the table?

Chris Heaton-Harris: There are a whole host of reasons. First, we want to get a deal over the line. May I just remind the hon. Gentleman what the House voted for, or against, yesterday? It voted against an SNP amendment by a majority of 36. Interestingly, were one to take that result literally, that now means that there is a majority of 36 in this House for keeping no deal on the table.

Dr Whitford: The Department's own report shows that almost a third of the Government's essential no-deal projects will not be ready for 29 March. The Minister will not say how the Government will vote on 12 March, but if the House votes against no deal, will that be respected?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am fairly hopeful that the vote on 12 March will be carried by the House because it is the one for the deal.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, although it is the Government's policy to leave the European Union with a deal, the SNP's position is to

accept no deal whatsoever, and they are therefore trying to manoeuvre the debate to the point of no deal, which would suit their argument—chaos, leading to an independence referendum, leading to the break-up of the United Kingdom?

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend makes a strong point, with which I mostly agree, although the Government have been preparing for two and a half years for our leaving without a negotiated deal so it would certainly not be chaotic.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I remind the Minister that the fact that a majority of Conservative MPs votes for something does not make it right. Certainly, the experience with the Scottish Tories is that they vote not for what they want to happen but for what they want their Whips to see them voting for.

Will the Minister comment on the statement made by his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland last night? He said that the Government voted to leave no deal on the table to make sure that it did not happen, and the SNP voted to take no deal off the table to make sure that it did happen. Does the rest of the Cabinet share the Secretary of State for Scotland's particular and idiosyncratic form of logic?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Personally, I think we are lucky to have such a brilliant Secretary of State for Scotland. I completely understand that the hon. Gentleman has taken a very principled position on not wanting to leave the European Union; I just wish that there were others, perhaps on the Opposition Front Bench, who would be honest with the British people—especially those in northern Labour leave seats around Barnsley and south Yorkshire, the east and west midlands, Manchester and so on—and say, “Actually, the new Labour position is to stay in the European Union” and that they disrespect the votes in the referendum.

Peter Grant: Yet again we see that, when it suits the Government, they insist on looking at the voting pattern of individual constituencies in the north of England but ignore the voting patterns of entire nations that are supposedly partners in this Union. If the reason why we want to take no deal off the table is that, secretly, we want it to happen, does that give us an explanation of why the Government keep telling the Scottish Government to take independence referendums off the table? Are they secretly wanting that to happen as well?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I might have misheard the hon. Gentleman, but may I gently remind him that the Scottish people voted to stay within the United Kingdom?

Regeneration of Towns

15. **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the UK leaving the EU on funding for the regeneration of towns. [909502]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): Of course, my hon. Friend will be well aware that leaving the EU creates fresh opportunities to allocate growth funding according to our own UK priorities, including the

regeneration of towns. The Government are committed to creating the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to tackle these inequalities across our communities. Leaving the EU with a deal will mean, of course, that we remain in the existing programmes until they close. We have also protected this funding in the case of a no-deal scenario.

Chris Green: Will my hon. Friend confirm how we will make the Shared Prosperity Fund better than the EU programmes that it will replace?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend, and I think everyone across this House who has an elementary grasp of arithmetic, will know that for every €20 that we put into the EU pot we got €10 back, so we were a net contributor. We were the second biggest net contributor, and the logic of that is that we can more than compensate for the loss of EU funding across our communities. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will go some way to meeting those concerns.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Anyone with an elementary grasp of arithmetic can also read the latest studies showing that, had the United Kingdom been staying in the European Union, we would have received far more in regional development funding because of the increase in regional disparities under this Government's austerity for the past 10 years. Will the Minister tell me that the Shared Prosperity Fund, of which we have no details with only 30 days to go to Brexit, will match the increased funding that we would have had from the European Union?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The point I was trying to make was that we as a country were a net contributor. We were the second biggest net contributor in the system that redistributed those funds. There is no doubt that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund can more than match EU funds. The details of that, as the hon. Lady well knows, will be discussed as we leave the EU on 29 March.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): May I quietly and politely encourage the Minister to speak to his colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to make sure that funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which will come in once we have left the European Union, is not required to be on a match funding basis? Our small towns up and down the country are unable to raise the match funding to access such funds, so the money ends up in the big cities, where the capital is available.

Kwasi Kwarteng: That is obviously an important part of the ongoing discussion. There is no doubt that, with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, we will be able to have a better, more sensitive regional allocation than is currently the case under the EU system.

UK Citizens: Rights in EU

19. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to ensure that the rights of UK citizens living in the EU are protected in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal. [909506]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The UK Government have been unequivocal that, under any scenario including no deal, EU citizens and their family members living here at exit will be able to stay. We are calling on member states to reciprocate that unilateral offer for UK citizens. Alongside that, the Government supported an amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) yesterday to seek to ring-fence the citizens' rights part of the withdrawal agreement. We will write to the European Council to seek its views on this as soon as possible.

Bob Blackman: I thank the Minister for his answer. Following the Government's acceptance last night of the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire, which I was pleased to support, what action will they now take to introduce the necessary legislation to safeguard EU citizens' rights in this country and also to protect UK citizens in the EU?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. We have already introduced some of the legislation for the settled status scheme to ensure that it is available for EU citizens in the UK. Of course, safeguarding the overall package for UK citizens in the EU will require a reciprocal agreement. It is for that reason that we will be writing to the European Council to raise the issue and seek to take forward talks on it as early as possible.

Devolved Administrations and Local Government

20. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential effect on the devolved Administrations and local government of the UK leaving the EU.
[909507]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The Secretary of State engages regularly with Cabinet colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretaries of State for the territorial offices. We will use Brexit as an opportunity to strengthen the Union, and we will engage directly with the devolved Administrations and local government across the UK. For instance, the Secretary of State for Scotland recently met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Luke Graham: Engagement with the devolved Administrations is very important on devolved issues, but what steps is my hon. Friend taking to involve MPs from the devolved nations in reserved issues, because every MP in this House is equal to every other?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Of course, MPs in this House will have an important role to play on UK-wide frameworks, which we are working to develop as soon as possible. Once we leave the EU, directly elected parliamentarians in this House and the devolved Administrations will be responsible for more than they were during the period of our membership.

Topical Questions

T1. [909512] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): Since the last departmental questions, this House has given a clear indication of what it needs to support a deal with the EU. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Attorney General and I have held discussions with key EU figures, and the Prime Minister made it clear in her statement on Tuesday that we are making good progress and remain committed to leaving with a deal on 29 March.

Nic Dakin: The threat of a no-deal exit from the EU means that the ability of businesses to use 2019 emissions trading scheme credits to address 2018 ETS costs is at risk, meaning that businesses may be subject to multimillion-pound bills that they can ill afford. Will the Secretary of State urgently take action to prevent businesses such as British Steel in my constituency from suffering heavy financial penalties through no fault of their own?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and fair point. He consistently speaks up for the steel industry, and the 2018 emissions surrender under the European emissions trading scheme is an issue of concern to that industry. I have spoken to my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary and he is happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is undertaking an analysis of the issue, and I am happy to engage with the hon. Gentleman regarding that.

T7. [909518] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): I will continue to vote to leave the EU on 29 March with a deal, but will the Minister explain how funding for university programmes such as those carried out in the University of Nottingham, which employs a number of my constituents, will be protected in a no-deal scenario?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): My hon. Friend will have seen the announcements about the Treasury guarantee for the funding measures she mentioned. We are also exploring more long-term alternatives, so this work is ongoing.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Thirty days ago the Government backed the Brady amendment and the Prime Minister said she would try to obtain

"legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement that deal with concerns on the backstop".—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2019; Vol. 653, c. 788.]

It is clear from yesterday's debate that some Members on the Government Benches have a high expectation that legally binding changes may yet be agreed, even at the eleventh hour. Against that background, will the Secretary of State confirm that, although discussions have taken place about work streams and possible additional words to further explain the backstop, in the 30 days since the Brady amendment, the Government have not drafted or put forward to the EU any proposed words

that could conceivably be described as “legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement” in relation to the backstop?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to refer to the package of measures that we are putting before the European Union, and the Prime Minister touched on that in her remarks on Tuesday. In terms of the specific wording, these are obviously live discussions and need to be given the space to be conducted. As the Prime Minister set out in her statement on Tuesday, we have been very clear with the European Union that the effects of these changes have to be legally binding. That is what the Brady amendment required and it is the clear will of the House; that is the crux of the issue that we are discussing with the European Union.

Keir Starmer: Well, this may be Brexit questions, but it is clearly not Brexit answers. The Secretary of State can evade questions all he likes, but his evasion tells its own story. He knows and I know that the Government are not even attempting to change a single word about the backstop in the withdrawal agreement, and he knows the expectation among his hon. Friends that there are going to be those changes to the withdrawal agreement. Can he not simply admit that the only plan the Government have is to run down the clock and attempt to force MPs to choose between the same basic deal that was rejected in the first meaningful vote and no deal?

Stephen Barclay: With respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, there is an inherent contradiction in his question. He says that the Government are trying to run down the clock while, at the same time, we gave a clear commitment yesterday to give the House a vote, if the meaningful vote does not go through on the 12th, on whether the House would then support leaving without a deal. That is not in the Government's interest. It is also not in our interest to run down the clock because, as he is well aware, we need to ratify the agreement through the withdrawal agreement Bill prior to leaving, and therefore we need time for that ratification to take place, so there is a contradiction within his question.

It is not in our interest to run down the clock, and, further, it is not in the interests of the business community, because they want the uncertainty ended as soon as possible. I gently say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, while congratulating him on perhaps winning a battle on his Front Bench on a second referendum when so many of his fellow shadow Ministers have spoken out publicly against it, that a second referendum will prolong the uncertainty, and I do not think that is in the interests of business.

T8. [909519] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Does the Minister agree that if a no-deal Brexit was really akin to the arrival of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Members in all parts of the House would be rallying behind the Prime Minister to support the deal that will get us out by the end of March?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The deal is absolutely essential across the piece, and that is exactly what we are focused on. If we can secure a deal, we will leave in an orderly and

timely way. Given the efforts of the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), in preparing this country for no deal, I do not believe that a no-deal scenario will lead to the sort of destruction that the doomsayers on the Opposition Benches have suggested. We are doing lots and lots to secure our safety and our prosperity in the case of no deal.

T2. [909513] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): In Cambridge, it is local elections season. When I knocked on my first door on Sunday, I interrupted someone who modestly described himself as a mid-career academic. He was filling in a job application to move to Switzerland and told me that a number of colleagues in his department were doing the same, the reason being that his department faces losing 20% of its funding from the European Research Council. These are senior scientists who have heard what the Government have to say but have concluded that their future lies elsewhere. How can the Secretary of State reassure the 48% who feel that their future has been put at risk?

Stephen Barclay: I am very happy to tell my fellow Cambridgeshire MP how I reassure the academics of Cambridge on this issue. If we look at just how many European Union universities are in the top 50 compared with the number of British universities in the top 50, we see that the determination of their success is not based on their membership of the European Union.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): The Scottish Government are demanding additional funding for preparations to leave the EU. Can the Minister confirm that in 2018-19, despite receiving £37 million, the Scottish Government allocated only £27 million for that purpose—a gap of £10 million?

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend has some good figures, and I have some extra, updated figures for him. The devolved Administrations received a total of £120 million in the 2019-20 EU exit funding allocations. The Scottish Government received £54.7 million for that period. We have been working behind the scenes with the Scottish Government, who have been nothing but professional, courteous and actually quite excellent to deal with on no-deal preparation.

T3. [909514] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State recognise that if the Prime Minister returns with an amended version of her deal, there is a very strong case that parliamentary approval being subject to subsequent ratification in a public vote?

Stephen Barclay: We have had a public vote. The people voted in record numbers, and they gave us a clear instruction to deliver on that. I simply remind the right hon. Gentleman that he, like so many Labour Members, stood on a manifesto that committed to give force to that vote. Many voters in his constituency and others across the country will be baffled as to why, given that manifesto, his party now seems to be going back on it and supporting a second referendum. That is not what it was saying at the general election.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Magna Carta states: “All merchants may leave or enter England”—

of course, now the United Kingdom—

“in safety and security. They may stay and travel throughout England by road or by water, free from all illegal tolls, in order to buy and sell according to the ancient and rightful customs.”

Does that remain the policy of Her Majesty's Government?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It has been a while since I heard Magna Carta quoted in the Chamber. I reassure my hon. Friend that we are committed to the principles of free trade to which that excerpt from Magna Carta alludes. We want a free trade agreement. We have been a champion of free trade over many centuries, and I strongly urge him to back the deal so that we can craft an agreement that will ensure free trade.

T4. [909515] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), told the House earlier that Scotland could not get a differentiated deal, as remain-voting Northern Ireland has, because of border issues. However, there is also a differentiated deal for Gibraltar. Can he explain why remain-voting Scotland is not to be treated with the same level of respect as Gibraltar and Northern Ireland? Does he agree with his former party leader and Prime Minister, John Major, that this Brexit madness strengthens the case for Scottish independence?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): No, I do not agree with that statement. I made it clear in my previous answer that we are negotiating on behalf of the whole United Kingdom. That is why we have forums for engaging with the devolved Administrations. Sadly, Ministers from the Northern Ireland Administration are not available to engage with us, but they will be treated in the same way as Ministers from the other devolved Administrations.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the UK prosperity fund gives the UK Government and Scottish Government the opportunity to work together to improve all aspects of Scots' lives?

Mr Walker: Wholeheartedly, yes.

T5. [909516] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): New industrial units were constructed at Moorfield industrial estate in my constituency, thanks partly to money from the European regional development fund. How much money are the UK Government allocating to replace the south-west Scotland regional development fund, and will they devolve it to the Scottish Government?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He will know that the multi-annual financial framework, from which that fund comes, finishes in a couple of years, so more certainty can probably be delivered to businesses such as those in his constituency from the shared prosperity fund.

T9. [909520] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Following on from the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) about European research funding, can the Minister clarify whether the Government intend to maintain that level of funding, whichever pot it comes out of, after we leave the EU? The University of Warwick is very concerned about that.

Mr Robin Walker: The Government are stepping up investment in research and development and building up the amount by which the UK leads other countries. As per the Secretary of State's answer, I expect the strong position of our universities to continue to strengthen in years to come.

T10. [909521] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State guarantee that in the event of a no-deal Brexit, the UK will have stocks of the essential dietary products for people with the rare disease phenylketonuria, or PKU?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Probably better than my confirming that is for me to point the hon. Lady to the written ministerial statement laid before the House earlier this week, which goes into great detail. I will happily give her a copy afterwards.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Secretary of State or one of his colleagues mentioned the Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill, but there is also the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill and numerous statutory instruments. We are days away from leaving. Why on earth are the Secretary of State or any of his Ministers confident that we will have a functioning statute book at 11.1 pm on Friday 29 March? I am not.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am surprised that the hon. Lady is not. I believe she has sat on a number of the statutory instrument Committees. We have nearly completed our statutory instrument programme to get ready for a no-deal situation, and we have plenty of mitigating measures in place should other primary legislation be held back inadvertently by Members not wanting as smooth a departure as possible if we are to leave without a deal.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The recent Government report states that only 40,000 of the 240,000 British businesses that trade exclusively with the EU have applied for their export registration number. Businesses say that it could actually be given automatically if they are registered for VAT. Is this just incompetence, or are the Government looking for a scapegoat in the event of a disastrous for business no-deal exit?

Stephen Barclay: No. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we have been significantly scaling up our communications to those businesses. We have capacity under the website registration to register 11,000 a day. Part of the challenge has been that many of those businesses are hopeful of a deal, and are therefore holding back until 12 March to await the decision on that deal. However, they can scale up, and we have the capacity to scale up, as the paper provided to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) set out.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of the fact that EU negotiators have said they need a significant reason for extending article 50 on their side, if Parliament votes to extend article 50 on 14 March, what reasons will the Government give, and what preparations are they making now to ensure that it is secured and honoured?

Stephen Barclay: What EU leaders have said is that they want to have the certainty of a deal. They do not want to see an extension, particularly any extension of uncertainty. The hon. Lady, as some other hon. Members

have, talked about 14 March. The key issue is the vote on the 12th—the meaningful vote—and getting a deal. That is what EU leaders have said they want, and that is what this Government want.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I voted for Labour's Brexit deal, but does the Secretary of State agree with the CBI that a no-deal Brexit will mean

“a lost decade, stifling the UK's potential and leaving us less competitive, productive and prosperous for years to come”?

Stephen Barclay: When the hon. Gentleman says he voted for Labour's Brexit deal, I am slightly confused about which one, because its position has obviously changed somewhat. Given that his own constituents voted in a majority to leave the EU, I would say that I share their optimism for the future. We are a country that can go out into the world and succeed, and we can make Brexit an opportunity for us, rather than as portrayed in the way he sets out.

Business of the House

10.37 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 4 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill [*Lords*], followed by a motion relating to the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2019.

TUESDAY 5 MARCH—Proceedings on a business of the House motion, followed by proceedings on the Northern Ireland Budget (Anticipation and Adjustments) (No. 2) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH—Motion relating to the appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General, followed by proceedings on a business of the House motion, followed by proceedings on the Northern Ireland Regional Rates and Energy (No. 2) Bill.

THURSDAY 7 MARCH—General debate on International Women's Day, followed by a general debate on the opportunities and challenges facing the modern Commonwealth in its 70th year. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 8 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

I would like to wish the House a very happy St David's Day for tomorrow. I thought about wearing a leek, but then I thought a daffodil would be more subtle. Some of my real highlights as Leader of the House in the past 12 months have included my visit to the Royal Welsh show, meeting Women2Win Wales and stopping off for a quick half at the Tiny Rebel brewery in Newport.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, the House will want to pay tribute to Eve Griffith-Okai, who retires this week after many years of dedicated service to four Speakers. I was delighted that you, Mr Speaker, the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the next Clerk of the House, John Benger, and others raised a glass with me this week to wish our fantastic Clerk, Sir David Natzler—he is in his place—all the very best for his retirement. This is his last day at the Table, and we will miss him. I hear that his retirement balloon has pride of place in his office. We wish both David and Eve, and their respective families, all the best for a healthy and happy retirement.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, but I am surprised that she did so for only one week. The Prime Minister practically told us what will happen in the following week, and I cannot see why the Government did not put that business through. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union actually announced the business and said when the vote will take place.

Last week, I asked the Leader of the House to confirm that all fire and safety works that were due to take place in the February recess had been carried out. Is she satisfied that that will be done in time? Again, I ask about Opposition days and the Easter and May recesses. I know what she will say—in a robotic way she will say that a business of the House motion will be tabled—but I ask her to help the House and its staff a bit more, so that they can plan.

Let me help the Leader of the House with a figure for the costs of the Government cancelling recess. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) put the figure at between £300,000 and £400,000. It was the Government who decided to cancel recess and waste those costs.

Is the Leader of the House still confident that there is enough time to put in place all the necessary secondary legislation by the time we leave the EU? During the Government-cancelled recess last week, just eight Brexit statutory instruments were laid before Parliament—the lowest total number out of the past six weeks. Only 59% of affirmative Brexit SIs have now been debated, which leaves more than 100 in this place and the other place. When will they be debated, because we need that scrutiny?

The Labour party has prayed against the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2019, which is statutory instrument No. 62. Under the serious shortage protocol for medicine, that appalling piece of secondary legislation enables pharmacists to override GPs when deciding what medication to give people. Some people need specific, rather than generic, medication, and pharmacists would be able to lower the dosage. That is absolutely appalling, to such an extent that the Good Law Project has started judicial review proceedings against the Government. When will we have that debate, and when can that SI be annulled? Labour Members also prayed against the Amendments Relating to the Provision of Integrated Care Regulations 2019, which is statutory instrument No. 248. May we have a debate on that?

In her statement on Monday, the Prime Minister made no mention of the proposed European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill. If the Government manage to get the withdrawal agreement through, they must bring forward that Bill. What is the timeframe for that, and in the meantime could the draft Bill be published? The Government—not anybody else—have postponed the meaningful vote, and that has led to the possibility of a no-deal scenario. It is the Government who have been appalling and disloyal to this country and the British people, not those who have had to point out what will happen if there is no deal.

I do not know whether the Leader of the House has read the Government's "Implications for business and trade of a no deal exit on 29 March 2019", which was published on 26 February. A no-deal Brexit could mean that the UK economy would be 9% smaller in the long term, and the flow of goods through Dover would be "significantly reduced for months". The Government are behind on contingency planning for a third of their critical projects. Banks will gain access to £300 billion to help them to deal with the financial shock, but what about the rest of us? What about the people of this country who will also face that financial shock? The UK trade and drinks industry has warned that one in eight companies could go out of business if the UK leaves without a deal, and around 70% of the UK's food imports come from the EU.

On Tuesday, the Government held emergency talks after discovering that we have the wrong kind of pallets for a no-deal scenario. Will the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs come to the House and explain what happened at those emergency

[Valerie Vaz]

meetings? May we have a debate or statement on what will happen regarding our food security? That situation is what is appalling and disloyal to this country.

There is some good news. The former chair and current president of the Chagos Islands (British Indian Ocean Territory) all-party group, the Leader of the Opposition, has been an advocate for the rights of the Chagossians for some time. The International Court of Justice said that Britain's acquisition of the Chagos archipelago in the 1960s was "wrongful", and that Britain must

"bring to an end its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible."

About 2,000 people were evicted, and they want to go home. That was in our manifesto—that is another point fulfilled—and we want the Chagos islanders to return to their homelands. Given that the Government seem to want to cling on to their colonial powers, may we have a statement from the Foreign Secretary? Will the Government abide by the Court's decision, or are they going to appeal?

Finally, it does not really matter how big your daffodil is; it's the wishes that count, and I want to wish everybody a happy St David's Day. I, too, thank David Lionel Natzler and Eve for all their work. It is David's last day today. It is lovely to see him at the Table; I was sorry he could not be there when we all wished him well. I shall miss seeing him in his Lycra as he gets on his bike. I want to wish everybody—those who are obvious, those who are behind the scenes, the admin assistants and unsung heroes who keep this House going—who are also retiring. We wish them well. Thank you for your years of service to the House, good bye and good luck.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her good and thoughtful remarks about Sir David Natzler.

The hon. Lady asks why I am not announcing more than one week of business. To be clear, the Prime Minister said that the meaningful vote would come back by 12 March at the latest. I have announced the business for next week, but, as always, if we can come back to the House before then, we will. The hon. Lady asks about fire and safety measures in the House. I apologise; I did not catch that last week. I will write to her with an update, although she will appreciate that it is a House of Commons Commission matter, and as a member of the Commission, she could equally ask the Director General for that information.

The hon. Lady asks about Opposition days. She will appreciate that I am seeking to balance the many different requests from across the House for business, including from the Opposition, the Backbench Business Committee and Members across the House. As I said last week, I was pleased to be able to find time for a debate on the draft REACH—registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals—regulations on Monday, following her request in business questions on 24 January. She also mentions two further statutory instruments that she would like debated in the Chamber. I have seen the official Opposition's prayer against the NHS and human medicines SIs. I encourage her to raise those through the usual channels, as is the convention.

The hon. Lady asks about recesses, particularly the cost of the February cancellation. She will appreciate that there were several very important debates that week, including on the NHS 10-year plan, which she

herself asked for, and the opportunity for many Members to question Ministers on important and urgent matters that arose that week, while several Brexit SIs also passed through their Delegated Legislation Committees that week. The Public Gallery was also full of young people on their half-term school holidays who were able to participate and see their democracy in action. It was a very important week.

The hon. Lady asks about the timeframe for the withdrawal agreement Bill. As I have said several times, we will bring it forward as soon as the House votes to support the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement and future political declaration. She asks about no-deal preparation. As she will appreciate, there has been an enormous operation by a superb civil service, to which we owe a huge debt of gratitude for its enormous contribution to this complex project. The United Kingdom is extremely well prepared. A number of the challenges are around our inability to force third parties to do their bit, but the UK has made significant steps towards being prepared for all eventualities. She will appreciate that we have just had Brexit questions. I am sure she will have listened carefully to the answers.

Finally, on the Chagos islands, the hon. Lady will be aware that what the UN gave this week was an advisory opinion, not a judgment. Of course, the UK Government will look at the detail carefully, but the defence facilities on the British Indian Ocean Territory help to protect people here in Britain and around the world from terrorist threats, organised crime and piracy.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I join others in wishing our Clerk a long, happy and healthy retirement. He has been a magnificent servant to this House.

Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on mechanisms to help people manage personal debt? I recently attended the 10th anniversary of a local charity that does just that, and it told us that the Office for Budget Responsibility has said that by 2022 total household debt will be £2.26 trillion. The message should go from this House that credit card companies and banks should stop ripping people off and making the situation worse with their outrageous interest charges.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was City Minister in 2014, when the Government fundamentally reformed the regulation of the consumer credit market, giving the Financial Conduct Authority robust regulatory powers to protect consumers better. He is right that no lender should be ripping off consumers with appallingly high interest rates. As he will be aware, we are increasing funding for publicly funded debt advice to more than £56 million in this financial year—enough to provide financial advice to help more than 530,000 people. The Government are committed to delivering a well-functioning and sustainable consumer credit market that meets the needs of all consumers.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, and I wish everybody a happy St David's Day tomorrow. I am pleased that the Leader of the House chose to wear a daffodil—there have been more than enough "leeks" from her side of the House.

My party and I wish the very best of retirements to our Clerk, Sir David Natzler, although we might not miss the Lycra quite as much as the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz).

Following meaningless vote No. 3, we are still no further forwards, and there are now only 29 days left until we are supposed to leave the EU. What a waste of another week! Nothing whatever has been achieved in the past few days. The Government's disastrous no deal remains on the table. There may or may not be a delay to achieve God knows what. In the meantime, there is no sign whatever that the EU will do anything to satisfy the Government's damaging demands that the backstop be reviewed.

Britain's biggest post-war political crisis is currently on hold, and at some point the inevitable conclusion will have to be played out. When is that going to be? When will we have the meaningful vote? This Brexit crisis will define the Conservative party for the rest of its wretched future. It is theirs to own—it is a Tory Brexit—and it is something that this nation will have to deal with.

May we have a debate on double-speak? Last night, we had the ridiculous sight of the Secretary of State for Scotland saying that the Scottish National party supported and coveted a no-deal Brexit. That is what he was saying. That was right after the House had voted on an SNP amendment that no deal, forever and a day, be taken right off the table. And the Scottish Tories all voted for this no deal to remain on the table—perhaps in an attempt to have it taken off. That must now rank with “War is peace,” and “This Government are strong and stable,” as an example of Tory double-speak.

Lastly, may we have a debate on a car park tax? *[Interruption.]* You'll enjoy this one. Yesterday, the Prime Minister raged against the SNP for introducing such a tax in Scotland—which we have not, but which already exists in England. The English car park tax is, of course, discretionary and remains a matter for local authorities. So far, only one English local authority has taken advantage of the power. I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to join me in my huge guffaws of laughter at the absurd sight of Tories in my constituency in Perthshire protesting against their own Perthshire Tory council so that it does not introduce a tax that does not even exist yet and it has already ruled out. Now, Mr Speaker—there you have Tory double-think and Tory double-speak.

Andrea Leadsom: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, he is really clutching at straws as an SNP Member who has allowed his own Government in Scotland to raise taxes for workers in Scotland. He is guffawing about the question of a car park tax—far more important that he look at the log in his eye over the mainstream taxes on Scottish workers, who now pay more than those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the next steps for the meaningful vote. He will be aware that the Prime Minister has given three commitments—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I can see that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is in a jovial and jocular mood, but he asked a series of questions. The Leader of the House is answering them, but he seems more interested in having a sort of finger-wagging competition with Conservative Members on the Government Benches. He should do the Leader the courtesy of listening to her replies.

Andrea Leadsom: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the next steps for the meaningful vote. The Prime Minister has set out three steps. First, we will hold a second meaningful vote by Tuesday 12 March at the latest. Secondly, if the Government have not won a meaningful vote by Tuesday 12 March, then, in addition to our obligations to table a neutral amendable motion under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, we will table a motion to be voted on by Wednesday 13 March at the latest, asking this House if it supports leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement and a framework for a future relationship on 29 March. The UK will leave without a deal on 29 March if that vote is passed. Thirdly, if the House, having rejected leaving with the deal negotiated with the EU, then also rejects leaving on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement and future framework, the Government will, on 14 March, bring forward a motion on whether Parliament wants to seek a short, limited extension to article 50. If the House votes for an extension, the Government will seek to agree that extension approved by the House with the EU and to bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date. That is what the Prime Minister said and I hope that that is very clear to the hon. Gentleman.

What I would also say to the hon. Gentleman is that we on the Government Benches are trying our hardest to deliver on the result of the June 2016 referendum. He and his colleagues in the SNP are trying their hardest to undermine the result of their referendum in 2014.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Edmund Burke defined statesmanship as a combination of

“a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve”.

In such a spirit, I met representatives of the taxi industry, trade unions and local authorities yesterday to discuss the excellent report “Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing”. This was commissioned during an enlightened period at the Department for Transport and was responded to by the Government a couple of weeks ago in a written statement. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Government to come to this House, with an oral statement or possibly even a debate, to make clear when they intend to bring forward the necessary legislation to give the 30-odd recommendations in that report real life? It is clear that the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing system at the moment is not fit for purpose. Public safety is critical to all our interests and the nation's. It must never be curtailed, capped or compromised.

Andrea Leadsom: First of all, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his work, as a former Transport Minister, in actually reviewing this issue himself. He will be aware that the Government are looking very carefully at how to improve the licensing of taxis to ensure that we keep the public safe.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): May I add my warmest regards to Sir David on his retirement? Sir David, may you have pleasure by the platter and troubles by the teaspoon in your long and happy retirement.

May I also send my best wishes to all Welsh Members and their constituents for St David's Day tomorrow? I do know, however, that the Welsh carry a grudge against

[*Ian Mearns*]

people from the north-east, particularly the men, because we have always grown much bigger leeks than the Welsh—much, much bigger leeks. [*Laughter.*]

I am grateful for the business statement and the fact that next Thursday we will have important debates on International Women's Day and on the Commonwealth. We had a veritable cornucopia of applications in the Backbench Business Committee on Tuesday. With that in mind, we have managed to secure time for: a debate in Westminster Hall on Thursday 7 March on short prison sentences, which had been an estimates day application; a general debate, on 12 March, on fire safety and sprinkler systems; a general debate, on 19 March, on the effect of leaving the EU on the UK's health and social sector; and on 26 March a general debate on forced live organ extraction in China. We have an awful lot still waiting, so the more time we can secure, the happier Back Benchers around the House will be.

Andrea Leadsom: Obviously, I am always very happy to hear from the hon. Gentleman about the many and varied subjects that Back-Bench Members want to discuss, and I will always try to accommodate them wherever I can.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Tomorrow, I will be going out with an ambulance crew in my constituency. Across the House, we will know of the challenges that the ambulance service faces, particularly including some horrendous violent attacks on ambulance crews. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the ambulance service and those challenges?

Andrea Leadsom: I am glad that my hon. Friend raises this issue and gives me the opportunity to thank all our ambulance crews for the amazing work that they do. He will appreciate that the ambulance service is something that all of us, right across the country, absolutely depend on. I encourage him perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that right hon. and hon. Members can share their experiences of the amazing work done by ambulance paramedics right across the country.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Cuts to police budgets have left my constituents in Hoyland well over eight miles from their nearest police station. May we have an urgent debate in Government time on how police funding should be based not on how much council tax can be paid, but on the actual demand in our community?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that since 2010, we have been tackling crime, reforming the police and toughening sentences for serious offences. We have protected police funding overall since 2015, and in the last police grant settlement we announced up to £970 million of extra investment in the policing system next year. That is more than Labour promised at the last election, and it is for police and crime commissioners to allocate that money to meet the policing priorities in their area.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I add my congratulations to Sir David and Eve on their retirements.

This House has rightly concentrated a substantial amount of time on debating measures to combat antisemitism, but we should abhor all racism, racial hatred and religious hatred. It is now time for a proper debate on a definition of Islamophobia. The all-party group on Islamophobia has come up with a working proposal, on which it is consulting, but that has drawn criticism from a large number of faith communities. It is time for the Government to come forward with a proposal so that we have a clear definition that everyone can support. May we have a debate on this in Government time so that we can reach some solid conclusions on which the whole House can agree?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right to raise our disgust at any form of racial or religious hatred or disadvantage. The APPG that he mentions has a very interesting proposition and I am sure that he will find a way to bring that to the attention of Ministers so that we can see what progress can be made.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), was somewhat snippy with me earlier when I asked him about the possibility that we will not have a functioning statute book at 11.1 pm on Friday 29 March, so I ask the Leader of the House for any information that she can give us about the whereabouts of the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill, the Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill or any of the other statutory instruments that we have to get through. Does she share my lack of confidence about our having enough time to get through all of those by the deadline?

Andrea Leadsom: I can certainly reassure the hon. Lady in an entirely non-snippy way that I know exactly where all those Bills are. The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill are all currently before the House of Commons. The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill, the Trade Bill and the Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill are also progressing. We have nine exit-related Bills, in addition to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which are either already going through Parliament or have already received Royal Assent. I can assure her that we are comfortable that all primary legislation that needs Royal Assent by Brexit date will be achieved. If it does not have that, it will have Royal Assent by the date on which it is needed.

With regards to secondary legislation, the hon. Lady will be aware that over 460 EU exit SIs have been laid to date—more than 75% of the SIs that we anticipate will be required by exit day. More than 240 have already been made and are thus ready to come into force. Good progress is being made and I remain confident that we will be able to get all the urgent SIs that we need through in time for 29 March.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): May we have a debate on the respective roles and responsibilities of Back Benchers and Ministers? There appears to be some confusion among colleagues who happily accept the Queen's shilling. They might well enjoy life more on the Back Benches, and would be able to participate in such a debate.

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate my hon. Friend, who always enjoys full participation in debates. I completely understand the point that he has made, but he will appreciate that it is vital for all members of the Government to retain collective responsibility, and to seek to support the Prime Minister as she finalises these very tense negotiations. I encourage all right hon. and hon. Members to think very carefully, because at the end of the day we owe it to the country to deliver on the referendum and vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): More than 50% of the prison population were excluded from school. Last year the Government announced a review of school exclusions, led externally by Edward Timpson. They said that they would publish its report by the end of 2018, and now they are saying they will do so by early 2019. How early in 2019 can we expect to see the report?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady did not mention that she would raise this matter, so I cannot answer her question because I am not aware of the timing. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady is shouting at me, "When is the report coming?" She will appreciate that had she asked me in advance, I could have provided the answer. If she will write to me, I will seek a response for her.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Colchester Borough Council wants to waste £100,000 of our new homes bonus infrastructure money on a giant elephant sculpture on a roundabout. I am a big fan of elephants, but this is ridiculous. May we have a debate on the appropriate use of new homes bonus money, and the role that it plays in providing infrastructure to support housing growth?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. The question is, is the elephant on a trunk road? *[Laughter.]* I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend. None of us wants to see white elephants, particularly when they are paid for with public money.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Gordon Banks's funeral will take place on Monday, and lots of people will be lining the streets. My constituents find it upsetting that he never got his knighthood. May we have a debate in Government time about honouring our heroes in their lifetimes rather than after they have departed?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady has taken the opportunity to pay her own tribute to Gordon Banks, and I know that many other Members would like to do the same. I suggest that she seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the issue directly with Ministers.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Many Members welcomed the launch of Fairtrade Fortnight yesterday. My constituents in Montrose are going the extra mile and launching events as part of the celebration organised by Montrose Fairtrade Forum, which starts on Saturday and which I am delighted to be able to attend. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the forum's chairman, Ian Sykes, and its secretary, Pam Robinson, on all the fantastic work that they do, and may we have a debate about the wonderful people who give up their free time to spread this positive message?

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating Ian and Pam on the work that they are doing to celebrate the launch of Fairtrade Fortnight in Montrose. Many events will be taking place throughout the country to mark the fortnight, and I hope that the hon. Lady was able to attend yesterday's event in the Churchill Room, hosted by our hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince). I congratulate all those in Montrose who are making the most of this opportunity to provide fair trade for people all over the world.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Leader of the House will know of the publication of various reports showing that the UK Government's austerity drive is adversely affecting women more than anyone else. According to Unison Wales's recent Audit of Austerity, 18,400 of the local authority jobs that have been lost in Wales as a result of that austerity drive were women's jobs. Will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on the Government's austerity agenda and the terrible impact it is having on women in the workforce?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is giving his perspective on the current plight of women, but across the country the female unemployment rate is at a record low and there are higher percentages than ever before of women on FTSE 100 and FTSE 350 boards, getting women into the most senior roles in our economy. There is a huge amount more to do to ensure we close the gender pay gap and ensure more women can have the flexible working they sometimes need in order to accommodate caring roles as well as their desire to have a fulfilling career. All of us right across the Government are committed to ensuring women can have fulfilling and decent jobs throughout their careers.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): In the Budget, this House increased Scotland's block grant by £950 million. In spite of this, local councils in my area are facing service cuts, and increases in council tax and tax on their workplace parking. *[Interruption.]* May we have a debate in this place on local government funding? Although Scottish National party MPs may laugh about these funding measures, but my constituents in Alloa are facing cuts to their Leisure Bowl, constituents in Fishcross are facing threats to their primary schooling, and constituents in Perth and Kinross have to endure council tax increases because increases in funding from this place are not being passed to local councils in my constituency.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this point. It is an issue that a number of our Scottish Conservative colleagues have raised in this House, and the fact is that there is absolutely no need for further SNP tax rises, thanks to this Government in Westminster delivering a £950 million funding boost to them. It is absolutely vital that the Scottish nationalists recognise the importance of preserving and maintaining local services to all Scottish consumers and residents.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): May I add my voice to those wishing David Natzler all the very best for a long and happy retirement?

The all-party group on Heathrow expansion recently reported that the Department for Transport methodology for assessing major airspace changes is deeply flawed.

[John Cryer]

This has major implications right across the House for many constituents, including mine. May we have a debate or a statement on the report?

Andrea Leadsom: I am not aware of the report the hon. Gentleman mentions, but I suggest that in the first instance he perhaps seeks an Adjournment debate so he can discuss it directly with Ministers.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate about online dangers for young people? I have been contacted by a constituent in Moray concerned about growing participation in something called the Momo challenge: young people can be watching various social media platforms and messages pop up urging them to contact a number on WhatsApp which then sends them images and instructions on how to harm themselves and others. Unfortunately in some parts of the world this Momo challenge has been linked to young people taking their own lives. May we have a debate and allow the Government to explain what more we can do to protect young people and educate them about the scourge of these online dangers?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an appalling situation; I have also heard of the Momo challenge, and the Government are extremely concerned about it. We have been very clear that more needs to be done to protect young people online, including from cyber-bullying and suicide and self-harm content, and internet companies do have a responsibility to their users. The forthcoming online harms White Paper will set out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures to keep UK users safe online, but I can say that organisations including the Samaritans, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the UK Safer Internet Centre have said there is no confirmed evidence that the Momo phenomenon is posing a threat to British children.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House may be aware of a report by the charity Project 17, “Not seen, not heard”, released on 19 February this year which found that many children of parents whose immigration status means they are not entitled to mainstream benefits are living in extreme poverty and are left feeling socially isolated, distressed, ashamed and unsafe. Local authorities are legally required to support children in this situation through section 17 support under the Children Act 1989. However, the report finds that many local authorities are routinely failing to act and support the children. May we have a debate in Government time on this tragedy of children living in an appalling state of vulnerability imposed on them because of their parents’ no recourse to public funds status?

Andrea Leadsom: I share the hon. Lady’s grave concern about anybody who is put into the position where innocent children are disadvantaged, and I am concerned to hear about that report. I urge her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise this issue directly with Ministers.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As a long-term former resident of Tanzania and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Tanzania, I am a great admirer of that country and its people. I am also an admirer of

the great work that President Magufuli has done to tackle corruption there, but I am increasingly concerned by the fact that a large number of opposition politicians are now in jail or on trial. May we have a debate on the importance of having a responsible opposition and a responsible Government who respect that opposition rather than putting them in jail and bringing charges against them all the time?

Andrea Leadsom: I believe that my hon. Friend lived in Tanzania for some years and is chairman of the all-party parliamentary group. I pay tribute to him for the way in which he has raised this issue. He is absolutely right to say that we in the United Kingdom will always stand up for democracy, human rights and freedom of speech, and I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise that particular issue directly with Foreign Office Ministers.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Tories in Scotland were fined a mere £400 by the Electoral Commission over a £100,000 donation of dark money to the party in the weeks before the 2016 Holyrood election. Does the Leader of the House agree that such a paltry fine is no deterrent at all? Does she also agree that, when breaking electoral law carries such derisory penalties, it makes it almost worth the risk for those who are minded to be dishonest? Will she make a statement on whether the Electoral Commission has enough tools at its disposal to deal more severely with those who break electoral law, which is the foundation of our entire democracy?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that the Electoral Commission is independent, specifically to ensure that it can look in an unbiased way at any accusations, from wherever they come. We have Cabinet Office questions on Wednesday 13 March, and I encourage her to raise that question then.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): May we have a debate on the governance of city deals and growth deals? As a Scottish Conservative, I am proud of the fact that we have so many city deals and growth deals in Scotland. They are worth billions of pounds, and they show what can be done when the UK Government, the Scottish Government and local authorities work together, but I am really concerned that every penny of the money that is invested should deliver the social and economic transformation that we need in Scotland in the cities that have been chosen for these deals. May we have a debate as soon as possible, and perhaps a statement from the Government on the governance of city deals?

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly share my hon. Friend’s great delight at the extent of the city deals that have already been negotiated with Scotland, and there are many others to come. The areas involved include Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness and Highland, Edinburgh and South East Scotland, Tay Cities, Stirling and Clackmannanshire, Borderlands, Ayrshire, and Moray. We can all be proud that these enormous achievements are contributing to the progress and development of the great cities in Scotland. I would certainly welcome such a debate, and I will see whether Government time can be found for one.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I know that the Leader of the House gets this, but could she have another go at the Home Secretary? Will she ask him if

he can yet again come to this House and explain to us what he is doing about the knife epidemic in this country? Since the serious violence statement last Monday, nine young people—some of them young adults—have been slaughtered on our streets by stabbings. I know that the Leader of the House finds this appalling, as does every Member, but we should be discussing it in the House. This morning, we heard the announcement that 27,000 young people, including children, are in gangs in this country. That is four times the number that the authorities knew about. We have not got a clue. What does the Home Secretary have to say about that? When is he going to come to the House and tell us what he is going to do about this issue and what urgency the Government are going to bring to it? I say again that Cobra should be meeting to discuss it. Cobra meets for other national emergencies, and this is a national emergency. It is a crisis, and it should be treated as such by the Home Secretary and the Government.

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman knows, all Members are incredibly concerned about the levels of violent crime, particularly knife crime. What is going on is absolutely unacceptable.

I have been pleased to give Government time to a number of debates in this Chamber and, of course, I will continue to seek further updates. We have just had Home Office questions, and I am sure the matter was also raised then. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government have a serious violence strategy that includes a £200 million commitment to a youth endowment fund that specifically seeks to get young people away from this conveyor belt to the appalling violence and gang crime we see far too often.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the Government are proposing a new statutory duty across education, social services and health to tackle serious violence as a matter of public health. All these measures, including funding community groups that seek to get young people away from knife crime, will start to make a difference, but I think we all share his concerns.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I am contacted several times a month by understandably angry constituents who have received extortionate fines from private parking companies. The fines often arise from having been just five minutes late in coming back from their supermarket shopping. The signage is often questionable or incredibly discreet. Can we have a debate in Government time specifically about how to tighten up legislation so that these robbers, who often prey on the most vulnerable in society, can no longer impose such ridiculous fines?

Andrea Leadsom: I completely agree with the hon. Lady and, given the murmurs on both sides of the House, it seems all hon. and right hon. Members have constituency examples of shocking practices by private car park attendants, who are really just stealing money from people who are trying to do the right thing.

I am sure the hon. Lady is diligent; I have had some success in tackling some of these companies on behalf of my constituents, and I bet she has, too. She is right to raise the issue. We have Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday, and I encourage her to raise it then and perhaps see what more can be done from a legislative point of view.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Your tie is not as nice as the one you wore last week, Mr Speaker.

The Leader of the House told the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) that she knows where a whole range of Bills are. Where is my Bill to help families and refugees? This is the third time I have raised my Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill at business questions, and the Tory Whips Office say it is down to the stalling of one Whip—they seem embarrassed. At the third time of asking, will the Leader of the House acquit herself well and tell us what she has done, and what she will do, to help families and refugees by getting this process moving along? It would be appreciated.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is right to continue to press for his private Member's Bill. I am sure he will join me in welcoming the fact that we have had Royal Assent for 50 private Members' Bills since 2010 including, just in 2018, the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act 2018 and the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018. These are all important measures.

The hon. Gentleman raises the question of his own private Member's Bill, and he will be aware that the Government support the principle of family unity and have helped to reunite 24,700 family members in the past five years. Our policy allows a partner and children under the age of 18 to join refugees here if they were part of the family unit before their sponsor fled their country.

The Government are following the passage of the hon. Gentleman's private Member's Bill closely, and we will continue to look at providing money resolutions for those Bills that require them in the usual way, which is on a case-by-case basis.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House will know that next Tuesday is Shrove Tuesday, and then we have Lent. Can we try to do something about the political culture and how we all speak and relate to it? I stand in front of the Jo Cox memorial. During those 40 days, at least, can we remember to think about how we have more in common on so many issues? We have just had a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), my dear friend, who is under ghastly pressure from awful people on social media. Can we stop this nonsense? Has the Leader of the House read Quentin Letts's so-called political sketch this morning in which he uses disgraceful language about people who work in this House? Can we have a different kind of mood in this place and in our country? Perhaps we could lead that change in these next 40 days.

Andrea Leadsom: I commend the hon. Gentleman for making that suggestion and I entirely support it. This is a matter for all of us, and I have made my position very clear. Just yesterday, I opened the all-party group on women in Parliament's event on its sexual harassment report, making clear again my personal commitment to ensuring that everyone in this place is treated with dignity and respect. That includes on social media, where those awful people sit there abusing MPs for what they are wearing, what they said and what they

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

did. It is absolutely disgraceful, and we are sick of it. We need to be the role model that we want to see, so I absolutely join the hon. Gentleman in saying, “Let’s be nice to each other during Lent.” That would be a fabulous thing to do.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): May we have a debate on how companies treat their staff? Some 360 Vodafone staff based in Berkeley Square in my constituency were told that they would have to relocate to Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent or Newbury, or lose their jobs. According to “STV News” a senior manager based in England was pictured posing with Irn-Bru and a “See You Jimmy” hat on. That just adds insult to injury for the staff in Glasgow, who are facing losing their jobs on poorer redundancy terms than those who lost their jobs just a few months ago. This is no way to treat employees. Does the Leader of the House agree?

Andrea Leadsom: From what the hon. lady is saying, it sounds as though the supposed joke was in extremely poor taste, and I certainly agree with her that when a business has to relocate jobs the greatest sensitivity needs to be paid to those who will have to relocate or lose their jobs. She is absolutely right in that regard, and she may well want to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise her concerns directly with Ministers.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Like many MPs, through my casework I have heard numerous stories of aggressive and inappropriate behaviour by bailiffs, often towards some of the most vulnerable. The Ministry of Justice has just closed a consultation on this issue, so may we please now have a debate, in Government time, about introducing an independent regulator for the bailiff industry and an ombudsman-style complaints procedure?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. I understand that, as a member of the Select Committee on Justice, she has played a full part in trying to get to the bottom of exactly what is going on in this sector. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, so that all hon. Members can share their views directly with Ministers.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The regional prosperity fund is the Government’s regional investment policy for when Britain leaves the EU, but we do not know what it is. Will the Government please come to the House as a matter of urgency to make a statement so that we can begin to address the important issue of infrastructure investment across the UK?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman rightly says that that prosperity fund will replace some of the structural funds that we will no longer be party to once we have left the EU. There have been so many opportunities to debate our departure from the EU, and I am slightly surprised that he has not raised the issue in any of the debates we have had in recent weeks or at any of the Brexit questions, such as those we have just had. I encourage him to seek the next opportunity to debate the meaningful vote to raise his questions then.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York is a very welcoming city. We welcome hundreds of international students—young people and children who stay with host families—to our city every year. However, those host families do not have any form of Disclosure and Barring Service checks, so there is a real safeguarding risk. May we have a debate about safeguarding loopholes, to ensure that all children and young people are kept safe?

Andrea Leadsom: First, may I say that I am not surprised to hear that lots of people flock to York to see that beautiful city? It really is a lovely place for a visit and I am sure that the many young people who go there thoroughly enjoy it. The hon. Lady raises an important point. Obviously, we would not want to limit the opportunities for young people, but it is an important point and I encourage her to table a written parliamentary question so that she can ask Ministers directly what more can be done to keep that balance between keeping the opportunity open and at the same time safeguarding children, which is vital.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On behalf of the Democratic Unionist party, I wish Sir David, the Clerk of the House, good health, a long life and happy times. I congratulate him on the story and photograph in *The House* magazine. If anyone has not yet read it—I am sure you have, Mr Speaker, along with others—they should do so.

In Uttar Pradesh in India on 7 February, 25 Hindu militants ambushed a prayer meeting in the home of a local church leader. They subjected some 40 attendees to verbal abuse and physical assault, resulting in six people requiring urgent medical attention. Bibles and other church property were also damaged in the onslaught. A source close to Christian Solidarity Worldwide has reported that the perpetrators threatened to kill the Christians if they continued to gather for prayer meetings. I and many others in the House believe in prayer—at prayer you can move mountains. How despicable it is that anyone should be killed or threatened with being killed for praying to God. There have been reports of similar incidents occurring in Uttar Pradesh. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or debate on the matter?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises the serious situation in Uttar Pradesh. It is vital that action is taken so that we do not see the situation deteriorate any further. The British high commission in New Delhi meets Christian groups and other minority communities regularly. On 24 January, the high commission expressed concerns to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs regarding the persecution of Christians.

If I may say so, the hon. Gentleman does a great job of raising the issue of religious persecution against whomever it takes place, and he is absolutely right to do so. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise this particular issue directly with Ministers.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for her leadership on the early years agenda, particularly through the cross-Government review that she chairs. I hope she will read and carefully

consider the Health and Social Care Committee report published earlier this week on the inquiry that I chaired into the first 1,000 days of life. Many Members share the Committee's analysis that the first 1,000 days are the most important time for a developing body and brain. Might the Leader of the House find Government time to debate the issue further?

Andrea Leadsom: First, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have already read the report and I am delighted with it. I congratulate him on his excellent chairing of the inquiry. I am absolutely at one with him on the vital importance of that first period in a baby's life, from conception to the age of two. I was delighted to be asked to chair the interministerial group. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the findings of his report will be taken into account very carefully. In fact, my office will contact him with a request for a meeting so that we can discuss the issue further.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): We have already heard the Leader of the House praise all those involved in Fairtrade Fortnight. This week, my office has been trying to help a Ugandan Fairtrade coffee farmer whose visit visa was turned down by the Home Office, despite her having sponsorship from the Welsh Government to come to the UK for the fortnight. We have managed to overturn that decision, but the Home Office turnaround time means that she will not be able to get here to participate in Fairtrade Fortnight. May we please have a debate as soon as possible on the performance and resourcing of the Home Office?

Andrea Leadsom: I am really sorry to hear that; I can imagine it must be incredibly disappointing. I say again: congratulations to all those taking part in Fairtrade Fortnight. The hon. Lady raises a specific constituency issue; I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, because I know that a number of right hon. and hon. Members would be keen to join in a debate on how to speed up processes in the Home Office.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Families in my constituency and throughout the UK rely on the Child Maintenance Service, but for both the paying parent and the receiving parent there are serious failures in the service. May we therefore have a debate in Government time on improving the Child Maintenance Service so that it really works for families?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. It is vital that the Child Maintenance Service works in a fair way for families and I commend her for raising it. She will be aware that we have Justice questions on 12 March and I encourage her to raise her specific concerns then.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Hooton Park gasification site is currently being constructed just outside my constituency, but, despite representations from me and Unite the Union, the developers are refusing to apply the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry terms. Those terms are vital to upholding standards in employment and training. Can we have a debate, please, about what more we can do to prevent the construction industry leading this race to the bottom?

Andrea Leadsom: I share the hon. Gentleman's desire to see all workers, including those in the construction industry, treated fairly and, of course, within the law. He will be aware that the Government are fully committed to upholding workers' rights and to improving them and, as we leave the European Union, to continuing to lead in improving workers' rights wherever they are. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate because he has some specific concerns that he should raise with Ministers.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Last Friday, the Ministry of Justice admitted that the roll-out of PAVA spray to prison officers, which was due to start in January, will now be delayed for up to two years. In light of that broken promise and the current epidemic of violence engulfing our prisons, will the Leader of the House ensure that we have an opportunity to debate how best to protect our brave prison officers to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is absolutely right: we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our prison officers who face daily threats, intimidation and violence, and it is right that we do everything that we can to protect them. She will be aware that we now have over 4,300 more prison officers compared with two years ago, and that we are investing an extra £30 million in our prisons to improve the facilities in those with the most pressing problems. All of those things will contribute to making a safer workplace environment. She will be aware that we have Justice questions on 12 March, and I encourage her to raise her specific question then.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): My constituency is best known by many for its shipping history, whether it be John Brown and Company of Clydebank or Denny of Dumbarton. Next week, for the 78th year in a row, my community, including my family and friends, will gather once again to commemorate those we lost in what was described by a Minister in an Adjournment debate three years ago as the "worst blitzkrieg" in the history of the second world war proportionally anywhere in the United Kingdom. Does the Minister agree that it is now time that this House considered in a general debate in Government time the long-term economic and social consequences as well as the mental health consequences of aerial bombardment on the communities that suffered it across these islands? It is about time that we learned the lessons from it, given that the impact of it is felt by so many other communities across the world.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly serious issue and I pay tribute to him for all the work that he does in his community to commemorate the appalling bombardment. He is absolutely right to raise the fact that this is the reality for far too many people right across the world today with appalling consequences not just of physical injury and harm, but to mental health and the long-term effects of suffering from constant bombardment. I encourage him to go to the Backbench Business Committee and see whether there is an appetite for a cross-party debate on this subject so that we can consider together how we might better commemorate these appalling acts.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am sad to have to report to the House that Stoke-on-Trent City Council has developed a rather nasty habit of creating wholly owned companies, shovelling public money into them and then denying any proper public transparency or scrutiny of the decisions they make on spending that money. On Unitas and Fortior Homes in the city, we are now being told as MPs that freedom of information requests simply do not apply because they are commercial entities. Will the Leader of the House speak to her colleagues in either the Cabinet Office or the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and ask them to bring forward the necessary legislation to ensure that, where public money is involved—whether that be a wholly owned company or a company under contract—scrutiny will apply.

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion will be very popular. He is exactly right that the use of public money has to offer good value to taxpayers. Scrutiny is therefore essential so that people can see how their hard-earned taxpayers' money is being used. We have MHCLG questions on Monday, and I recommend that the hon. Gentleman raises the matter directly with Ministers then.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): Can we have a debate in Government time on the Department for Work and Pensions policy of treating tax rebates as income for the purposes of universal credit? I have a constituent who was diagnosed with breast cancer and was on statutory sick pay, which triggered a tax rebate and stopped her universal credit. Surely that is not what we should be doing to people in such circumstances.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency issue and he is absolutely right to do so. If he writes to me after business questions, I can take up his concerns with the Department on his behalf.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent who works full time but receives universal credit to assist with childcare fees. The Leader of the House will be aware that any universal credit application effectively means an application for housing benefit so, although my constituent does not receive housing benefit, the mere mention of universal credit in paperwork has resulted in the refusal of her mortgage application. This did not happen under working tax credit. Can we therefore have a statement on what the Government can do to improve correspondence on universal credit and how they can engage with mortgage companies to prevent such situations from happening?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a concerning issue. I have not personally come across this problem, but if he writes to me following business questions, I can take it up with the Department on his behalf.

A Better Defence Estate

11.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the progress of our defence estate optimisation programme.

Let me first pay tribute to those who have worn and who wear the uniform both as reservists and regulars, as well as their families and loved ones, who provide them with so much support.

Today marks the start of the countdown for the 100 days leading up to the 75th anniversary of more than 130,000 troops landing in Normandy on D-day—a critical turning point in world war two and a reminder, if ever one was needed, of the importance of co-operation and collaboration with our allies. It also reminds us that Britain should retain its own full-spectrum, hard-power capabilities if we wish to play a continued role as a force for good beyond our shores.

With a forthcoming spending review looming, I make no apologies for raising the issue of defence spending. The world is getting more dangerous and complex, and threats are increasing and diversifying. We now live in a multipolar world with competing powers and diverging views on how the world should look, and we are one of a few nations willing to have the desire and ability to step forward as a force for good.

Discussions about defence spending often focus on equipment, training and operations. I do not deny that these areas require investment, but I would not be doing my job as portfolio holder for defence people if I did not publicly make the case for looking after our armed forces community when they are away from training or the frontline. That means providing them with suitable, modern accommodation and basing requirements that will meet the changing needs of our armed forces community. The defence estate is the rock around which our armed forces revolve. It is the place where our brave men and women work, train and deploy from. It is where they are educated, where they exercise and where they rest.

As I have said in the House before, the defence estate has grown so large over many decades that it now accounts for 2% of the UK's land mass. This means that it is unwieldy and too expensive to retain in its entirety, and parts of the estate are often in the wrong place so they are no longer fit for purpose. That is why, back in November 2016, this Government launched the defence estate optimisation programme—a long-term plan to modernise our facilities and bring them into the 21st century. It has involved investing £4 billion to create a smaller, more modern and more focused estate. However, the complexities of regrouping air, sea and land assets and upgrading and building new facilities does take time, so this is a 25-year project. This statement provides an update relating to just 30 sites.

Last July, in a written statement, I updated the House on nine sites that had been disposed of. Since then, we have delivered a further three: the Defence Infrastructure Organisation at Aldershot; Fitzwygram House—the Royal Army Veterinary Corps Centre—in Hampshire; and Joint Supply Chain Services in Longmoor. In parallel, our military and infrastructure experts have continued to be busy conducting the necessary site assessments

and consulting the local community to support the next phase of delivery and provide greater clarity for the next five years and beyond.

Today I can confirm to the House that over the next five years nearly £1.5 billion will be invested in our estate. This will help us to create regional clusters bringing people and capabilities closer to their training estates in new centres of specialism. In doing so, we will open up fresh opportunities for military families to find work, lay down permanent roots, and organise more stable schooling for their children. I can also confirm the updated status of 33 sites across our establishment. Since time does not permit me to go through the arrangements for each exhaustively, we have placed a table and timeline as an annexes to this statement in the Library of the House.

However, hon. Members will note that several significant adjustments have been made to the original programme. First, we have decided that five sites will be part of a phased withdrawal and disposal. They are Prince William of Gloucester Barracks, Venning Barracks, RAF Henlow, Chilwell Station, and RAF Halton. These facilities will now close several years later than originally stated, with, in some cases, units staying in place throughout that period. Next, we have assessed that five further sites originally earmarked for disposal will now be retained. They are Norton Manor Camp; Royal Marines Condor Airfield; Royal Marines Chivenor; MOD Woodbridge—Rock Barracks—and RAF Molesworth, which will continue to be used by United States visiting forces. The Secretary of State will visit Royal Marines Chivenor and Norton Manor Camp later today to meet local personnel. Finally, the closure of HMS Sultan, the home of the Defence School of Marine Engineering and the Royal Naval Air Engineering and Survival School, will now be delayed. These decisions have not been taken lightly but after months of rigorous analysis, and they reflect a clear-eyed assessment of the rapidly changing threats facing our nations.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities, the devolved Administrations and Members of Parliament to explore the best ways in which vacated sites may be used. We will do all we can to take into account local plans, infrastructure requirements and the environment. Hon. Members can rest assured that we will continue to keep Parliament fully apprised as our plans mature. At all times, our objective has been to strike the right balance between working with the community, achieving value for money for the taxpayer, and making sure that our armed forces' operational requirements are met and that they can do their duty to protect our people and advance our prosperity into the future. I believe that the defence estate optimisation programme is getting that balance right and that we are on track to create the world-class bases that our nation needs. With that in mind, I commend this statement to the House.

11.48 am

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement. I would like to wish the House and all members of our armed forces a very happy St David's Day for tomorrow.

We all recognise that as time passes there is a need to modernise and adapt our defence estate to ensure that it is fit for the 21st century. It is now more than two years

since the MOD first announced plans to close some 91 sites across the country. While Members in all parts of the House will want to consider today's update in more detail, this statement does provide some additional clarity.

MOD facilities are not simply places where our armed forces work and train. Many are home to service personnel and their families, and many have proud histories and a special significance in their local area. The visibility that barracks and other sites provide is important in maintaining buy-in from the local populations, who are always immensely proud of their military heritage.

Given that so many sites act as a clear symbol of the armed forces in their local areas, has the Department considered the effect that these closures could have on recruitment? That is particularly true for reservists, who rely on facilities being within a reasonable travelling distance of where they live. Is the Minister concerned that closing sites that host reserves training could cut off opportunities to recruit and retain those personnel?

MOD sites also support local economies and provide employment to a large number of civilian personnel, many of whom have personal circumstances that would not permit them to commute long distances to work. Can the Minister set out what redeployment opportunities exist for civilian personnel who will be affected by these closures and what discussions he has had with the relevant trade unions?

I turn to the disposal of sites. The Government have previously proposed using more public land for affordable housing, and yet their record in that area is incredibly poor. Clearly this will not be an option for every site, but where it is, what discussions has the Minister had with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government?

Has the Department implemented the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee, which advised the MOD to avoid

"enabling private sector providers to earn excessive profits",

when companies such as Capita are involved in this process? What work has the Department undertaken to ensure that public money is not spent paying rent on a large number of empty properties when sites close, as has happened in the past?

Finally, the House will recognise the Minister's commitment to

"continue to keep Parliament fully apprised as our plans mature."

Given that the delay in closing sites will cause added uncertainty for many, when does he next expect to update the House?

Mr Ellwood: I welcome the hon. Lady's tone and her general support in this area. She is right to talk of the bond that exists between any unit, garrison or base and the local community. Many of those bonds go back decades and even centuries. We are very conscious that upheaval will provide change and a little bit of instability and hence needs to be managed.

The hon. Lady touched on the fact that the plan for these 90 sites started two years ago and almost suggested that she wanted answers for the 90 sites in two years. It is a 25-year programme. There are lots of pieces to the jigsaw—for example, troops returning from Germany. When we vacate one location, we move personnel

[Mr Ellwood]

somewhere else. We need to ensure that all those parts are in place, which is why there are sometimes delays, but those delays must be kept to a minimum.

The hon. Lady mentioned the housing targets. She is right to say that our Department can contribute to the challenge of meeting Britain's housing needs. In many cases, it is not the MOD that is the reason why the right houses are not being built, but the chronology of events. We announce an area to be liberated for housing, but if the local authority has not included that in its housing plan, it takes some time for that to happen. She is right that we should not renege on our duty to expedite this.

I want to stress that we are looking at not simply providing housing but building communities. Wethersfield is a great example. In many of the areas we are looking at, I am encouraging local authorities to look at providing jobs too. It is about a dual purpose—housing as well as areas for businesses, schools or academic facilities. We should not have a knee-jerk reaction and say, "Let's build houses for the sake of it." The hon. Lady mentioned the role of trade unions, which are an important part of this. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation works closely with trade unions, along with other stakeholders, to ensure that their voices are heard.

The hon. Lady touched on recruitment and retention. One reason that we are investing £4 billion over this period is to ensure we have places that are attractive to the next generation, who will look at them and say, "That's the sort of place I want to work, train in and live in." However, she is right to imply that there have been some challenges. I do not think this debate is so much about Capita itself, but it would be a missed opportunity for her not to mention that, and it has certainly been taken into account.

The hon. Lady touches on the issue, which I can add to, of where reserves will continue to train. Many of our reserve regiments and so forth use the regular facilities for their own purposes—I could add the cadets to that as well. It has very much been at the forefront of our minds to make sure that we do not lose the important asset of our reservist capability and our cadets simply because of the defence estate optimisation programme.

I would be more than delighted to meet the hon. Lady to discuss this in detail. I do not know when I will next update the House, but I assure her that when the next batch of changes is to take place, I would be delighted to come here and answer questions. I should add that, for right hon. and hon. Members who are affected by today's events, a letter to them has been placed on the letter board with details of what is happening in their constituencies.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I welcome what the Minister said about the upcoming 75th anniversary of D-day? Are he and right hon. and hon. Members aware that the Royal British Legion is looking for veterans to make a trip to the Normandy beaches in honour of that anniversary? I hope right hon. and hon. Members will alert veterans whom they know to that opportunity.

May I ask the Minister what sort of financial model he anticipates for the development of some of these bases? Questions have rightly been raised in the past

about the adequacy of the private finance initiative model. The legendarily close relationship between the Treasury and the MOD should be bringing forth something typically productive, and I wonder how we are doing in that respect.

Mr Ellwood: First, I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has mentioned the prospect or possibility of veterans returning to Normandy for the 75th anniversary. He obviously does not follow my tweets, because I have promoted this very thing, and the MOD is involved in chartering—[*Interruption.*] He is not on Twitter.

Dr Lewis: Life's too short.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend does not do social media—very wise. I will send him a pigeon with the information.

Let me take this opportunity, if I may, to say that if there are veterans wishing to participate and to return to Normandy for this incredible anniversary, a facility has been made available by the MOD, working with Royal British Legion, and we very much look forward to it.

My right hon. Friend touches on the financial packages. He is aware that the PFI model is being moved away from. We do seek recognition from the Treasury that, if it is not a financial vehicle that it wants to continue to use, we will need other support, and I hope that will be forthcoming in the spending review.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I agree with the Minister on the D-day landing commemorations. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention yet again during a defence statement the civilians who died in my home town in the Clydebank blitz. It is the 78th anniversary next week, when I will be joining my community at the mass grave in Dalnottar cemetery—one of two.

I am grateful to have had early sight of the statement. I am delighted, as I am sure other Members in the House will be, about the commitment to RM Condor. I know that my colleague Graeme Dey, the Veterans Minister in Scotland, as well as the local MSP, will be delighted as well.

Yet I have to say that we need to look at the recommendations in the National Audit Report, and the statement is less a commitment than an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand, given the complexity of the issues—not only housing and the estate, but the equipment plan—faced by the Ministry of Defence. In reply to the Opposition lead, the Minister mentioned communities, and communities being able to inform the debate on policy is also about being able to hear directly from members of the armed forces.

The issues that the estate has faced are complex, as the Defence Committee knows—the Chair is in their rightful place—because the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces raised these issues before the Select Committee this week. The biggest issue that members of the armed forces face relates to terms and conditions—money and the way in which they live. That is profoundly disappointing, as I know that last week the Minister stated in response to a question from me that he does not see members of the armed forces as employees. Will he reconsider the

Government's position on the ability of members of the armed forces to engage with the Government, and on whether an armed forces representative body should be set on a statutory footing?

There is grave concern that, although some of these measures are welcome, numbers of armed forces personnel in Scotland are still 25% below the commitment made in 2014. Can the Minister say how this issue will lead to an improvement in the terms and conditions of the armed forces, for example in housing? If housing is to be brought to the fore, I hope that at least in Scotland it will meet the Scottish housing standard. If it does, we might find an improvement across the rest of the UK.

I noted that the Minister made no commitment about Fort George, and there was a lack of commitment to Rosyth, as well as the continued diminution of the RAF footprint in the highlands. Why are the Government opposed to an armed forces representative body that would assist them in understanding the terms and conditions that the ombudsman highlighted in the Defence Committee? Will the Minister guarantee the future of the RAF footprint in the highlands and Fort George as well as in Rosyth, and will he commit, as I asked earlier, to ensuring that housing for the armed forces in Scotland meets the 2015 Scottish housing quality standard?

Mr Ellwood: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's questions and his party's interest in these matters—perhaps we could meet and discuss them in more detail. He raised issues of representation that he has raised before, and our views on that issue have not changed. I will say that Scotland fares well from our defence posture as a representative nation. Our fast jets will continue to operate from RAF Lossiemouth, and the P-8As are being moved there as well. The Army is well represented at Leuchars Station, and there is Her Majesty's Naval Base, Clyde—the hon. Gentleman will be thrilled to know that our nuclear deterrent continues to be operated from that neck of the woods, and indeed, all submarines will be moving to those quarters. He welcomes the continuation of 45 Commando at Condor, and if my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) is able to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope that she will give her views on that. She has campaigned hard on that issue, and it was a huge pleasure to visit the marines there, and to see the real estate and its importance. I am pleased that we are able to retain that asset for the Royal Marines.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that all the money released from the disposal of any defence estates will be reinvested in the defence budget? At the beginning of his statement he mentioned the spending review and defence spending. On the off-chance that the Treasury is listening, what message would he send it?

Mr Ellwood: I am sure that Treasury Ministers are glued to the monitors as we speak. My hon. Friend is right—everybody knows that I am very much in favour of collective responsibility and not speaking outside my brief, but I would not be doing my job in the forthcoming defence spending review if I did not mention the pressures on defence spending. The first line of the strategic defence and security review states that our economic security is dependent on our defence, and if we do not

get our defence right we will have no economy or future prosperity. It is important that we continue to invest in security for air, sea and land, as well as in the new dimension of space and cyber-security.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Minister knows that I have grave reservations about the consolidation of the estate, not least because it could take a military family away from other communities across the country. That presents challenges in recruitment and in the general understanding of the military. How is the Minister engaging with communities and the wider military family, given that we have delayed some of these proposals yet again and are just providing more uncertainty?

Mr Ellwood: First, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the detail and energy with which she pursues these matters. It is important that we scrutinise these issues carefully. As I have said, there is huge engagement, not just with unions and so forth, but with other stakeholders, including the families federations. Operational requirements are hugely important, but we must also recognise the impact on local communities. We are moving towards more of a hub perspective so that we can consolidate our assets, save funds and liberate spaces for the necessary housing commitments, but we should not lose sight of what we are offering and of the need to ensure that it is practical and welcoming so that it encourages the next generation to step forward. I was privileged to speak in front of her all-party group on the armed forces covenant a few days ago, and I would be delighted to sit down with her and discuss these matters in more detail.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I warmly welcome the announcement from my right hon. Friend that RM Condor will remain an integral part of the defence estate. Securing its long-term future was one of my election campaign promises, so I am especially delighted with this result. When he replied to my recent Westminster Hall debate, he hinted that this might be the outcome, and it has been received incredibly warmly by both my constituents and the armed forces personnel at RM Condor. Will he commit to coming back up to Angus to hear about that positive result and to see the day-to-day work that goes on within the base, and may I encourage him to invest further in the base?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the energy and determination that she has put into retaining this asset. It was a huge pleasure to visit Condor a couple of months ago. If I was not here making this statement, I would be there with her to celebrate the news that we are keeping this important asset in Scotland. If there is an invitation there, I would be delighted to take her up on it.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): In my debate on 9 January on the long-term basing of the Royal Marines, I called for certainty for the Royal Marines in Plymouth—not only certainty for after the Government close Stonehouse barracks, the spiritual home of the Royal Marines, but certainty around where and when the new super-base for the Royal Marines will be built. Now we are not having that super-base in Plymouth, can the Minister set out why more uncertainty for the Royal Marines in Plymouth is

[*Luke Pollard*]

a good idea, and when will he tell us when the new base will be built, where it will be built and what units will be based there?

Mr Ellwood: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the Royal Marines as a whole—we have had a series of debates on these matters—but I should make it clear that there is certainty around where the 40, 42 and 45 Commandos will be. He is focusing on 3 Commando Brigade. I can assure him that it will remain in the Plymouth area—detailed analysis is being done on where—but I am conscious that it cannot remain in Stonehouse, which, as he appreciates, is no longer fit for purpose, much as there is a historical connection to the first purpose-built garrison headquarters in Britain. Its departure is a sad moment, but a decision has been made, and it is partly operational. I can give him a commitment, however, as I can to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), that 3 Commando Brigade will remain in the Plymouth area.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I very much welcome the fact that the sale of Middlewick Ranges will be delayed by at least 12 months. Will the Minister commit to working with me and local stakeholders to see if, alongside some housing, an innovative approach that secures a significant part of Middlewick Ranges for a new country park could be explored?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right to highlight, as I did earlier, that this is not just about housing—I saw the Housing Minister here earlier; it is important to remember that we are building communities, rather than simply houses. There has been a delay—I appreciate his understanding—because we need to keep the ranges open for operational reasons, but it is only for one year. I would be more than delighted to meet him to see what more we can do to help him realise the vision of securing the proper offering that his community seeks.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I echo the Minister's praise of armed forces personnel and their families. Does the estates strategy go beyond the United Kingdom to look at bases such as Cyprus, which clearly, with Brexit, is particularly affected? Would he be willing to comment on that? Closer to home—I am briefly wearing my invisible House of Commons Commission hat now—is he aware of the issue of the MOD car park and the important role it might play in relation to restoration and renewal? We are quite keen to get our hands on it.

Mr Ellwood: I will resist the temptation to reopen the Brexit debate again, but the right hon. Gentleman is right to raise concerns about future confirmation of what is happening to our sovereign bases in Cyprus—I could add Gibraltar to that, as well. I served in both localities and I assure the right hon. Gentleman that all the necessary details have been addressed to make sure that they are not affected by any outcome of Brexit.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I note the Minister's statement that the programme will allow the MOD to maximise the amount of land that could be used to build more homes and help more people on to the

housing ladder. As the Minister is aware, the REEMA sites in Carterton already provide land for hundreds of homes.

I also note the Minister's comment that in some areas local authorities are the block to development; that is certainly not the case in West Oxfordshire, where planning permission for these sites was given some 10 years ago. What is awaited is the money for the MOD to redevelop those sites. Can the Minister tell me whether West Oxfordshire, Carterton and the Royal Air Force can look forward to some of the proceeds from this announcement being invested in the REEMA sites in Carterton or whether there is a blockage elsewhere in the system that I need to explore?

Mr Ellwood: First, I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done in liaising with the local authorities and in representing Brize Norton, one of the most significant RAF garrisons across the country and dealing with the heavy lift. He is absolutely right to point out various plans to build extra housing. That has been delayed—not because of the MOD, but because the money was taken away from us, given changes to the private finance initiative. That is why I was surreptitiously hinting that I hoped that in the spending review another solution would be provided that allows any PFI project that has been removed to be put back in place, so that we can build the houses that my hon. Friend wants.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Although it is welcome that the closure of Towthorpe and the state of the art medical training facility have been delayed and also Strensall because of the Natural England report saying that the site is not suitable for development, it is disappointing that Imphal barracks is not on the list. That will have a major impact on the local economy in York; it is due to close in 2031. Will the Minister set out what steps he is taking to ensure that there is a proper economic assessment of the impact of the closure of the barracks?

Mr Ellwood: I have had the pleasure of visiting the units in the Yorkshire area. I visited 1st Division and the 4th Infantry Brigade. There will continue to be a huge military footprint in the area that the hon. Lady speaks of. She also mentioned the long-term plan—something that is going to happen a decade away. There is a reason for that: if they are to be moved, those assets need to be housed elsewhere. If that other place has yet to be built, or confirmed, there is a knock-on process. I hear what she says about wanting to expedite the process. [*Interruption.*] Whatever her long-term view is, I will be more than happy to meet her and discuss the issue in more detail.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): My constituents will be sad and disappointed that our friends the 30 Signal Regiment and the Queen's Gurkha Signals will move from Gamecock barracks to Stafford. But equally, they will very much welcome the Royal Engineers and a number of medical regiments that are coming to the barracks. Will my right hon. Friend say more about what we are doing to improve accommodation for our armed forces personnel? When significantly more people are stationed at barracks, what more can we do to support local areas with provision such as school places?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend touches on two issues. First, there are the complex movement patterns when some assets move from one location and others move in. I am pleased that the overall position is neutral. He also touches on the standard of accommodation that is now expected. One of the reasons why recruitment will improve is that we are building accommodation that youngsters today expect. When I joined the armed forces, someone could end up in a place with eight or 20 people in one room; now people want their own accommodation, cooking facilities and wi-fi. They expect those sorts of things: if they are not there, they will not sign up. That is the standard accommodation that we are now building for our armed forces.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for the information about the updated disposal date for Redford cavalry and infantry barracks in my constituency. I also join my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) in commemorating the imminent anniversary of the Clydebank blitz.

Although I am glad to get an updated date for Redford, I have written to the Government a number of times about the consequences of the disposal of Redford barracks. I was pleased to hear the Minister talk about consulting local communities. Will he meet me to discuss the need to release the land at Redford to the local authority for community benefit?

Mr Ellwood: I have written to the hon. and learned Lady and other hon. Members as well—there are letters on the letter board—but I will be more than delighted to meet her. She is absolutely right that there is a delay of three years in the disposal of Redford cavalry and infantry barracks. That has been to do with the complex sequencing and plotting that we are doing. There have also been some local planning issues.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I commend the Minister for his comprehensive statement this morning and his handling of this whole defence review. It is absolutely right that we should have a defence review, get good value for the taxpayer and have an estate fit for purpose for our armed forces.

My right hon. Friend will not be surprised that I am going to thank him in particular for his change of mind in keeping open Norton Manor camp in Taunton, home to 40 Commando, and for listening to the case that I have put, with others, in changing his mind. That means a very great deal to the whole community of Taunton, who are celebrating as we speak. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all those involved but particularly 40 Commando for all the great work they do in keeping us safe? What they need to do that is the best facilities for themselves and their families. Keeping the camp open should help to do that.

Mr Ellwood: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's comments. I am really pleased that 40 Commando will remain in the locality. I pay tribute to her hard work and dedication and the campaign that she has put forward as well. If the community are celebrating now, I hope she will soon be on a train to go down and join them. The Secretary of State is heading that way as well, to see what more needs to be done.

The camp needs some work, so I make clear my hope that the necessary funds will be provided to upgrade the camp. When diplomacy fails, we count on our elite forces such as our Royal Marines. We need to look after them, and that is why it is good that the camp is being invested in.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Bearing in mind the concerns of the communities who are losing these facilities, will the Minister assure us that the closures are operationally led rather than cost-cutting as a result of the Treasury's handing the MOD a pensions bill that the Library estimates at £3 billion over the next spending period?

Mr Ellwood: I did mention that the closures were operationally led, but there are cost savings to be made. The huge pressures on the defence budget mean that we have to find better ways to make efficiencies. As I said before, 2% of UK land is owned by the MOD. Much of that is surplus to requirements: we do not need it. We have duplicate assets in different places. It is best to try to bring those together and hub them, but without losing sight of the fact that in some places assets need to be kept for reservist and cadet functions.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): May I ask for a meeting with my right hon. Friend to discuss the release of the MOD land at Forthside in Stirling, earlier than the planned 2022? My right hon. Friend will be aware that the land is of absolutely vital importance to the Stirling city deal for development, both commercial and residential. Would he consider, for example, releasing the decontaminated land in parcels?

Mr Ellwood: I will be more than happy to meet my hon. Friend. I should stress that the future use of any land is not for the MOD to determine. That is first handed to the local authorities, but there is a desire and certainly support from the MOD to make sure that whatever use is made is in the interests of the local authorities themselves and also governmental intentions in building housing.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The Minister is absolutely right to talk about the importance of links between local communities and their service personnel. Nowhere is that more true than in Chester. I welcome the delay in the proposed closure of Dale barracks. Will the Minister use that time to bear in mind the facts about Dale barracks in Chester: retention rates are higher; accommodation is of a higher quality: social infrastructure—for example, schools—is well built up to support our service personnel; and the operational footprint in the north-west needs to be maintained to maintain operational efficiency? Will he bear those in mind and see whether we can perhaps push that date back even further?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman, quite rightly and eloquently, describes the pieces of the jigsaw that make a successful garrison or Army unit in any locality: links with the community, operational purpose, and recruitment and retention. If we have areas that are high in those across the country, we certainly need to leverage that.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): We very much value the presence of three regiments, the Royal Signals, the RAF's tactical supply wing in Stafford and other units. I have not yet seen the details, as the letter about further

[Jeremy Lefroy]

changes has not reached me, but can the Minister assure me that the Ministry of Defence will work very closely, as it has done very well in the past, with Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council to ensure that the integration of any new units is conducted in the best possible manner?

Mr Ellwood: I can provide that assurance. My hon. Friend underlines the importance of a strong bond between the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and local authorities dealing with what can be the quite challenging changes we are introducing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for his very clear commitment to addressing many of the issues facing service personnel, including accommodation and finding work. I put on record my thanks to the service personnel of all three services for all they do. The Minister stated that employment for personnel and their spouses will be offered. We have had the opportunity over the past few years to speak to some of those families, so we know what the issues are. There are only so many job opportunities, however. Will personnel families be given priority? Will those jobs be in MOD camps or in local communities? Will there be local government involvement? Will efforts be made to place them where their camp can benefit both themselves and their local community?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point about what happens in succession and the support we need to provide. I can write to him in detail on what we are doing in Northern Ireland. He is aware that I have visited Northern Ireland on a number of occasions to ensure that the more nuanced approach we have to take there, because of the sensitivities, is conducted carefully as it continues to have an important military footprint with Aldergrove, Palace and Thiepval barracks, and 38 Brigade, which I know he supports.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): May I say how refreshing it is to hear my right hon. Friend speak so knowledgeably to his own brief and say how genuinely pleased I am that he is remaining in government, because, without a dose of sarcasm, Madam Deputy Speaker, he is an excellent Minister and I want him to stay in post to do the valuable work he is doing? How does this strategy tie in with the need to provide affordable housing to our veterans?

Mr Ellwood: I hear the message first, but my hon. Friend raises an important aspect of looking after our veterans. I hope the whole House will join me in paying tribute to those who have worn uniform. Our duty of care does not simply end when they depart. We must make sure that they are looked after for the rest of their lives. There are charities and there are initiatives being looked at to see whether the new batches of housing coming online because of areas being liberated can be focused on providing housing for veterans. I think that that is well worth pursuing.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): May I first say how much I welcome the Minister's comments with regard to the 75th anniversary of D-day? It is

fantastic that Portsmouth will be the national home of those commemorations. I am especially proud that my grandfather was a veteran from Portsmouth and left Southsea on his 17th birthday for Operation Overlord. The MOD's recently published quarterly personnel statistics reveal a further decline in personnel numbers of all services for the eighth consecutive year. Can the Minister be more specific about how he is looking at the impact of the closures on recruitment?

Mr Ellwood: First, on the hon. Gentleman's particular area, I think the whole House supports the fantastic events that will take place in 100 days' time, and I join him in saying that Portsmouth can be very proud of the role it played in putting together such a fleet that participated in the event itself. On HMS Nelson wardroom, which affects his constituency, there are some issues to do with the masterplan for the Portsmouth naval base which we hope will be resolved. I hope that he will welcome that update. He talks about recruitment. We must conduct these changes with recruitment in mind. As I have stressed, we must make the kind of 21st century high-standard accommodation that youngsters expect. When they go to university, they see the sort of environment they expect to live in. We need to provide them with that. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) is no longer in his place, but in Stonehouse, for example, we still have British marines living in eight-man accommodation with a very lousy shower. That is not acceptable in today's modern age.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): May I, too, associate myself with the Minister's comments about the service of uniformed personnel and with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) on the anniversary of the Clydebank blitz?

The Defence Secretary stated that Russian submarine activity in the north Atlantic has increased tenfold in recent years. It currently takes 24 hours for a ship to be scrambled to Scottish waters, which account for approximately 60% of UK waters. Will the Minister therefore commit to opening a permanent surface vessel base in Scotland, particularly given the increasing importance of north Atlantic security?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to touch on the activities of Russia. It is investing hugely in all three arenas of operations, air, sea and land, but especially submarines. By investing in submarines, there is far greater submarine activity. We do not monitor the north Atlantic on our own; we do it as part of the NATO alliance. She is right, however, that we need the correct assets, which is one reason why our P-8 maritime patrol aircraft will be based at RAF Lossiemouth. I hear her call, and I would be delighted to meet her to discuss her ideas further.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): More than 4,000 of my constituents signed a petition opposing the closure of Woolwich barracks, evidence of precisely the bond that the Minister and other hon. Members have mentioned. The Minister knows that the decision to dispose of the site was finely balanced. In the light of the decisions he has announced in his

statement today, may I urge him to consider another adjustment and revisit the decision to sell off Woolwich barracks?

Mr Ellwood: I understand the hon. Gentleman is making a strong plea, and I would expect that from the constituency MP. I visited the barracks many, many times and know its history. It is not a part of today's announcement in any sense, but again I would be happy to meet him to discuss his thoughts.

Point of Order

12.28 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I note that the remaining stages of the Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill [*Lords*] were announced by the Leader of the House this morning. We have had an email from the Public Bill Office to say that the deadline for amendments was the rise of the House yesterday. Now, we are all pretty good in this place at figuring out how things work, but knowing how to do something that I should have done yesterday is quite difficult. Is there anything that you can do, Madam Deputy Speaker, about this incredibly short notice, which gives us little time to table amendments, less time to see other people's amendments and consider them, and makes it very difficult for us to scrutinise the Bill effectively in the House on Monday?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for giving me notice of it. The scheduling of business is a matter for the Government, not the Chair, but I can understand her slight confusion. I believe that the letter from the Public Bill Office may well have said that the formal deadline would be yesterday, but amendments can be tabled today. I am sure, having heard the concerns that I suspect other colleagues may share, that Mr Speaker will take those into account when making his decisions on the selection of amendments on Monday. The hon. Lady referred to the Public Bill Office. I recommend that she and other Members visit it for further information, because I know that the staff there will be very happy to assist her and any other colleagues who have inquiries.

BILLS PRESENTED

NORTHERN IRELAND BUDGET (ANTICIPATION AND ADJUSTMENTS) (No. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Karen Bradley, supported by the Prime Minister, the Attorney General, Elizabeth Truss and John Penrose, presented a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland of certain sums for the service of the years ending 31 March 2019 and 2020; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for those years; to revise the limits on the use of certain accruing resources in the year ending 31 March 2019; and to authorise the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland to borrow on the credit of the sum appropriated for the year ending 31 March 2020.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 4 March, and to be printed (Bill 346.)

NORTHERN IRELAND (REGIONAL RATES AND ENERGY) (No. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Karen Bradley, supported by the Prime Minister, the Attorney General, Elizabeth Truss and John Penrose, presented a Bill to make provision about the regional rate in Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2020; and amend the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 4 March, and to be printed (Bill 347.)

Backbench Business

St David's Day

12.31 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered Welsh affairs.

May I take this opportunity to wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and everyone in the House a very happy St David's Day? Dydd Gŵyl Dewi hapus. I formally thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this debate; it is really important that as a proud devolved country, we have the opportunity in this House to discuss issues that are pertinent to our constituencies and to Wales.

I thank colleagues from across the House for their support in securing this debate, but more importantly I want to give a big shout-out to one special friend who is no longer with us, Paul Flynn. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] If I referred to his book "How to be an MP", which sits proudly in my office upstairs, I am sure it would say that one should never give another MP a shout-out, but Paul was not a traditional MP and I learned a lot from him after being elected. His firebrand speeches and his unstinting campaigning style will be sorely missed by many, but I am sure that some Government Members may be slightly relieved.

For me and many others, the work that Paul did on medicinal cannabis will never be forgotten, including by the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people that could benefit from it. The Elizabeth Brice Bill was cutting edge, and the legacy of Paul's work has paved the way to changing the UK's attitude to the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the debate and for the tribute she is paying to Paul Flynn. Does she agree that Paul would be appalled about the situation for young children such as my constituent Bailey Williams? I know that my hon. Friend has done tremendous work with Bailey's family through her work on medical cannabis. Paul would be appalled that as we stand here, despite the Government having made it possible for medical cannabis to be prescribed, it is still almost impossible for families to get it prescribed when children are suffering in this way.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. The situation is absolutely a disaster. I am particularly upset about the case of Bailey Williams and many others, including constituents of mine. It is one thing to change the law; it is another not to make it work. While the law has changed, these obstacles to access are still there, and I will continue Paul's work to ensure that children and constituents such as ours can be prescribed this very misunderstood drug. I pass on my love and best wishes to Sam, the rest of Paul's family and his friends and let them know that he will always have a place in my heart, and that I would like to thank him for all his support and help.

Standing here and opening this debate makes me extremely proud to be a Welsh MP. Since I retook Gower in 2017 for Welsh Labour following a short hiccup, I have dedicated myself to serving my constituents,

helping the most vulnerable in society and making sure that those who usually do not have a voice are listened to. My office works tirelessly on behalf of people who are being treated appallingly—who have continuing problems with personal independence payments, with universal credit, state pension inequality and immigration. The list goes on and I will continue to fight for them.

Last year, the St David's Day debate was delayed by the severe weather caused by the beast from the east, but this week we have been basking in some glorious sunshine—maybe not today, but we have been. While the weather is enjoyable, it is a worrying indicator of the drastically changing climate that threatens the world. The Government have set targets for reducing carbon emissions and increasing the use of renewable energy to combat climate change following legislation from the EU, but as we have seen, they are not living up to those promises, particularly in Wales.

Since I have been in this place, we have seen the collapse of two major energy projects in Wales: the hugely ambitious tidal lagoon project in Swansea bay, and the Wylfa nuclear plant in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). Does this not just show a disregard for the pressing issue of climate change and demonstrate the disdain that the Tories have for Wales? What commitment can the Secretary of State make to the people of Wales on how the UK Government will reduce the carbon footprint of Wales to protect our future generations? As a former teacher, I think that seeing pupils going out to protest about climate change is inspirational, and I give them my full support.

While we all look forward to really celebrating St David's Day tomorrow, we know that the celebrations have been ongoing all week. Just yesterday saw a celebration at No. 10 that was apparently well attended. [*Interruption.*] I say "apparently", as we have only social media to go on, as the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State had forgotten to invite Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru MPs to the event. [*Interruption.*] Come on, we only make up four fifths of all Welsh MPs. I hope they had fun and did not forget to mention all the funding and support that the Welsh Labour Government have given to many of the companies that were there. I will welcome an invitation next year.

Support for many of our services has not been protected by the Tories. As we have seen and heard from our constituents, since 2010 police funding cuts across the UK and in Wales have had a huge effect on the work of the police.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Specifically on police funding, I have asked many times for capital city funding for South Wales police. My constituency holds well over 400 events—royal events, political events and sporting events—every year, but nothing is forthcoming. Does she agree that just as with energy projects, the Tories cannot be trusted to fund our police properly in Wales?

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution. That is very important. Many of us who were at the international match on Saturday got to see how many police are needed to keep people safe. I am

really concerned that this is a drain on the resources of South Wales police in particular, and we need to address this issue immediately.

The community teams of officers and police community support officers across Swansea and Gower work tirelessly, juggling shift work and family life, and I am particularly grateful for their excellent work. I am very fortunate to enjoy a close working relationship with these teams. I have been out on the beat to see their dedication to serving the community, including visiting local pubs—not to drink, but to promote anti-drink-driving campaigns in rural areas. Without a doubt, they are committed and hard-working and I recognise the challenges that they face in dealing with some of the biggest problems in 2019.

How many of us are aware of the number of officers and support staff that it takes to keep us safe at night? I was struck by that when I went down Wind Street in Swansea with PC Andy Jones before Christmas. The resources that the force puts into ensuring that match day at the Liberty Stadium is policed and monitored are astounding. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) has already spoken about Cardiff, so I shall move on, but that needs to be noted and it needs to be addressed.

Police forces face many challenges in providing care and support for the most vulnerable in Wales, and South Wales police are collaborating extremely well with all agencies. The police and crime commissioner, Alun Michael, has funded the groundbreaking Swan project, which involves the police and Women's Aid working together to support prostitutes in Swansea. Those vulnerable women have nowhere to turn. They are in crisis. They often have drug problems and a history of adverse childhood experiences such as sexual abuse.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Does the hon. Lady agree that one way to give policing in Wales an instant cash boost would be to devolve it? There would then be Barnett consequentials, and instead of being tied to an England and Wales formula that penalises them, the Welsh police forces would be better off to the tune of £20 million.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I feel that I shall have to make a date with the hon. Gentleman to discuss his suggestion further. I do not entirely agree with it, but it would be good to have a discussion about it.

The Swan project is to be commended, and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) has another vision that I totally support. Swansea needs a 24-hour crisis hub where our most vulnerable people can have access to all the services that they need in one place. Think of having a safe space to go if you are a victim of domestic violence; think of having a consumption room in the place as you can pick up your needles. We want to keep people off the streets and safe, and we need to work with our colleagues in the Welsh Assembly to deliver that and help those who need it most.

It is fantastic to see the beauty and splendour of my constituency being celebrated on moving billboards across London: at Paddington station, I believe. I hope that Members have seen the National Trust #PlacesMatter story about Mal, who had an accident at work which meant that he was unable to walk for five years. He says

that when you go to Gower, you are blown away by it. The Gower peninsula just makes him feel alive. It helped him, and it helps many others. We should never underestimate the impact of our surroundings on our wellbeing. The beauty of my constituency, from Worms Head to the Lliw Valley reservoir, can never be overstated.

Wales is obviously the most beautiful country in the UK—

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): In the world!

Tonia Antoniazzi: In the world; correct. It is the most beautiful country, from the striking and romantic coastline of Ynys Môn to the picturesque fishing village of Aberaeron in Ceredigion to the Afan Forest Park, a hidden gem in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). We also have an unrivalled cultural history. We have the Welsh National Opera, *Only Boys Aloud*—who have been here today—Mike Peters MBE of *The Alarm*, Bonnie Tyler, and, of course, Goldie Lookin Chain. We also have poets galore.

Jo Stevens: Has my hon. Friend heard Goldie Lookin Chain's fantastic tribute song to our dear friend Paul Flynn?

Tonia Antoniazzi: It is excellent, and I want to say thanks to Goldie Lookin Chain, because it was really cool.

Jonathan Edwards: Will my hon. Friend also commend Goldie Lookin Chain for playing the "Yes is More" pro-independence gig in Cardiff in the last few weeks?

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and—whatever.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): The hon. Lady omitted from that prestigious list Geoff Downes, of "Video Killed the Radio Star" and Asia, who is a constituent of mine. I am sure that she will not include him.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Marvellous—but I need to make progress.

Many teachers have written to me to bring to my attention the significant cost pressures that Gower schools are facing as a result of unfunded increases in contributions to the teachers' pension scheme. That is serious and damaging, and I want some answers. From 2019-2020, each school faces the prospect of having to increase its contribution. How can we expect schools to meet additional costs on that scale, over which they have no control? The Welsh Government and Swansea Council have made explicit commitments to ensure that all money that is released by the Treasury will flow directly to schools in Swansea, but what commitment can the UK Government give to cover the pension deficit and ensure that all my pupils in schools in Gower are given their fair share?

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): My right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and I have written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about Flintshire County Council, and she has said, in a

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letter to me, that responsibility for that is devolved to the Welsh Assembly, but financial responsibility—the financial contribution from the Government—is not. Is that not unfair?

Tonia Antoniazzi: It is completely unfair. I really would like to have some answers, because that unknown is causing instability when it comes to planning the future of our children's education.

I shall end my speech now. I look forward to listening to the debate and responding to it at the end. I wish everyone a happy St David's Day.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. This debate is well subscribed, and the next debate is also well subscribed. I would rather not impose a time limit, but if colleagues could speak for about six minutes, that would be very helpful.

12.46 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi). I also extend my sincerest condolences to the family of Paul Flynn, and to all Paul's colleagues in the Labour party. I had known him for well over 30 years. He used to be my MP, and he used to come to my school when I was a sixth-former. I would try, and utterly fail, to catch him out with difficult questions. History seemed to repeat itself when he joined the Welsh Affairs Committee. He was an inspirational Member of Parliament, a true Back Bencher, who worked incredibly hard. He turned up to every Committee meeting, even when his health was making that difficult for him. We were both Council of Europe delegates as well.

I think that the best compliment I can pay comes from one of Paul's constituents, who described him as "a damned good constituency MP" who would always take up people's concerns. That comment was actually made to me by a member of Newport West's Conservative association. I think I need say no more than that.

Let me also thank all members of the Welsh Affairs Committee, past and present. In the nine years for which I have served on the Committee, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with everyone. We certainly have a wide range of political opinions, but most of our reports have featured a strong measure of unanimity in their recommendations to the Government. I think that that is because, outside the Chamber and the hurly-burly of politics, most of us—indeed, all of us—will always want to put the good of Wales first, and look for ways in which to support Wales and the Welsh people rather than dividing on political issues.

In the four minutes that I have left, I will canter through a couple of the issues with which the Committee has been dealing. The issue of the Severn Bridge was the first that I took up as Chairman, and there were various inquiries, reports and follow-ups on the subject. With the support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, we continued to maintain that the tolls were unfair, and were creating a brake on the south Wales economy. I was delighted when, earlier in the

year, they were finally scrapped. If we are to see the full benefit, however, it is vital for the Welsh Government to get on with building an M4 relief road. Otherwise, we will simply see further congestion in the area of the Brynglas tunnels.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has paid tribute to the Secretary of State. Will he join me in also paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who has campaigned for the abolition of the tolls since 2005? Should she not be congratulated on her achievement?

David T. C. Davies: In fact, the hon. Member for Newport East was a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee when that first report was produced some nine years ago, and I think that it was at her instigation that the abolition went ahead. I pay full tribute to her for that.

As I was saying, the advantages that will accrue from the abolition of the tolls will be greatly increased if the Welsh Government now get on with building the M4 relief road. I know that was the policy—or it certainly seemed to be—of the Labour Government in the Welsh Assembly, and I am sure the Government here will want to support them in that.

To be slightly more parochial, the booming south Wales economy, for which my colleagues in government can take much of the credit, has meant that there is a demand for housing in south-east Wales, which is causing further problems. I hope Ministers will be doing everything possible to get the local authorities together to build the Chepstow bypass, which is also urgently needed.

The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs obviously cannot do much in the way of culture, media and sport, which is a devolved matter, but there are areas where we can offer support, not least in cheering on the national side as we all did on Saturday, but on S4C too. We have produced numerous reports to try to ensure that there are no threats to S4C's budget.

I am also delighted that the Select Committee now enables anyone who wishes to do so to give evidence in Welsh. Debates can also now be held in Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee, and I do not see why this cannot be extended further. I know that many Committee members would be quite supportive of it. There is no technical reason why we could not have debates on Welsh matters in Westminster Hall in Welsh, and I do not think there is any technological reason why a St David's Day debate in this very Chamber could not also be held in the medium of Welsh. Perhaps we could look at that over the next few years.

We have looked on many occasions at the issue of powers for the Welsh Assembly. I was on the losing side of a referendum: I campaigned against the Welsh Assembly but quickly realised it would be utterly wrong to stand in the way of something the people of Wales had voted for. That is why I am glad the Conservative party, rather than trying to overturn the result of that referendum in 1997, embraced it and realised we would simply have to go along with what the Welsh people wanted, because that is democracy.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman must then be very upset that the Prime Minister in 1997, after the referendum, voted against the Government of Wales Act.

David T. C. Davies: I was not here until 2005 so I will take the hon. Gentleman's word for that. I do not know what the reason for that was, but it was very clear at the time that the Welsh Conservative party accepted the Welsh Assembly, and rightly so. I would suggest judging us by our deeds, not by words; judge us by the many extra powers we have granted to the Welsh Assembly over the years. One of those could be what we are looking at at the moment: devolving air passenger duty. I will not make too many comments on that prior to finishing our report, but clearly if there is an economic case to devolve APD to the Welsh Government, we should not stand in the way of that. I certainly do not see any constitutional reason why that should not happen, since we have already devolved income tax, land tax and all sorts of other taxes. There is no constitutional reason not to do it; if the economic case can be made, and it is fairly strong, we should not be afraid to devolve APD as well.

Jo Stevens: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that during the passage of the most recent Wales Act the Secretary of State refused to devolve APD to the National Assembly?

David T. C. Davies: I am sure the Secretary of State will, as he always has done, take great interest in the report we are producing; we have not finished it yet so I can only say that I have heard strong economic arguments in one direction. There may be strong economic arguments not to devolve APD; we will have to wait for the findings of the report. I pay great tribute to the Secretary of State for Wales, who has always read carefully through the recommendations of our reports and taken them very seriously.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Is not one glaringly obvious solution to the APD question just to abolish it entirely for all nations? It is an unfair tax, it hinders tourism, and there is an economic boost to be had for the whole United Kingdom in bringing down APD.

David T. C. Davies: There is a very strong case for that as well, but I am deviating now slightly from the subject of Wales and running over my six minutes.

I cannot really not mention Brexit. The fact of the matter is that we are not going to get any consensus around this at all. I am strongly in favour of Brexit and the people of Wales have voted for Brexit. I have a slight regret that we did not go off to Brussels a few years ago and make it very clear that we were not going there as supplicants; instead we should have made it clear that the people of Britain, and the people of Wales, had voted to leave the European Union and if there has been a failing it has been a failing of the EU in not being able to instil the confidence it wants in the people of this nation.

I hope all those who feel there will be some detrimental impact if we leave without a deal are willing to back the Prime Minister. I believe that we must be out by the end of March. I hope all Ministers and all Cabinet Ministers are aware of that, and aware that if they want our support for difficult policies, we need to be out, with or without a deal, by the end of March.

12.55 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, as always, to speak in this debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on securing it. I have to say to Government Front Benchers that, after last year's example of the Government taking the lead, I thought that we would be returning to where we were for many years, with the Government taking Wales day seriously and Welsh issues seriously, so that we would not have to make a bid to the Backbench Business Committee.

I want to say—as many have in the last few days; I make no apologies for saying it now—how great the victory on Saturday was by Wales against England in rugby. It united the country of Wales in a way we have not seen for a long time. The tactics were perfect; I wish the Prime Minister would act more like Warren Gatling than Eddie Jones when it comes to Brexit and mind games, and actually deliver.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is right; that victory did unite the country. Does he wonder, as I do, whether it united the Ministers in the Wales Office? It would be interesting to know who the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), was supporting last Saturday.

Albert Owen: I will give Ministers the opportunity to speak for themselves, but I have had compliments from both of them on the way Wales played on Saturday; it absolutely united them.

I want to talk about energy, the north Wales economy and indeed Brexit, but I want to start by paying tribute to my late good friend Paul Flynn. As chairman of the Welsh parliamentary Labour party, I officially send our condolences to Sam and her family, and their friends from the Newport area, many of whom I know and who have told me great stories. Paul was a unique man; he was a great campaigner, as many people have said. I remember my other great late friend Rhodri Morgan—he was also of the class of '87—saying to me, "If you haven't had an argument with Paul, you've never really known Paul." That was his nature; he was very astute at putting his arguments and not afraid to hold to his opinions. Those are my memories of Paul, and I will miss him very dearly.

The Secretary of State and others on the Treasury Bench will know that I have taken an interest in energy for many years, and I have taken this subject up because I believe that Wales has the great potential to be a world leader in the low-carbon economy and to lead the way on many projects. When I talk about a mixed rich energy diversity I am talking about renewables, nuclear and also energy efficiency. The innovation can come from Wales; we have a skill base there, we have natural resources and we have the potential to be a world leader.

I have written a booklet—you may have a copy after this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker—on resetting the energy button, because over the last few years we have not focused attention as we should. Prior to 2009 there was a great consensus across the House on a way forward and how we would reduce carbon emissions. I accept that the great world recession had an impact on that, but there has been disjointed policy from the UK

[Albert Owen]

Government since then. We have had reform Bills—electricity reform, market reform, retail reform—but we have not had a coherent policy. Wales is suffering as a consequence of that, because many major projects were earmarked for Wales, with lots of time and effort from the private sector, the Welsh Government and the UK Government, yet the end product has not materialised as it should have.

I have argued for many years that we need a proper formula, particularly for first-of-a-kind energy projects, for example in marine technology, because the auction system—the contracts for difference—that the Government have put in place does not help new forms of technology break through. We have great tidal resources around the coast of the UK and Wales—the west coast has some of the best tidal resources—and we need to work together to make things happen.

The Secretary of State has been very good with me in recent weeks and we are working together to get a new formula, but now we want not only a formula but an action plan. We want to be able to deliver on these projects, because we need to get the carbon emissions down and to meet our targets. We will not do that by prevaricating or by blaming the private sector for its financing. We need proper Government investment, in financial as well as policy terms. We should not leave this to the auctions; we need coherent planning.

I also want to talk about the job losses that we have seen in north Wales in recent times. I mentioned this yesterday, and I am grateful for the response that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams). Rahau Plastics in my constituency town of Amlwch is going through a consultation programme and could lose 104 jobs. It is an international company. It is a family company that is based predominantly in Bavaria, but it has global reach. It has been in Amlwch for 40 years, but it is consolidating the work that is done at that plant in central Europe.

There is a pattern developing, whereby international companies that have their bases across continental Europe and the United Kingdom are consolidating their workforces and their businesses in the European Union, because they know that the single market delivers. They are very polite about it and say that this is not simply down to Brexit, but I say to the Secretary of State that we cannot have companies based in countries such as Japan, which have direct agreements with the European Union, pulling out of Britain like this. Our workforce, our commitment and our end product are all good, but there is a fault, and that fault is the uncertainty of Brexit, pure and simple.

I want to move on to the North Wales growth bid. I congratulate the Secretary of State on working with the Welsh Government and local government on this important issue, but I want to say to him directly that there should be greater input by north Wales MPs. Simply leaving it to the councils is not good enough, because their resources are being cut and they have different responsibilities. As north Wales MPs, we have a strong mandate here and we want to work with the Treasury, the Government, the Welsh Government and local government to make

this deal happen. This is not about being top-down; it is about working in partnership to deliver for the people of north Wales.

Following the suspension of the Wylfa Newydd power station, many of the projects are now in jeopardy. The Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are joining us for a meeting next week to discuss this. It is hugely important that the gap created by the suspension of that £20 billion project should be filled. It could be filled with quality jobs in renewable energy, in improving our rail infrastructure and in many more projects. I want to work with the Secretary of State in focusing on that, but I want a commitment from him that he will fight our corner in Whitehall and that we will get more money as a consequence of that suspended project. The private investment that has been lost needs to be topped up, and that could be done through the mechanism of the North Wales growth bid. The Welsh Economy and Transport Minister, Ken Skates, has said that he would match any moneys that come from the United Kingdom Government. We want to see action from this Government, not just warm words.

I understand the time constraint on this debate, but I want to mention Brexit very briefly. I have been arguing in this House for more than two years about the Irish dimension to Brexit and its effect on the port at Holyhead. The former Secretary of State just said, “Don’t worry, it will be simple”, but we are coming up to the eleventh hour and we are still arguing about the Irish backstop. If we treat one part of the United Kingdom—that is, Northern Ireland—differently and allow it to have alignment with the single market and the customs union, that will have an impact on Welsh ports as well as on ports in Scotland and England. Those countries will lose out as a consequence.

I want this message to go out from Wales to the Prime Minister: look at what is happening in Wales, listen to the Welsh Assembly and to Welsh MPs, do not be blinkered and do not pander to one side of your party. Start speaking up for Wales, because it is an integral part of the United Kingdom. We are pioneers and leaders, and I am proud to speak in this debate.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. We are not doing very well so far, are we? If we cannot stick to six minutes, I will have to impose a shorter time limit, so I urge colleagues to make an extra special effort.

1.4 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I shall try to adhere to your quite reasonable constraints, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure to participate in this annual debate. As the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), whom I congratulate on securing it, said, it gives us an opportunity to celebrate all that is good about Wales. Unlike the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), whose remarks were rather Eeyore-ish, I want to celebrate what this Government are doing for Wales, and especially for north Wales.

In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the Government for their total commitment to the North Wales growth deal, which was pioneered by George Osborne and has been taken forward by this Chancellor,

with an announcement in the last Budget of £120 million-worth of funding. That funding has now been matched by the Welsh Government. This is a huge opportunity for north Wales. It gives us the opportunity to put in place transformational programmes that will benefit not only this generation but the generations to come. It is extremely important that the Government should continue to do what they are doing at the moment—that is, not only listening to local government but working with Members of Parliament. The Government have been working extremely closely with the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee North Wales, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), and listening closely to what north Wales MPs think.

We are now arriving at the moment when the design of the growth deal is coming to fruition, and we should be considering what the transformational projects should be. I believe that infrastructure, particularly digital infrastructure, should be the key to this. That will be the key to our future economic growth. Historically, north Wales has been at a disadvantage in that regard, but that disadvantage will shortly be overturned by 5G, which will bring in gigabit speeds right across the country, including the difficult-to-reach areas of north Wales.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I understand the need for technology to advance in Wales. Our geography means that broadband cannot get to those most difficult areas, but has the right hon. Gentleman thought about the impact on people of the electromagnetic fields? I am concerned that we are throwing up masts that are larger than ever before, willy-nilly, without thinking about the people who choose to live in areas with no wi-fi or 5G.

Mr Jones: All I can say is that most of my constituents, particularly the farmers, are desperately keen to have access to the internet, which has been patchy so far. Clearly, we have to take health considerations into account, but that is what we rely on experts for, and I am entirely happy to accept the expert evidence. I urge the Government to listen to experts such as the Deeside Business Forum, which is calling for high quality broadband infrastructure to be put in place as part of the North Wales growth deal.

The other issue that I want to raise is essentially a constituency one, but I believe that it has wider implications. It concerns the sea defences at Old Colwyn in my constituency. Two Members have mentioned climate change so far, and there is no doubt that coastal erosion is going to become an increasing problem. In Old Colwyn, we have a significant problem of crumbling sea defences. In February last year, the promenade there was badly affected by high seas. It has now been repaired, with contributions from Welsh Water, but the engineers tell us that the sea defences are now in such a parlous condition that they are in danger of being swept away into the sea. This is more than an issue of the promenade at Old Colwyn, because the sea defences at Old Colwyn also protect the main sewer for Colwyn bay, the main London to Holyhead railway line and the A55 main trunk road to Holyhead. If these sea defences are compromised to the extent that they are destroyed, there would be an immediate and serious environmental incident in the Irish sea, there would be the potential loss of that important rail connection between London and Holyhead, and the A55 would be closed, too.

Everyone agrees that the defences need repair, and the cost is estimated at some £37 million. The problem is who actually pays the cost. I have been in correspondence with the responsible Welsh Government Minister, who has said that, although coastal defences are a devolved competence, the Welsh Government will not contribute to the cost of repair if the defences do not protect houses or dwellings.

Welsh Water has spoken optimistically about a contribution but, of course, it requires others to contribute, too. Network Rail has very few funds available to contribute to the repair. Conwy County Borough Council, the responsible local authority, has no capital-raising powers, so it cannot pay for the repairs, either.

We remember what happened in Dawlish five years ago, when the railway line was swept into the sea, and the chaos it caused on the south-west peninsula. As we speak, the whole north-west Wales economy is in danger of being affected by a serious incident in Old Colwyn. I ask Ministers to give consideration to that and to seek to work with the Welsh Assembly Government, and with all the other interested parties, to try to get these defences repaired.

This problem affects my constituency but, because of climate change and coastal erosion, it will affect many other constituencies right across Wales. I believe this is a matter that requires priority attention, and I hope Ministers will do all they can to try to find a way forward.

1.12 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate at a particularly happy time for all Welsh Members, following Saturday's sensational try by Josh Adams that propelled the Welsh team to the top of the Six Nations table. I have fingers, toes and, frankly, everything crossed for a Welsh grand slam, and I know the whole country is firmly behind our team and cheering them on.

I will be brief, and perhaps disorderly, in thanking the choir in the Public Gallery, Only Boys Aloud, for giving us a wonderful performance earlier today.

As others have done, I pay a personal tribute to our late friend and colleague, the former hon. Member for Newport West, Paul Flynn. His loss is a painful one, and it will continue to be felt on these Benches and across Wales for some time to come. Paul truly was a giant, both of Welsh politics and of our Welsh Labour movement. He leaves an unfillable space in this place, just as he does in the communities he served with such wit and passion across Newport West. We will miss his courage, his keen sense of humour and, above all, his determination to do what he believed was right for the people he served, however unpopular or unfashionable that may be.

Sharp, often outspoken, always articulate, occasionally contrary and of peerless intellect—Paul was all these things. This House, and our country, has lost a compassionate, independent champion for his constituents. I would argue that the term “honourable gentleman” could have been coined with Paul in mind. Even as his health was failing, he fought for his people and his principles with the zest, tenacity and effectiveness that were his trademarks. At a time when the public's trust in politicians and our political institutions is so low, it is

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an even greater blow to lose someone whose ambition and achievements soared so high. My thoughts and deepest sympathies continue to be with his wife, Sam, and his friends and family at this difficult time.

Likewise, I know that colleagues from all parties in the National Assembly for Wales are still coming to terms with the immeasurably sad loss of Steffan Lewis. I first met Steffan when we were both young Assembly researchers and, although we were serving politicians of different political colours, he was unfailingly courteous and engaging, and even then he showed the gentle effectiveness that became his hallmark.

Steffan's passing at such a terribly young age must remind all of us who are still fighting to improve the lives of our constituents that, through our common beliefs, passions and ideas, we can achieve so much more than through the "Punch and Judy" theatrics that too often typify our politics. That is the style of politics Steffan embodied in life, and it should stay with all of us in his passing. My thoughts continue to be with Steffan's family, friends and Plaid Cymru colleagues in this Chamber and in the Assembly.

This year has seen a significant amount of change in Welsh politics, most notably with my friend and constituency neighbour Carwyn Jones stepping down as First Minister after nine years in the top job. Carwyn was that rarest of political beings, someone people not only trusted to run their country but with whom they would also happily enjoy a pint. An outstanding leader of Welsh Labour and the Welsh Government, his legacy is a strong one, rooted in Labour values and delivered against almost a decade of unrelenting Tory austerity. I place on record my support and good wishes to our new First Minister and Welsh Labour leader, Mark Drakeford, in continuing the work of delivering for the people of Wales.

Members on both sides of the House will know that one of the issues I am particularly passionate about is rail infrastructure—I often bore Members to death with my constant talk of rail infrastructure—and one of Carwyn's greatest legacies is the massive investment being pumped into the new Wales and Borders franchise through Transport for Wales.

The Welsh Labour Government are investing a whopping £5 billion in our rail network, with £1.8 billion invested to ensure that all trains are replaced with new rolling stock by 2023. Crucially, these are Welsh solutions, designed in Wales to benefit Wales. Half of these trains will be built in Wales, providing skilled employment opportunities and delivering a world-class service of which passengers can be proud.

This bold, innovative and well-resourced approach stands in stark contrast to the ongoing rail disaster being overseen by the UK Department for Transport and the Wales Office. From the scrapping of rail electrification to the meagre amounts of money being allocated to Wales for rail safety improvements and network upgrades, their "great train robbery" shows how little respect the Tories have for Wales.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend makes a valid point about train services in Wales. I look forward to that new

investment, particularly in services to Penarth and throughout my constituency. Will he join me in welcoming the fact that a brand-new station will be built in St Mellons in east Cardiff? That is the sort of investment we need, instead of the Department for Transport's shambles on the Great Western main line.

Chris Elmore: I agree with my hon. Friend, and one of the most frustrating things is that the Secretary of State makes bold announcements about railway infrastructure investments and plans for Aberystwyth and Carmarthen without putting any investment into the railway infrastructure that currently exists. [*Interruption.*] He can shake his head all he likes, but he has made those statements publicly.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): On that very point, the Secretary of State must recognise and accept that investment in infrastructure in Wales is the UK Government's responsibility, and there has been historical underinvestment in the railway infrastructure in Wales. He should be there to argue Wales's case.

Chris Elmore: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I would add that Wales has 11% of the railway infrastructure and has had only 2% of the funding since 2010, which is a shocking failure of the Conservative Government and, indeed, of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government before them.

While the Welsh Labour Government are building a transport network fit for the future, the UK Government seem intent on flying a white flag and accepting the status quo where Wales is concerned. I will not dwell on this for too long, as Ministers and the House clearly know my views, but let me pose this question: if austerity really is over, when are we going to see the investment in the non-devolved parts of our rail network for which many Labour Members have been calling for years?

To give two small examples—Members have heard these examples many times—I have long campaigned for the closure of the dangerous level crossing at Pencoed and for much-needed improvements to the Tondy loop on the Llynfi Valley line in my Ogmore constituency. Although Wales Office officials, after three years of my complaining, are at last engaging, both I and my predecessor, Huw Irranca-Davies, have witnessed a laughable passing of the buck as to where the responsibility for this vital work lies. I fear that this buck passing has suited the Government's continued austerity agenda. If Ministers are true to their words about ending the spending squeeze, let us work together and get these vital works done at the earliest possible opportunity.

Of course, the most significant issue facing Wales in the immediate and long-term future is Brexit. I have spoken previously of my fear that no single Brexit scenario will deliver a better future for Wales or the many wonderful communities that make up my Ogmore constituency. When the UK Government's most positive analysis of the various Brexit scenarios is that Wales's gross value added would be moderately lower than it is today, it appears to me as though we are setting a very low bar for ourselves and failing to clear even that. With the real threat of a no-deal Brexit or further pandering to the European Research Group, the Welsh Secretary and the Prime Minister should have the courage of their convictions to go back to the people to seek their

consent for this course of action. When the facts change—or, in the case of the 2016 referendum, when the endemic falsehoods are exposed—it is only right that my constituents and the wider British public get to rubber stamp our next course of action. To the people who say, “Wales has spoken, Wales has voted leave”, I simply say this: what do you have to fear from being asked to look at this question again? I completely respect the many, many reasons why people voted to leave, and if one message comes from today’s debate it should be this: we must start addressing the real concerns many leave voters had with our political system, because nearly three years after the referendum I fear we have yet to scratch the surface.

It feels as though Wales, like the UK as a whole, is at a turning point. This is not a crossroads or a simple T-junction; there are multiple paths Wales can take in the near future, and it is essential that we choose the correct one. It is fundamental that we continue to be an outward-looking, internationalist nation that looks after its citizens and is welcoming to others who choose to make their life in Wales—without exception. Where we see injustice, where we see our communities suffering, we must continue to be the positive and outward-looking nation that Wales has always been.

1.21 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for working hard to secure this important debate. It has been a good week for Wales, bathed in warm sunshine and the afterglow of a stunning and historic victory on Saturday. Wales is a truly blessed and happy nation in this St David’s Day week.

I wish to use my brief remarks this afternoon not to raise concerns and problems affecting my constituency, as I have used other opportunities in the Chamber this week to do that, but to talk about things that makes Wales great in 2019. So I will be making some unalloyed positive remarks in the St David’s Day debate. Things that make Wales great No. 1: Welsh sport. I make no apologies for making this my starting point. I love sport as entertainment. Anyone who watched the game on Saturday will know that “That’s Entertainment”, in the words of the Jam. But sport in Wales is so much more than just entertainment: it is a source of employment, skills and volunteering opportunities; it is a vehicle for social cohesion and national ambition; and it is a tool for tackling poor mental health and for leveraging inward investment. I truly believe in the power of sport to transform lives and boost our economy. This is really important for us in Wales, as a smaller nation, where our victories really matter to us. Whether we are talking about the Welsh football success at Euro 2016, Newport knocking Leicester out of the FA cup, the victory on Saturday or Geraint Thomas winning the Tour de France in 2018, these are things that really matter to us. It is not just about making us feel good; one of the keys to Welsh success in the years ahead is investing in sport, for all the reasons I set out, and using sport to help make Wales a stronger nation. In Wales, we are also closer to our sporting heroes than people in England perhaps are, and I sometimes try to explain this to my English colleagues. We see our sporting heroes in Wales

in the street. We sometimes see them in the pub or at motorway service stations. They live among us in Wales. That is really important, and it brings me to my second point.

Things that make Wales great No.2: community. The spirit of community in Wales is very strong and positive. It is a bit of a cliché to say it, and we sometimes hear people from the north of England say similar, but Wales is a friendlier place—I genuinely believe that. In 2019, it feels as though we have shaken off some of the stuffy insularity or curtain-twitching judgmentalism that Dylan Thomas used to rage about and hate, writing about it in “Under Milk Wood”. In 2019, Wales is an open, tolerant, caring, welcoming place.

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree that community is one key characteristic of Wales and what makes it great. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the great ways in which communities come together is through music? We have Only Boys Aloud here today in Parliament and they have been singing in the St David’s Day service; they have been taking part and they are making a huge difference in communities up and across Wales.

Stephen Crabb: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I have heard that choir sing on many occasions, and what a great bunch of guys they are. In terms of using culture as a tool for social mobility and ambition, they are a hallmark of Welsh success. This spirit of community shapes our politics and society in Wales. Whether someone comes from a Welsh Tory, Liberal or Labour tradition, their politics tend to be more communitarian, rather than individualistic. That brings me to an important point about Welsh participation in this House of Commons, which I flag up to the Secretary of State. If the boundary review goes ahead in the way it is shaping up, the Welsh voice in this UK Parliament will be smaller and that Welsh political tradition, which has helped to shape our UK politics, risks being diminished.

Things that make Wales great No. 3: our landscape. The hon. Member for Gower has spoken passionately about her constituency and how stunningly beautiful it is, and she is absolutely right; it comes in just behind Pembrokeshire in the league table of beautiful constituencies around the UK. We are truly blessed with some stunning landscapes. This is not just about saying what a pretty postcard it makes; the outdoors in Wales is the source for outdoor education, learning about the environment and promoting important messages about climate change. I want to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the Darwin Centre in my constituency, which, for the past 10 years, has pioneered outdoor education in the areas of science and environmentalism. I pay particular tribute to its outgoing director, Marten Lewis, who has revolutionised education in Pembrokeshire, using the outdoors as an educational tool.

Things that make Wales great No. 4: the Welsh men and women who serve in our armed forces. There is an important historical tradition of Welsh men and women serving in all branches of the armed forces. I watch the film “Zulu” every year and have a chuckle at the depiction of Jones 1 and Jones 2 in that film, but our having this rich tradition is an important point. I have concerns about the way recruitment is developing in our armed forces, with the changes to the recruitment processes

[Stephen Crabb]

and the closures of some recruitment offices. I have concerns about some potential changes to the armed forces footprint in Wales. We do not want to risk reducing the important contribution that Welsh men and women make to our armed forces.

Finally, I come to things that make Wales great No. 5: our language. I say that as someone who does not speak Welsh. I have made three serious attempts at trying to learn Welsh, but I grew up on the wrong side of the Landsker line in Pembrokeshire. Many Members here will know that that is the 1,000-year-old cultural and linguistic line that divides Pembrokeshire, which was put in place by the Flemish lords who came in on the back of William the Conqueror. On Friday, however, I had the huge privilege of visiting a brand new Welsh-speaking school in Haverfordwest, Ysgol Caer Elen. Haverfordwest has traditionally been an English-speaking town, but a new generation of Welsh speakers is coming through and that is a really positive thing. My final comment is a message to those people on social media and elsewhere who moan about the costs of bilingualism and about the Welsh translation of English place names in Wales. My message to them is: get over it. The language is a really important thing that roots our nation back to ancient and mysterious times, and that is a great thing. Happy St David's Day.

1.28 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch, Madam Ddirprwy Lefarydd. It is a delight to follow the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and his singing the praises of bilingualism and the other great points of Wales. I also wish to add my voice in expressing respect for those colleagues whom we have lost: Paul Flynn, who was so welcoming to me, as he had been to everybody here; and Steffan Lewis, the Assembly Member whom we lost at the desperately young age of 34. I greatly appreciate the fact that mention has been made of him. He was a great politician and a great man, whose loss we definitely feel in Wales.

I extend my sincerest thanks to the schoolchildren of Ysgol Gymraeg Llundain and Only Boys Aloud. Those of us who were lucky enough to be there this morning know that they sang absolutely wonderfully at this morning's St David's Day service. Only Boys Aloud's rendition of "Nearer my God to Thee" will remain with me. Mae eich gwlad yn falch iawn ohonoch chi—your country is very proud of you.

This St David's Day, we celebrate our nation, its culture, its people. We all know that Westminster continues to recognise Wales's contribution to the United Kingdom; however, we cannot simply close our eyes to the fact that Westminster's contribution to Wales still leaves us very much wanting.

Cyfiawnder—justice. Some Members of this House may not be entirely familiar with the medieval Welsh ruler Hywel Dda. His name is particularly linked with the codification of traditional Welsh law, which was thenceforth known as the laws of Hywel Dda. The latter part of his name, Dda, or da, translates as "good", and refers to the fact that his laws were perceived as being just that: just and good. In fact, one sees in them compassion rather than punishment, common

sense and recognition of the rights of women. Fast forward to the 16th century. The last recorded case to be heard under Welsh law was in Carmarthenshire in 1540—four years after the 1536 Act of Union, which stipulated that only English law's writ would run in Wales.

Since then, we have seen the coming of age of devolution, and this year is of course the 20th year of the National Assembly for Wales. Wales has had for 20 years its own Senedd: a Parliament and legislature, creating laws in relation to health, education and the economy. However, cyfiawnder—justice—or the lack thereof, continues to be controlled by Westminster. Although my party's ultimate aim is to restore the true meaning of cyfraith dda—good law—handing to Wales the reins over criminal justice in its entirety, the crux of my contribution today will focus on the more immediate shortcomings of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and opportunities for improvement under the current model. Indeed, the Welsh Affairs Committee is currently holding an inquiry on this very subject that is due to finish soon.

The prison estate in Wales is currently controlled, managed and paid for by the Ministry of Justice, while the responsibility for providing healthcare, education, housing and emergency services sits with the Welsh Government—with no extra funding from Westminster, of course. The incoherent interaction between devolved and reserved competencies results in disjointed policy making.

First and foremost, we need improved and accurate statistics to inform proper planning in the provision of Ministry of Justice prison and probation services alongside service provider partners. We need disaggregated statistics specifically for Wales in relation to both Wales-addressed offenders and prisons in Wales, to inform scrutiny at UK and Welsh parliamentary levels. Such scrutiny has been sadly lacking, and it has proven difficult even to get information. We need statistics on reoffending rates; on offender health outcomes; on prison staff recruitment and detainment; on the use of experienced staff from Wales across the wider prison estate, otherwise known as detached duty; and on violence rates, including deaths in custody, self-harm and violence towards staff. It has in the past proven difficult to get such information. All the information should be provided for scrutiny annually to both the Welsh Affairs Committee and the relevant National Assembly for Wales Committee, and the relevant responsible Ministers from both Parliaments should be called to account.

Currently, the prison estate in Wales caters only to male prisoners, and there is only one young offenders institution in Wales. Given the geography of Wales, at the very least two residential centres should be developed for female prisoners. As we know, large-scale super-prisons simply do not work. HMP Berwyn opened in February 2017, and when it is completed and at full capacity, it will hold more than 2,000 inmates. It will be the largest prison in Europe. Not all its inmates are appropriately placed. Sixteen prisoners who were previously categorised as the most dangerous to society were held at HMP Berwyn in 2017. The prison was intended for low-risk offenders to be on a regime designed to reward good behaviour.

We were also told that HMP Berwyn would hold suitable north Wales prisoners, but evidence shows that they are still being sent to distant prisons, remote from the rehabilitation benefits of being close to home, family

and potential employers. The best rehabilitation results are found in prisons located close to the communities from which offenders come and to which they will return for employment, so the Ministry of Justice should not propose another supersize prison anywhere in Wales. It would inevitably require a high percentage of English inmates to be transported considerable distances for the sake of ease and the cost of warehousing, rather than the prioritising of effective rehabilitation.

As well as the prison estate, the probation service requires immediate attention. The proposed Wales probation model still involves significant contracting out, although the proposal to bring it back into public management is to be welcomed. It is to be hoped that that will be a future model for England, too. Only yesterday, I found that in the four years since key parts of the probation system were privatised, there have been 225 charges of murder against offenders monitored by private probation contractors in the four years since their creation. That far outnumbers the 142 murder charges against high-risk criminals managed by the Government probation service over the same period. These shocking statistics show the urgent need to bring probation back into the public sector. As we have experience of in Wales, with Nadine Marshall and the tragic Conner Marshall case of 2015—the offender was managed by Working Links, which has since gone into administration—victims and for that matter offenders, too, are being failed by a system that is putting profit before public safety.

To close, I wish just to say that the word for justice in Welsh, *cyfiawnder*, means to make good, to make right and to make just for all. Let us make *cyfiawnder* Welsh for Wales.

1.36 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): In the interests of other Members who wish to speak I will curtail the first two pages of my speech, but my thoughts are with the families of Paul Flynn and Steffan Lewis, and I wish to say how sad I am at their passing.

Since we last had this debate, I have been privileged to be elected as the deputy leader of the Welsh Labour party, so I am in the privileged position of working not only with Labour colleagues but across party lines on campaigns that are dear to my heart and that I hope make a difference not only to my local community or to Wales but right across the United Kingdom.

My work as deputy leader shines a light on the shortcomings of the Conservative Government, while our Welsh Labour Government show that there is a better way to govern, even in the teeth of continuing Tory austerity. Nowhere is that better illustrated than in the case of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, a project with the capacity not only to reshape the energy mix of an entire region, but to make Swansea a world leader in tidal energy while creating jobs and offering a boon to the local economy. The lagoon received the full support, both practical and financial, of the Welsh Labour Government, and it was backed by Swansea's Labour-led council and championed by many Labour colleagues, including my hon. Friends the Members for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and for Swansea West (Geraint Davies).

In short, it was a project of rare transformative capability, yet the project, steered with such care and passion for so long by the lagoon's backers, was damaged

immeasurably by the clumsy indifference and terrible short-sightedness of those on the Conservative Benches. Promises were repeatedly made and assurances offered, but ultimately all turned to dust. At the eleventh hour, the Government pulled their support for the most spurious of reasons. Why? Because, to put it bluntly, they do not seem to have any respect for Wales. Not one iota. It is this lack of respect and apparent indifference to the damage it causes that can be seen time after time, in decision after decision. Time after time, it serves only to underline the difference of the Welsh Labour Government approach.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Tory English Government's commitment to fracking is in sharp contrast to the Welsh Government's commitment to the tidal lagoon, in the context of climate change and the imperative there? We are leading and they are losing.

Carolyn Harris: The Welsh Labour Government do so many things so much better.

Examples of shocking disregard for Welsh communities are sadly all too many in number. Take investment in rail services. The electrification of the main line between London and Swansea had been a sworn promise for years; indeed, it formed a key plank of the Tory campaign in Wales during the 2017 general election campaign. We were told that reliability would be improved, journey times reduced and emissions cut. My constituents in Swansea East were elated to think they would finally see some improvements to a service on which so many of them relied. As we all know, Tory promises were once again broken, and in the most shameful manner: sneaked out in a press release. My constituents learned of the cancellation of the electrification programme in the same way that I did—through the newspaper. There is no investment for Wales, no interest in Wales, and no respect for Wales. Compare that with the Welsh Labour Government's rail investment. After years of Tory underinvestment, the Welsh Labour Government, through Transport for Wales, are delivering new trains, more services and better stations. Despite some early teething problems, we are at the start of a 15-year, £5 billion investment programme, scrapping Pacer trains, boosting capacity by 65%, offering free travel for the under-11s and providing £200 million to upgrade stations. In Wales, we are working with the trade unions, not against them, to protect the role of the guard on every train. That is the Welsh Labour way, and it is a way that this Government would do well to look at and, may I suggest, to learn from. It has meant that, in Wales, we have 30 hours free childcare and education for working parents being rolled out across the country. That is the best childcare offer for working parents anywhere in the UK.

We have repealed major sections of the pernicious Tory anti-union law to protect the Welsh public sector workforce, while scrapping the right to buy, protecting the housing stock and helping more people access affordable homes. We are now building affordable homes in Wales at a record rate, curbing zero-hour contracts and delivering 100,000 all-age apprenticeships. Children leaving care in Wales will no longer pay council tax until they reach the age of 25. That is the Welsh way. That is the Welsh Labour way, and I am proud to celebrate it here today.

[Carolyn Harris]

Finally, let me close with something that is so very close to my heart—funding for children's funerals in cases where families simply cannot afford to pay for them. Since I first spoke in this Chamber of the passing of my own son, Martin, and the extraordinary difficulties that we faced in paying for his funeral, the Welsh Government responded by scrapping fees for children's funerals, following a lead set by Welsh local authorities. I appreciate that the wheels of bureaucracy turn slowly, but time is a luxury that bereaved parents cannot afford. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that the Children's Funeral Fund would be in place by this summer. Although I had hoped for an earlier implementation, bearing in mind that it was first promised 11 months ago, I welcome the fact that we now have some clarity on timings. I sincerely hope that the summer, which is when the Prime Minister suggested that it would happen, arrives well before the "end of May".

1.42 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Diolch yn fawr, Madam Ddirprwy Lefarydd.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on bringing this debate forward today. May I also echo what others have said about our colleagues Paul Flynn and Steffan Lewis? I know that Paul was a radical, reforming and brilliant politician who fought very hard for his causes and was a great advocate for devolution.

As I prepared for this debate today, I wondered about its purpose. Is a general debate about Wales on any given subject just a token gesture to our country as we approach our national bank holiday? MPs, one by one, will stand to raise concerns or issues on anything relating to our country, but there will be no obligation for anyone to respond to or to act on anything raised.

As a devolutionist I am happy that the majority of our work is carried out by the Welsh Parliament in Cardiff Bay, with our Welsh Labour Government able to bring forward radical and progressive policies and legislation. None the less, I am constantly frustrated by those in this place who misunderstand devolution. They are supported, on the whole, by a London-centric media, which talks as though England is the whole of the UK—whether that is on education policy, the NHS, housing or social services, all of which are devolved.

There should be a place for Welsh MPs to raise issues, to scrutinise and, importantly, to get a response and some action. One of the frustrating things in this place is that, as a Welsh MP, it is very difficult to raise issues. With just 30 minutes of Welsh questions every five or six weeks, just before Prime Ministers questions, there really is not much parliamentary time available to us, particularly at this time of great constitutional and political upheaval. With Brexit approaching in just a matter of days, we know the impact that either the Prime Minister's deal or no deal will have on our country, and we know that it will hit us in Wales the hardest. By the time that we have the Prime Minister's endlessly postponed meaningful vote on 12 March, we will have fewer than 400 hours until the article 50 deadline, at which time we will crash out of the European Union into the unknown unless something is done.

No one can argue that that is in the country's interest. Businesses, which have, for years, invested in Wales, are now upping and leaving, fed up with the uncertainty and chaos. We know that Ford, Airbus, Sony, Panasonic and Honda will not be the last. As more companies announce the impact that Brexit is having on their businesses, they are taking their jobs, their development and their trade elsewhere.

Stephen Crabb: I am listening with interest to the hon. Lady's remarks. She is talking about companies upping sticks and leaving Wales. She just read out a list of companies, which included Airbus. Has she any evidence at all to suggest that Airbus is reducing any of its operations in Wales?

Anna McMorris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. I am talking about the warnings that are being given. Airbus is issuing stark warnings, and some companies are upping and leaving. Many will up and leave unless something is done.

Stephen Doughty: The right hon. Gentleman does not appear to have heard the warnings from organisations and businesses across the spectrum. The other day, I was speaking with people from Cardiff University who cited Brexit as one factor in their decision to issue redundancies. That is happening in our crucial and brilliant university in our city.

Anna McMorris: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent point.

This pattern does not seem to bother our UK Government, intent as they are on delivering a Brexit whatever the cost. That cost will be great, but it will be the greatest in Wales as we are dependent on those and other such jobs. We have been at the mercy of a Tory Government's austerity measures for the past nine years. I see the struggle in our public services and in our communities. Our people who were left bereft following the ruthless Thatcher years are once again feeling the brunt, and Brexit is only set to make things worse. Why do we in Wales have to put up with this again?

Wales is an outward-facing international country with our own values, our own language, and our own culture and history. We do not want this right-wing Brexit ideology, which only harms our communities, our people and our services. We know that Brexit—any Brexit—only aids the right. It is a project driven by the right and for the right. As a progressive forward-looking Wales we know that the best deal for us, for our hard-working families, for our public services and for our businesses is the one that we have now as full members of the European Union.

David T. C. Davies: Does the hon. Lady not recognise that that is not the vision that Wales has? Wales voted to leave by a much greater margin than it voted for the Welsh Assembly.

Anna McMorris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. Has he not seen the recent polls that say that the majority of Welsh people have changed their minds? In any case, this is not what they voted for. That is why we should put the question back to the people for final ratification and confirmation and for a final say.

The Secretary of State for Wales has done perilously little to stand up for our country. When I asked him in the Welsh Affairs Committee to name an infrastructure project in Wales that he has helped to secure during his time as Secretary of State, he could not name one. It was no to rail electrification, no to the tidal lagoon, no to Wylfa Newydd, and no to onshore and offshore renewable energy projects. What is this Secretary of State for? What is his purpose, as he certainly does not stand up for Wales?

I want to see more investment in our country, greater powers being devolved to Wales and reform of our institutions.

I fought for the Senedd back in 1997, and then again for greater powers in 2011 and 2017. I will continue to fight for more powers and for our country to be better able to govern without being hampered by this Tory Government. In fact, I would like to see Wales's powers equal to those of Scotland at the very least. But what matters is how we use those powers. We regularly need to go cap in hand to this Tory Government in order to effect change; that cannot be right. It cannot be right that our country needs permission to build Wylfa Newydd or a tidal lagoon. We need a settlement to enable us to do that—in Wales and by the people of Wales.

It cannot be right that we are unable to tackle the serious problem of mental health in prisons, as the broken devolution settlement means that this is impossible. Justice is not devolved, while mental health is. This must be put right. Criminal justice should be devolved to enable us properly to resolve these issues and create a solution that suits us as a country. It is also certainly not right that air passenger duty is not devolved when it is devolved to both Scotland and Northern Ireland. These anomalies must be put right.

Although this place is in need of much reform, I agree that the Senedd needs some too. I welcome the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill brought forward earlier this month, which sets out the exciting opportunities to strengthen our Welsh Assembly, bringing about reform and democracy, lowering the voting age to 16 and introducing more Assembly Members.

Reform and change take time. In Wales, we are proud that we can grasp this change. I only wish that this place would take some lessons from that. We must look towards the sort of Parliament we want in Wales, and I hope that we wholeheartedly embrace it, creating a positive future for our children. As the historian Gwyn Alf Williams said:

“Wales is a process. Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce. The Welsh make and remake Wales day by day, year by year, generation by generation, if they want to”.

1.51 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna Morrin), and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on securing today's debate. As she is an avid Welsh rugby fan and former Wales international, I know that she will have enjoyed the match on Saturday. It was a stunning win and a great way to kick-start the St David's Day celebrations. Eddie Jones led his England side down the M4 and got stuck in traffic along the way before coming completely unstuck against a Welsh side

determined to stop his chariot. We were given little chance of winning that match but, as the Welsh always do, we rose to the challenge and triumphed in the face of adversity.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I congratulate Wales on their victory at the weekend. It was mightily impressive and a real demonstration of power. Does my hon. Friend agree that the renewables sector provides a huge opportunity for Wales to refound itself through offshore wind and onshore through hydroelectric?

Stephen Kinnock: I agree with my hon. Friend. Wales was of course the cradle of the industrial revolution and it should be the cradle of a green revolution. Unfortunately, we are dealing with the most incompetent and short-sighted Government in living memory, who refuse to go forward with the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. I think that sends a clear signal about what really makes them tick.

Today's St David's Day debate is marked with sadness following the loss of our good friend and colleague Paul Flynn, the former Member for Newport West. He had a razor-sharp intellect and a rapier-like wit. He was an outstanding parliamentarian who was passionately committed to social justice and opportunity for all—a lovely man, who always had a helpful word of advice for us new kids on the block. He will be sorely missed.

Just as I had complete confidence in the 23 men in red on Saturday, I have confidence in my fellow countrymen and women to rise to the challenge of Brexit, but the challenge is truly daunting. We are two and a half years on from the referendum and fast approaching 29 March. We are also two years on from a general election when the Conservative manifesto promised to set up a new UK shared prosperity fund to replace EU funds after 2020. But with just 29 days to go until we leave the EU, we know little more about the UK shared prosperity fund than we did in June 2017.

Like much of Wales, my Aberavon constituency has benefited hugely from European money—from the Bay Campus at Jersey Marine to the sunken gardens and toddler play area on Aberavon beach; from the Croeserw community enterprise centre to the Cognation mountain bike trails in the Afan valley; and from the transport hub to the Port Talbot magistrates court. These projects would not have been possible without European funding.

Between 2014 and 2020, west Wales and the valleys were set to receive from European structural funds investment worth more than £1.6 billion, yet nearly everything about the shared prosperity fund is still to be worked out. We still do not know how much funding will be available, how it will be divided across the country, what activities will be eligible for support or who will take the decisions on how the money is spent. There is a huge fear that this will be not just a financial grab, but a power grab, and that the Westminster Government will use this opportunity to reduce funding for areas that need it most and to claw back powers that sit naturally with the devolved Administrations.

These deep-seated concerns led to the creation of the all-party parliamentary group for post-Brexit funding for nations, regions and local areas, which I am truly proud to chair. The wide-ranging review that we carried out heard from 80 organisations across the UK, including the Welsh Government, councils in Wales and the

[Stephen Kinnock]

Welsh TUC. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Wales back in November, seeking a meeting about the findings of our APPG, but have yet to receive a response. Those representations were unanimous in saying that the UK shared prosperity fund must comprise not a single penny less in real terms than the EU and UK funding streams it replaces. Westminster must not use Brexit as an opportunity to short-change the poorest parts of the UK. Equally, the UK Government must not deny devolved Administrations the appropriate control over funds. Local decisions must not be made by a bureaucrat or by a Tory Government sitting at the other end of the M4. The Government's inaction cannot continue; they must provide guarantees on the shared prosperity fund.

Of course, one group of people who know very well about this Government's inaction are the steelworkers in Port Talbot, Llanwern, Trostre and right across Wales. They have gone above and beyond to save our steel industry, but their actions have not been matched by the Westminster Government. When unscrupulous pension advisers took the opportunity during the pension transfer to swoop in like vultures and rip off steelworkers, the Government did nothing. Now there is a very serious risk that thousands have been conned into transferring out of the scheme, almost always against their best interests. It is imperative that steelworkers are notified of this, so that it can be remedied before the opportunity is missed, but the Government's inability to support steelworkers does not stop there. At the height of the steel crisis, the UK Government consistently showered steelworkers with warm words, but since then they have failed to create a sector deal for steel, and last year less than half of the steel bought by the Government came from the UK, despite British steel being the best in the world; that is simply not good enough.

Disabled people in my constituency have also been badly let down. The personal independence payment is there to support individuals with the extra costs of living associated with a disability, but the system in place now is working against disabled people, instead of for them. Three quarters of people in Wales who challenged the decision of the Department for Work and Pensions to stop or reduce their PIP were successful in having that decision overturned, which just shows how fundamentally broken the system is. In Wales, one in 10 people waited more than a year to win back money that they were initially denied—a dreadful failure.

I am a proud Welshman. I was born in Tredegar in 1970. My grandfather on my father's side was a coalminer in the Welsh valleys, while my grandmother was a district nurse—the backbone of the NHS. My grandfather on my mother's side was a railway signaller in Anglesey, supported by a grandmother who was truly the rock of the family. Their never-say-die attitude and commitment to working hard for their communities has been passed down the generations and it is with that spirit that I will continue fighting hard for my Aberavon constituents in Westminster.

We are a proud, unique community in Aberavon. Even Banksy picked us out last year as a worthy home for one of his wonderful creations. But, like every area, we need a UK Government and a Welsh Secretary who will stand up for Wales; and that means, more than anything, that we desperately need a UK Labour Government. Happy St David's Day to all.

1.59 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on introducing this debate. May I say how great it has been to acknowledge the contribution of our friend, Paul Flynn? Every week when I go through Newport train station, I remember his dry wit and his friendship. We will miss him greatly.

A year and a half ago, steelworkers from across south Wales were hit by a pensions storm. They had a hard deadline to decide on their futures against a backdrop of serious uncertainty for their industry. Then they were aggressively targeted by financial advisers, and about 8,000 of them ended up transferring out of their pension scheme altogether. While the full scale of the problem is not entirely clear, it looks set to be as bad as many feared. We know that 872 of the steelworkers were advised by firms who were prevented from advising by the Financial Conduct Authority. Now there are real concerns that the final number might be even greater. Since then, the FCA has reviewed the files of 2% of the steelworkers who transferred out. It found that 58% of this advice was not suitable. That could mean that thousands of steelworkers were affected.

This is a very serious situation, and it requires a strong and co-ordinated response with much more granular analysis of what occurred. That response should focus on four specific areas. First, steelworkers who transferred out need to make sure that the advice given was appropriate. There are advisers and solicitors who are supporting steelworkers, working on an independent initiative to help them. I encourage steelworkers who transferred out to get in touch when that has been set up. Secondly, if the number of people affected is as high as we all fear, there needs to be pressure to make sure that the industry insurers fully honour their obligations.

Thirdly, arrangements for compensation need to be looked at. The financial services compensation scheme has reviewed earlier claims and increased the compensation in some cases, and that is positive. However, we also need to look at the rate that is used to calculate this compensation, because that has a big impact on steelworkers and their families. It needs to be as generous as possible so that the steelworkers are not disadvantaged when making claims. Finally, rogue advisers who prey on steelworkers have to face serious consequences. This should include permanent restrictions, financial penalties, and, when necessary, referral to the police for criminal investigation.

The crisis that saw many steelworkers see their hard-earned money put at risk should not have happened. On this St David's Day, we need to work together and sort things out for them.

2.2 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate. Along with my hon. Friends, I pay tribute to Paul Flynn, my former hon. Friend the Member for Newport West, who would sit on this Back Bench close to us and make contributions every week tackling the Government and promoting Labour values.

I did not know Steffan Lewis personally, but I know that, taken at a young age, his family will be devastated. I also offer my condolences to the team in the Assembly and to Plaid Cymru as a political party.

I want to make just four points in this debate. The first point is about Brexit. Whatever we end up doing on Brexit, the Secretary of State for Wales has an absolute duty to make sure that a no-deal Brexit is ruled out. He will have before him the evidence from Airbus near my constituency, which employs 14,000 workers across the United Kingdom, thousands of them in north Wales. Katherine Bennett and Tom Enders, two senior Airbus officials, have warned about the consequences of no deal. The Secretary of State will know that Tony Walker of Toyota, which employs hundreds of people in north Wales, and in Derbyshire, has said that a no-deal Brexit will cost Toyota £10 million a day. The Secretary of State will know from talking to farmers across Wales that a no-deal Brexit will mean that we cannot take Welsh lamb to the table of Europe while no deal remains on the table in the United Kingdom. He will know that firms such as Vauxhall, and myriad firms in my constituency, small and large, are facing uncertainty because no deal remains on the table. The one thing he can do in responding to this debate is to rule out no deal, whatever we settle on with regard to Brexit.

The second issue I want to focus on is getting some assurances from the Secretary of State about the north Wales growth deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) set out very clearly what is required. We have a potential growth deal of £335 million. We have had an announcement from the Government of about £240 million, with match funding from the Welsh Government and from local sources and the private sector. We need to ensure that the Government consider what they promised they would do in Budgets four and five years ago and deliver on the north Wales growth deal. As the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) said, this is a great opportunity for investment to modernise the infrastructure of north-east Wales and north Wales as a whole, and the Government should take it.

My third point relates to council tax. My local authority has made it very clear that the difficulties it faces with teachers' pensions, in particular, are putting it under tremendous strain. That is why this year we have had a council tax increase that is well above average. I know the pressures that my local colleagues are facing. The Secretary of State has devolved teachers' pensions to the National Assembly for Wales and to the Welsh Government, but no money has gone with that. He needs to explain to this House today the financial settlement in relation to that, and to make sure that it is secured, not just for the past year but in future years.

My final point—my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) touched on it—is about scrutiny of the Welsh Office and scrutiny of the Conservative Government's performance in Wales. There is now even more limited opportunity for that than there was previously. Let me take, for example, the Welsh Grand Committee. When we had a Labour Government from 1997 to 2010, the Welsh Grand Committee met 39 times to debate Welsh matters. In the nine years of this Conservative Government, it has met nine times. Six of those occasions were in the first two years of the Conservative coalition, from 2010 to 2012. There have been only three in the past three years, and there were a whole three years when the Welsh Grand Committee never met at all. The Welsh Grand Committee gives us an important opportunity to raise issues such as these. Does the Secretary of State wish to continue with it, and, if so, when will it meet in future?

It is about time that we reviewed the issue of cross-party discussions on English votes for English laws. In the Brexit debates, when I have had to discuss issues in my constituency relating to teachers, health workers and people working in businesses in England, I cannot vote on those issues for my constituents on the border who are impacted by them. That is not sustainable for the future. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North also mentioned, a 30-minute—

Mr David Jones: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point about cross-border issues where Welsh MPs may wish to have input into matters that are discussed here, but does not this cut both ways? For example, as he will know, my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) has frequently raised issues relating to hospitals in south Wales. Do we not need a new settlement to accommodate these things?

David Hanson: I would be very happy to discuss those issues with the right hon. Gentleman when there is more time. I simply say that my constituents are served more poorly by the fact that I can no longer vote in this House on some of the issues that affect them.

With unemployment rising in my constituency by 30% in the past two years, the need for a growth deal is clearly there. If we have a no-deal Brexit, that unemployment figure will be worse. I hope that the Secretary of State can answer these points today.

2.8 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate. As I stand to speak, I am sure I can see out of the corner of my eye the figure of Paul Flynn in his usual seat casting a critical but fair ear over everything I say. Paul called for St David's Day to be a national holiday and for the Welsh language to be recognised in this place. His work on cannabis reform has been inspirational to many people. It was my pleasure and my privilege to serve on the same Select Committee as Paul. I think of him as a friend and a mentor, and he will be sadly missed.

As a child growing up in Greenock in the '60s and '70s, my knowledge of Wales was limited—limited, that is, to the most important thing: rugby union, and that red shirt, those songs and, as a young scrum-half learning my trade, the greatest scrum-half in the world ever, Gareth Edwards. I hated them all. They were so good. It was hard to take. Imagine my joy when, as an unsophisticated 16-year-old, if that is easy to imagine, my school team at Greenock Academy travelled to Wales to play St Cyres college in Dinas Powys. It was my moment to avenge all those defeats at Murrayfield and Cardiff Arms Park. We got hammered, or, to be more accurate, humiliated. They took us to the pub the night before; those Welsh boys were canny. We had to wait a year to reverse the result, but we did, and I look forward to the international rivalry being renewed at Murrayfield a week on Saturday. Unfortunately, at this juncture, I have been unable to acquire a ticket. I will leave that out there.

Jonathan Edwards: On the basis of Celtic solidarity, will the hon. Gentleman consider asking the Scottish coach to give the second squad a run-out a week Saturday?

Ronnie Cowan: If the Welsh put out their second team, that might help us, to put it mildly.

Often we romanticise Scotland—dashing Jacobites, the flamboyant house of Stuart and a twee caricature of what we truly are. I would hate to fall into that trap when talking about Wales. It has a vibrant linguistic, literary and musical past, present and, most importantly, future. In Scotland, we like to think of ourselves as great contributors to the world, and so are the Welsh. Those contributors include Edward George Bowen, pioneer of radar; Martha Hughes Cannon, pioneer in women and children's medicine; John Dee, founder of the new school of English mathematics and one of the greatest polymaths of all time; Bill Frost, the Welsh carpenter who patented the aeroplane in 1894 and took to the skies in a powered flying machine the following year, eight years before the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk; William Jones, the noted mathematician and the first to use pi as a mathematical symbol; Brian Josephson, Nobel prize-winning physicist; Francis Lewis, signatory of the US declaration of independence; William Henry Preece, an electrical engineer who was a major figure in the development and introduction of wireless telegraphy; Bertrand Russell, philosopher, mathematician and Nobel prize winner; Alfred Russel Wallace, who conferred with Darwin on the evolution of species; and Shirley Bassey, Tom Jones, Richard Burton and "Ivor the Engine"—the list goes on and on. And I thought all they did was play rugby!

Scotland and Wales are nations with a strong tradition of agriculture and forestry, which plays a vital role in our economies. The last two years have seen the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly work together in a spirit of constructive collaboration as we seek to protect our nations from the threat of Brexit. Protecting Wales from the impact of a Tory Brexit will be vital to the Welsh economy. Figures released on Tuesday show that a no-deal Brexit could cause the Welsh economy to shrink by up to 8%. Between 2014 and 2020, Wales is due to receive €5 billion in EU-related funding. Some guarantees are in place for the period after Brexit and beyond 2020, but uncertainty remains over the future shape of regional development and agriculture funding. The UK Government should ensure that all voices are heard from across the UK as they proceed with Brexit negotiations. I add a word of warning from Dylan Thomas: do not go gentle into that good night.

To close, I will say this to the people of Wales: when Scotland claims its place at the top table as an equal independent country among equal independent countries, we shall keep a seat beside us for you, and if it is your will, I hope that you will join us.

2.13 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): We have had a superb debate on St David's Day, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing it. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) that we should not have to go cap in hand to the Backbench Business Committee every year; the Government should make time for this debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower for her tremendous tribute to Paul Flynn and all other Members for their tributes. I first met Paul in 1980.

He was an inspiration to me then and continued to be throughout my life. We will all miss him, and our condolences go to Sam and all Paul's family and friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower said she was a proud Welsh MP; I am, too. She also is a fantastic rugby player.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Used to be!

Christina Rees: No, she still is. I am quite a weak squash player. I have played for Wales more than 100 times, but one good tackle would see me off. My hon. Friend highlighted the beauty of Wales. She also said that the Secretary of State for Wales is not standing up for Wales, which has been a theme of contributions from Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) paid a good tribute to Paul Flynn and said that he first met him when he was a sixth-former. That conjures up an image in my mind—was he a prefect?

David T. C. Davies *indicated dissent.*

Christina Rees: The hon. Gentleman said that he challenged Paul Flynn on some questions—no change there then, Top Cat. He listed all the good work that the Welsh Affairs Committee, which he chairs, has done for Wales through its reviews and recommendations. I was briefly on the Committee when I came into the House, and I must say that the hon. Gentleman is an excellent Chair who works cross-party. He does some cross-party training in the gym with me in the mornings, and he is quite ferocious there as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn has vast experience in this place. He talked about how important energy is to Wales and how it must be accompanied by infrastructure. He mentioned the unfortunate fact that Wylfa Newydd has been pulled on Ynys Môn. Yet again, the UK Government are not standing up for Wales, and they must replace the money that they promised in the north Wales growth bid.

The right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) highlighted the good cross-party work of the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee north Wales, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas). In the right hon. Gentleman's opinion, the key to the future is digital infrastructure and 5G.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) highlighted that Wales is en route for a grand slam, and I agree with him. The boys played really well last Saturday, and long may that continue. He mentioned that Only Boys Aloud, who are wonderful singers, have been here today. He paid tribute to Steffan Lewis, who sadly lost his life recently. I did not know Steffan, but I understand from all the tributes to him that he was an exceptional young man. My hon. Friend also paid tribute to Carwyn Jones, who has stepped down as leader of Welsh Labour after nine years, leaving a strong legacy. Mark Drakeford has our support in his role as First Minister. Finally, my hon. Friend highlighted the fact that Transport for Wales has put so much investment into rail infrastructure in Wales, but the Department for Transport has not. I agree.

I never thought I would hear myself say this, but I agree with many of the things said by the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). He highlighted the fact that we are a nation of sport

and the power of sport to unite and inspire people. He listed Welsh sporting heroes, but he did not mention Tesni Evans, who is the greatest squash player that we have produced. She retained her Welsh and British titles this year and won a bronze medal at the Commonwealth games in 2018. She is one for the future. I must agree, however, that if the boundary review goes through, we will lose the Welsh voice in this Chamber, and I sincerely hope that that does not happen.

The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) spoke about justice and the prison and probation services, especially for women. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), the deputy leader of Welsh Labour, is a great campaigner, and she listed the achievements of her campaigns. We really value all that she does for Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) said that she was a proud devolutionist, as I think we in the Opposition are.

I am running out of time, so I will bring my remarks to a close. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), whose seat is adjacent to my seat of Neath, is a champion for the steelworkers, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), in regard to pensions and how they have been ripped off. My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) speaks so clearly all the time, and I really value his advice to me personally. I must end by saying that Gareth Edwards, who was mentioned, comes from Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen in the Neath constituency.

2.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for securing this debate, and for the support of the Backbench Business Committee in making time available for it. It has been a wide-ranging debate, as was pointed out by the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees). Unfortunately, I will not have time in the time permitted to respond to each and every point made, but if I do not have the opportunity to respond to them, I will happily continue to engage positively with colleagues in all parts of the House on the issues they have raised.

Among some disagreements, there has without doubt been unity and lots of agreement on a number of issues, but I want to underline the comments by every Member of this House about our friend and former colleague Paul Flynn, the past Member for Newport West. I had the privilege of knowing him before I was elected to this House, and I remember that he was particularly supportive of me at a difficult time. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) pointed out his exceptional constituency work, and I can speak about that from experience because my parents-in-law live in his constituency. As I mentioned yesterday, I think there is a significant gap on the Labour Benches, and Paul will be missed. We pay tribute to him, and we pay our respects to his family.

I would also underline the comments that have been made about Steffan Lewis, the former Plaid Cymru Assembly Member. Without doubt, he was an exceptionally bright talent. He had a significant influence in his short political career, and I think Wales will miss him and the influence he brought to bear during that time.

The rugby also brought significant agreement across the House. As my right hon. Friends the Members for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) pointed out, it is a great time to be Welsh, particularly in relation to the rugby that took place at the weekend.

Listening to this wide-ranging debate, it is hard to believe that in 2010 Wales had a formula that underfunded its needs, a legislative consent order model that meant we did not have a full law-making Assembly and a rail franchise that was not fit for purpose—we did not have a single mile of electrified rail track—while unemployment was rising, economic inactivity rates were stubbornly high and manufacturing jobs had gone into quite a sharp decline.

Now, however, I would point out that Wales has a fair funding settlement—there has been enhancement on the funding settlement—and we now have a full law-making Assembly that is to become a Senedd. Major upgrades of the railways are taking place, with investment both in south Wales and in north Wales, and a will and a commitment to open new stations. Unemployment is at record low levels, and economic inactivity rates that have been stubbornly high for decades are now better than England's. A remarkable transformation has taken place in the Welsh economy, and the manufacturing sector is growing faster than in any other part of the UK. Without doubt, one of my proudest moments has been the abolition of the Severn tolls, so people do not have to pay to come into Wales any more, which provides a great opportunity to bind together the United Kingdom.

Albert Owen: The figures for unemployment and employment levels that the Secretary of State reads out are a credit to the Welsh Government, but they are small comfort to people facing job cuts right now, and I think his tone should reflect that. On the devolving of powers, will he answer the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson)? Teachers up and down the country, like local authorities, are asking: has the money allocated through the teachers formula gone to Wales and is it going to those local authorities?

Alun Cairns: My tone is certainly not vitriolic in any way. I am seeking to contrast the situation in 2010 and the good place Wales is now in because of the joint work with the Welsh Government. I will come on to that as the second theme I am seeking to develop. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the constructive way in which he works in relation to the challenges and issues that his constituency faces. On the specific point he makes about teachers' pensions and so on, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote to the Welsh Government on 11 February to clarify that additional resource is being made available. How the Welsh Government distribute that is a matter for them, but I hope that answers many of the questions that have been asked.

Whether it is "Lonely Planet" highlighting north Wales as one of the best places to visit, "The Rough Guide" pointing to Wales as one of the most beautiful countries or the Eurobarometer poll pointing out that Cardiff is one of the best cities to live in across Europe, Wales is in a strong position. Wales is a beautiful location, and it has a lot to offer to the United Kingdom and to the rest of Europe and beyond. In the spirit of

[Alun Cairns]

my right hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd West and for Preseli Pembrokeshire, I want to celebrate what Wales has to offer. We should bear in mind that we are talking to international investors. Such people will be watching and reading this debate, and I am proud of what we have achieved and of the potential and the opportunity in front of us.

Jonathan Edwards: The Secretary of State has mentioned international investors, who will of course be watching the upcoming sequence of votes we are about to have on Brexit. He knows that the British Government's view will be defeated on 12 March. What will he do on the 13th? Are the press rumours that he will vote for no deal on the 13th correct, because that would be disastrous for the Welsh economy?

Alun Cairns: I am disappointed by the approach the hon. Gentleman is taking. On the one hand, he, like many other Members in the House, will point to individual companies that are fearful of a no-deal Brexit, or farming unions and other organisations that have said they are fearful of or do not want to face a no-deal Brexit. On the other hand, however, such Members are not prepared to take the advice of those companies or farming unions that are urging them to support the Prime Minister's deal. On that basis, they are being highly selective. The best way to secure a smooth exit from the European Union and to act on the instruction of the referendum is to support the Prime Minister's deal. When that debate comes, I hope that Members will look at themselves and think long and hard about the risks they are taking with the Welsh economy and the UK economy if they vote against the Prime Minister's deal, which offers us a smooth exit from the European Union and access to the European market, while confirming our position as an independent trading nation.

I wish to highlight my positive relationship with the Welsh Government, our negotiations on Brexit, and the legislative consent motion that we secured for the withdrawal Bill. The Welsh Government sit on the Cabinet sub-committee that considers preparations for Brexit, which is positive, and I hope that they will extend similar respect and opportunity for UK Government representatives to sit on their committees, because of the importance of leaving the EU in a conjoined way.

I point to the UK industrial strategy and the city deals. It was a privilege to launch the Cardiff capital region city deal plan this morning, and we are working closely with the Welsh Government on the Swansea city deal. North Wales has been mentioned on several occasions, and I am open to considering additional or different projects as a result of recent economic announcements about pausing work on the nuclear power station on Anglesey, rather than scrapping or suspending it as has been suggested. There is also the mid-Wales growth deal.

Finally, for a demonstration of joint working with the Welsh Government and local authorities across Wales, in a couple of weeks, together with local authority representatives, I will launch the first ever catalogue of Welsh projects at the MIPIM conference, to attract international investment because of the new opportunities that Brexit will bring.

2.31 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi: I, too, send my condolences to the family and friends of Steffan Lewis.

I thank all Members of the House for their contributions, but more than anything I make a plea to the Secretary of State for Wales to stop putting sticking plasters on the job. It is not good enough. Children are growing up in Wales, where Brexit is a major threat to their opportunities. While the Government will not take no deal off the table, that danger remains—those are the problems we face. The Secretary of State should stand up for Wales, and get into Downing Street and sort it out. We have all had enough. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is the end. Good night.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I hope not quite—that would be slightly alarming.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the House has considered Welsh Affairs.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to seek your advice because I saw today in the news that two British fishing boats registered in Northern Ireland, and their crews, have been seized by the Irish Government, escorted to an Irish port, and arrested without a huge amount of justification. I would have assumed that the Government would want to come to the House to make a statement, and I wished to ask whether you are aware that the Government have called for such a statement. If that is not the case, if there is the demand or desire for an urgent question, what is the earliest that one can be requested from the Speaker?

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

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I will first reply to that point of order. It may be that my answer is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

I thank the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) for his point of order and for notice of it. I have received no indication that the Government intend to make a statement this afternoon. The earliest opportunity to ask the Speaker to grant an urgent question would be on Monday because the House is not sitting tomorrow. I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the right hon. Gentleman's deep concern about this matter, and that they will feed it back to the relevant Department for the Secretary of State to consider whether a statement would be appropriate.

Jim Shannon: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank you for your response, but I, too, am appalled by the actions of the Government of the Republic of Ireland, who have seized boats that belong to this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Those fishing boats are clearly British fishing boats, and they were illegally seized in waters that are disputed—waters that belong to this great British nation. We have the voisinage agreement. The Irish Government were supposed to hand over control of those waters, and I understand that a legal document has been drawn up about that.

I understand that it is probably too late in the day for a statement from the Minister, but I have spoken to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), and I have lodged a request for an urgent question with Mr Speaker's Office for the purposes of questioning the Minister on Monday if he cannot attend today.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that further point of order, and the most I can say at this stage is that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard his concerns and will feed them back to the Department.

Net Zero Carbon Emissions: UK's Progress

2.35 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK's progress toward net zero carbon emissions.

I am incredibly grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this debate, and I thank my co-sponsor, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), as well as the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) and all those who contributed to our application for this debate. Those included MPs from every political party across the House, and I hope that will be the spirit in which we debate these issues today.

I mainly, however, want to thank young people, and particularly the 2,000 young people in Oxford who decided that this issue was so urgent that they would take time off school to protest in Bonn Square in the centre of Oxford, and try to force us into action. If it were not for that protest I would not have applied for this debate. This is an opportunity for their voices to be heard in this place, and about time too.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making an incredibly important point, and I completely support the actions of those young people. Many young people did the same across Wales, and it was disappointing to see the attitude of some Ministers who dismissed their actions—*[Interruption.]* I accept that that did not include the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, but other Ministers dismissed the behaviour of those young people as being in some way irresponsible. No, it was responsible behaviour, because they care about our future.

Layla Moran: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. As a former teacher, I am here because I want to prevent young people from having to do that again. We are coming up to exams, and it would be better if they stayed in school, but it is incumbent on us to ensure that action is taken.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I agree enthusiastically with the hon. Lady about the energy and enthusiasm that we saw from young people on that Friday? I have grandchildren in Cambridge who demonstrated, as did schools in my constituency, and their energy and enthusiasm was remarkable. That is what we need to save this fragile planet.

Layla Moran: I could not agree more. Climate change, as those young people were saying, is the biggest issue facing our planet, and in 2018 extreme weather hit every populated continent, killing, injuring and displacing millions, and causing major economic damage.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Does it not show how dysfunctional our politics have become that this is the first debate on climate change for two years? We are dysfunctional in the face

[Jonathan Edwards]

of the biggest political challenge of our times. We are obsessed with Brexit, but we should be spending our time discussing this issue.

Layla Moran: Indeed, and September 2016 was the last time that we debated climate change in the Chamber, which is shameful.

The year 2018 was the fourth hottest year on record with average global temperatures nearly 1°C above the pre-industrial average. Yesterday in West Yorkshire there were enormous fires on Saddleworth Moor. The weather was lovely, was it not? But do we remember a year ago and the “beast from the east”? Such extreme weather events are not to be welcomed. They are not good things. They are a sign that something has gone horrifically wrong.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. Does she agree that there is no time left for delay, and that the Government need urgently to show that they are serious about tackling climate change, and enshrine in law net zero carbon emissions by 2050? That is a clear strategy that we can all get behind.

Layla Moran: The hon. Lady hits the nail on the head. We need to move faster and deeper. This is a climate emergency, and this place must stop taking as little interest in it as it has been doing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Layla Moran: I will make a little progress, if I may. Today's debate could not be more urgent. Leading climate scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have warned that unless we take urgent action we have just 12 years before global warming rises above the maximum limit of 1.5°. After that, the risk of droughts, floods and extreme heat increases significantly. Just last week, the independent Committee on Climate Change warned that the UK would struggle to meet its own—not-ambitious-enough, frankly—binding targets on climate change unless the Government act to greatly reduce emissions from buildings, while the UK's most polluting sector, transport, saw no reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in 2017.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): We discussed these issues in the Welsh debate just now and their effect on Wales—I do not think the hon. Lady was here. The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee, of which I am a member, took evidence on energy efficiency and was told that the resources invested by the Scottish Government were four times higher than those invested by the UK Government and that investment was twice as high in Wales and one and a half times as high in Northern Ireland. This Parliament and this Government have taken their eye off the ball.

Layla Moran: The hon. Gentleman is right. Report after report and evidence after evidence show that the UK is not doing enough to drive down emissions.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am delighted that my hon. Friend has secured this debate. She has made the point that emissions have not fallen. In fact,

most recently, they have increased. Does she agree that the target of ending carbon vehicles by 2040 is not ambitious enough?

Layla Moran: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The theme of my speech today is that we are not doing enough.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Does she, like me, welcome the initiative of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who has got momentum behind the idea of real investment in climate infrastructure through a green new deal? Does she agree that we urgently need that kind of approach in this country?

Layla Moran: Who doesn't like AOC? She's fantastic. The green new deal was something we started when my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, but that has now been removed from the Cabinet. That is an example of how the Government do not take this seriously enough—there is now not a Cabinet member whose sole purpose is to talk about climate change. It is not good enough. So my first question to the Minister is: are we planning to have a net zero emissions target for the UK, and if so when? I understand that the current target is 80% by 2050, which is not good enough.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady regret that in government the Liberal Democrats oversaw the scrapping of the Department of Energy and Climate Change—

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): No, we didn't.

Mary Creagh: I thought they did, but perhaps I am wrong. It was a machinery of government change. I am happy to be corrected if that is not the case. [Interruption.] It was subsumed into the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. But we also saw the end of the green new deal and of the energy efficiency standards in homes, which means we have a carbon lag that will be more difficult—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. First, there is too much noise. Secondly, I appreciate that the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) is being generous in taking interventions, but she is being generous with the time later in the debate when many people want to speak, and those who are intervening now might not be those sitting here for the whole debate. I encourage her to make some progress.

Layla Moran: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) should have waited for the speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton, because none of those things is true. Perhaps he will correct the record later.

Sir Edward Davey: I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. The intervention she just took was wrong on every count. It was the Conservatives who got rid of the Department for Energy and Climate Change,

the zero carbon homes allowance; and the green deal, the carbon capture and storage experiments—I could go on—whereas the Liberal Democrats have a proud record. Under us and our policies, carbon emissions fell dramatically.

Layla Moran: So where do we go from here? The COP24 summit in Katowice, where countries settled most elements of the rulebook for implementing the 2015 Paris agreement, did not go far enough. I have been contacted by non-governmental organisations, the Climate Coalition, Green Alliance and the UK Sustainable Investment and Finance Association, and they are all disappointed by the lack of forceful language and ambitious pledges to come out of COP24. Not enough was agreed.

I am delighted to hear, however, that we are bidding for the next round. What are we doing about it and what progress has been made? It is a good thing, but what is going on? We must make sure it happens. What can we do to lead from the front? The lack of action by Parliaments and Governments has prompted young people from across the world to strike. We all know of 16-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, whose solo protest outside the Swedish Parliament started this movement. The idea has spread rapidly. Across the world, 70,000 school children each week in 270 towns have wholeheartedly supported what we are trying to do here, but they ask us to go much further.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Layla Moran: I will take one final intervention, and then I will plough on.

Luke Graham: I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Does she welcome the fact that, as the PricewaterhouseCoopers report states, the UK has decarbonised faster than any other G20 country and has decreased its emissions by 29% in the last decade alone? It is a British success story, but there is a lot more to do.

Layla Moran: I would point out that decline is due to Liberal Democrat policies that we forced through in government.

Here we are, and our aim must be that these students need not strike again. I must insert an element of party politics, however, because it is important to remember the now all but forgotten promise of the greenest Government ever. As my right hon. Friend rightly says, this Government have cut so much. The Conservatives alone have not been forcing this through in the way they should. What happened to the carbon targets? What happened to renewable energy? We have not had the progress we need. The Government have effectively banned onshore wind, which is the cheapest form of renewable energy, all while pursuing an ideological obsession with fracking and overriding the views of local communities who have rejected it. These policies make it crystal clear that the Government are not serious enough about cutting emissions. We must demand better for our environment and our planet.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): On fracking, will the hon. Lady give way?

Layla Moran: I am sorry, but I need to make progress.

We must take inspiration from our own communities, where local political parties seem to be coming together. The Liberal Democrats on Vale of White Horse Council put forward a motion that was passed almost unanimously. Oxford Council unanimously passed a Green amendment declaring a climate emergency. The same is happening in towns and cities across the country.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Layla Moran: I am going to continue for a bit longer.

The Liberal Democrats want to see a carbon neutral Britain by 2050. To do that, we would bring forward a zero carbon Act, including measures to fast-track the switch from fossil fuels to clean energy and green tech. We would introduce a green transport Act, bringing forward the planned ban on new diesel and petrol cars by 2025 and 2030 respectively, and helping to fast-track the uptake of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Then there is the zero carbon homes standard, which was recklessly scrapped by the Conservatives. I welcome the Plastic Pollution Bill, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), which would set targets for the reduction of plastic pollution.

All in all, we need a new type of economy—one that is sustainable and which embeds the issues of the day at its heart. We must consider implementing radical financial changes, such as moving to a circular economy, as advocated by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, using a carbon tax and dividend to use market forces to reduce emissions quickly. We should implement rewards for companies that demonstrate green investment and for pension funds that take pains to divest. We should reward companies that take this issue to their hearts, but I do not yet see the radical change that is needed.

Mr Wragg: The hon. Lady need not fear my intervention; she may find it helpful to her argument. As a member of the Backbench Business Committee, I found it a pleasure to hear her application and happily grant this debate. I entirely agree with her about fracking: I will oppose any liberalisation of planning law on fracking. The Government are misguided in their policy and should listen to their own Back Benchers, who have been making that point time after time.

Layla Moran: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; I was simply trying to make progress and was not afraid of it.

It is also clear that Brexit poses a risk to our environmental standards, as outlined in the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) to yesterday's Brexit motion. Can the Minister confirm today whether the UK will continue to participate in the EU emissions trading system after Brexit? Those are the questions coming thick and fast into my inbox. Many are extremely worried about what will happen to environmental standards should we go through with a Tory Brexit as proposed.

I know there is great appetite across the House for change, but the message that came to us from the young people who went on strike the other day is that we now need to treat this as an emergency. We cannot wait

[Layla Moran]

another two years for the issue to be debated in this place. My solemn promise to those young people is this: the Liberal Democrats have heard you, and we promise to act. I thank all Members from all political parties and I hope that they will make the same pledge to those young people on behalf of their own parties. Only by finding a way forward together that is ambitious and listens to the fears and needs of young people will we find a way to safeguard our precious planet. After all, there is no planet B.

2.51 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I applaud the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate. It is a great pleasure to be able to debate an issue that is one of many that are more important than Brexit, although some of my constituents disagree. What we are discussing is an existential issue; in a year or two, if I am optimistic, or more, if I am pessimistic, we will have moved on from Brexit—I promise.

Mary Creagh: You say that!

Richard Benyon: I can dream.

It is absolutely imperative that we tackle this issue of carbon emissions. The Pentagon, surprisingly for some, has looked carefully at the impact of climate change and our ability to tackle it. It refers to climate change as a “risk escalator”: it increases pressure on migration and imposes the huge cost of stabilising failed states, with the impact that that can have on the security of the world. No one should underestimate the impact that climate change will have and is having on all our lives.

I find it fascinating to look at the crucial nexus between environmental degradation and security. We face a huge challenge—not just because of the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and all that comes from those, but because of the wider context and implications of not tackling climate change.

Jim Shannon: The right hon. Gentleman and I have probably both received the National Farmers Union briefing. At the Oxford farming conference in January this year, the NFU president Minette Batters announced that British farmers were committed to greater action on climate change and the achievement of net zero carbon emissions from agriculture production by 2040. Does the right hon. Gentleman welcome that NFU announcement as I do? Does he welcome the changes that it is agreeing to for the future?

Richard Benyon: I do—and I speak as one who knows a bit about this subject. I have been trying to embrace techniques in what I have been doing through the less than perfect mechanism of the common agricultural policy and I am excited about the potential for agriculture to play its part. The NFU is right to be leading on that.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend moves off the security relationship, does he agree that, almost certainly, other than North Korea and the dispute over the India-Pakistan border, the single biggest risk to international security today—much

too little discussed—is the question of the climate fence around Bangladesh and the possibility of rising waters forcing tens of millions of people up towards the border with Calcutta?

Richard Benyon: My right hon. Friend is right. Looking out of an aeroplane window at that delta, one can think about the implications of even a 1 metre rise. It would have a devastating, catastrophic and tragic impact on those who live there. That impact would be multiplied by an enormous magnitude because of the knock-on effect it would have on the surrounding area. It is absolutely vivid.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): On a related issue, we talk a lot about the melting of the polar icecaps, but in the Himalayas, which are often known as the “third pole”, the permafrost is thawing and the ice is melting. That could have absolutely huge implications for water sources and for the water that flows down to a significant area. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we should be talking about that, as well as the polar regions?

Richard Benyon: We could go on a global tour of the planet's vital environmental assets that are at serious risk of being irretrievably damaged unless we tackle this issue. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that point.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): On a related point, it is not just the melting of the icecaps. The Tibetan plateau is the water source for 40% of the world's population. The Chinese are developing that wild area, with serious implications for that water source and for that very important and highly populated part of the world.

Richard Benyon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point. These debates are invigorating, desperate though the issue is, because there is an enormous amount of expertise across the House. Members really understand and have seen for themselves the risk we face and the impact it could have.

I want to cut off, I hope for the final time in my life, the question put by some people who deny the human impact on climate change. For people who are, like me, sometimes assailed by people who read certain journalists and acquire a view, I recommend a book by Richard Black, the former BBC environment correspondent, called “Denied”. It is a forensic demolishing and devastating take-down of climate change denial. It goes through all the arguments in absolute detail. It has an outstanding foreword by a Member of this House—[*Interruption.*] Yes, it is me. [*Laughter.*] The content of the book is absolutely superb and I recommend it, despite the foreword. Richard Black refers to climate change deniers as contrarians rather than sceptics. I think that is right. It is good to be a sceptic and it is good to be sceptical about received wisdoms, but contrarians tend to be the golf club bore who strikes an opinion with no basis of information. The book provides the scientific evidence that really nails the subject.

The hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon rightly raised the school strikes. I think it was right to welcome that event. I think some people got it wrong

and missed the point. We can all complain about children bunking off school, but that is not the point here. The strikes showed the extraordinary passion of the young people whose lives will be much more affected than those of us in middle age like me. That passion needs to be harnessed. I was moved, a couple of days ago downstairs in the Churchill room, to see the excellent “Year of Green Action” event organised by Ministers at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We heard evidence from two young people called Amy and Ella Meek, I think from Gedling, who have set up a venture called “Kids against Plastic” that has gone viral. It is that kind of action that we want to encourage among the young people who came to our offices on that day. This is not just something that policymakers and politicians will deliver. People on the ground, of all ages, can make a difference.

Thirty or so young people from Newbury turned up at my office. I was struck by their passion and their commitment, but I was also left with a strong belief that we need to inform people better about what is going on. I have already heard questions in this debate such as, “Why isn’t something happening?” when it is, and “Why aren’t we doing more?” when that is happening. We need to applaud in a cross-party, consensual way when good things are done and to push relentlessly where we think we are missing the point.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman welcome my Little Litter Heroes campaign? We got primary schoolchildren involved in making sculptures out of their recycled goods and encouraged them to recycle everything where possible.

Richard Benyon: I am going to get my children on to that. I am a serial litter picker, to their dismay, and I think that is a fantastic initiative.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Richard Benyon: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will just make a bit more progress.

When I was discussing this issue with these young people, I was conscious that none of them knew that the UK was the first developed economy to pass a Climate Change Act. Why should they? In a way, it is a rather a processy thing to know. Nevertheless, it does show that across this House there has been a determination to act. This country has reduced its emissions by over 40%—more than any other developed G7 economy. I asked how many of them knew about Blue Belt and all their hands stayed down. Blue Belt is one of the policies in recent years that I am most proud of. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) was fundamental in driving that through despite, I have to say, a bit of institutional opposition in certain Departments, but he did it and we are now protecting an area of sea the size of India. That will shortly grow to much larger areas and we are policing that with modern satellite technology. It is an extraordinary thing that we in Britain should be proud of, particularly those of us who were swept away by “Blue Planet II”. At least we have a Government who are doing something about this.

There has been a huge leap in renewable energy. Record amounts of power are now generated renewably. The 25-year environment plan has things in it that those

young people would be really pleased to see, and they would of course be right to push us to make sure that it happens. Work has been done in this House in recent months, particularly on the Government Benches—with letters to the Prime Minister and Ministers, and meetings with the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, who will respond to the debate—to move to net zero, which I think is clearly inevitable.

Why do we need that to happen? We need it to happen because the science is clear—it is staring us in the face. In October last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said that there was an even chance of meeting a 1.5° target for global CO₂ emissions and spoke of the absolute imperative of reaching net zero. It set forth this extraordinary challenge to policy makers all over the world: there are 12 years left to deliver that. I am really pleased that the Minister, who has responsibility for climate change, has instructed the Committee on Climate Change to do a feasibility—an impact—study on what net zero would mean and what we would be requiring our economy to do. It is no good we in this House just using terms such as “net zero” without really understanding that there will be an impact. It will affect businesses, but if we do this in the right way, first, businesses can transition, and secondly, there is an economic opportunity for Britain to continue to be a centre for green growth. That fits in with the clean growth strategy.

In the wider context, this is a key moment for the United Kingdom. Domestically, we have new legislation coming before the House on fisheries, farming, the environment and other related subjects. As a farmer, a conservationist, and someone who has been, and is, active in the non-governmental organisation movement—I am a trustee of a charity called Plantlife—I am excited by the opportunities offered to take control of our environmental agenda and to make sure we do what we have been talking about for a long time, but seem unable to do, which is to reverse the declines in biodiversity, to significantly reduce emissions from agriculture, to weaponise, if you like, the natural environment, to lock up carbon and to be a sustainable source of the necessities of life, such as clean water.

Mr Sheerman: I know of the right hon. Gentleman’s great reputation as a farmer. Do we not have to do something about the dairy industry and the effect on waterways, rivers and streams?

Richard Benyon: I think that the best way to protect our environment is to have more grass in rotation. If people make sweeping statements that close down certain industries—[*Interruption.*] I know that that was not the point that the hon. Gentleman was making, but there are swings and roundabouts. I was probably the only dairy farmer in the House of Commons until I stopped being a dairy farmer, so I know a little bit about this, and I am happy to talk to him about it.

Internationally, our leadership in tackling climate change, the protection of our oceans and reducing pollution can be a key component of what people mean when they refer to “global Britain”. As a Minister—and a devout pro-European—I sat in international forums such as the International Whaling Commission and the United Nations Conference of the Parties, and I sat for too long in EU co-ordination meetings, lowering the ambitions of the UK so that there could be a single,

[Richard Benyon]

agreed view across the European Union. Now we can have those ambitions. We can raise our game. We can reconnect with organisations from which we have withdrawn. I am looking for silver linings to our current cloud, and that is very much one of them.

Let me end by returning to the issue of the schools strike. We make a mistake if we—whom those children would view as old people—complain about their having the nerve to bunk off school, or if we just tell them the good things. We need to agree with them that there is a problem and much more needs to be done, and we need to explain it.

Thank goodness climate change is a cross-party issue in this country, whereas in the United States it is a polarising, divisive issue. We can do this together, and we can be a world leader.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I will give considerable leeway to the Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee, who will speak next, but I will advise that after that, if everyone speaks for between five and six minutes, we will manage without a time limit. I am not criticising the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who is a former Minister, and I do not expect the Chairman of the Select Committee to speak for only five minutes, because I am sure that she will have a lot to say, but after that, if Members speak for between five and six minutes we will manage without a time limit, in a courteous and consensual way.

3.7 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon). I advise him to keep his mobile phone switched on, given the news that the Fisheries Minister, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), has just resigned. The Government may be looking for a new Fisheries Minister, and it may be the right hon. Gentleman's lucky day yet again. In the great tradition of reusing and recycling Ministers, I can think of no finer replacement.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I really cannot allow the hon. Lady to get away with that. If she thinks it is a privilege or a delight to be a Fisheries Minister at present, she must be dreaming in ways of which I know she is not capable.

Mary Creagh: I wonder whether the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth has resigned so that he does not have to answer the letter that my Committee has just drafted, which asks him about our progress towards becoming a so-called independent coastal state and how the negotiations with various regional fisheries organisations are going.

Let me now turn to the subject of the debate. Securing a sustainable future for the planet and our children is a responsibility that we simply cannot ignore. I welcome the chance to discuss this issue, because we have spent far too long discussing Brexit in the Chamber and not enough time discussing the thumping alarm that is being sounded all around us on our planet.

To achieve net zero, we must reduce our emissions rapidly and at scale in every area of our economy and in every area of our lives. Our Committee has talked about

some of the personal changes that we can make, whether that means turning our backs on single-use plastics or considering how we can achieve, for example, a net-zero fashion industry. The report that we published last week took climate change into areas where it may not previously have gone.

Stephen Doughty: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the personal things we can all do is look into where our pensions are invested and establish, for instance, whether they are invested in fossil fuels or renewables? I have been doing that, and I hope that we will give some thought to where our moneys are going in the context of the parliamentary pension scheme.

Mary Creagh: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. One of the things we did in our green finance reports last year was talk to the top 25 pension funds in the country and ask them what they were doing in this area, and of course we talked to our own parliamentary pension fund as well, and we ranked them as engaged, moderately engaged and less engaged. We need to shape and bend the entire financial system to invest in this new green economy and to ensure a just transition, because in areas such as mine, Wakefield, which were dependent on coal, we must not have thousands of people just being left on the dole. We need to skill up the current generations to meet the green future we want to see.

Mr Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of our other great strengths is our great science in this country—the science base? Good policy based on great science really works.

Mary Creagh: I totally and passionately agree. We on the Environmental Audit Committee are privileged to have global thought leaders appearing before us and giving us the best available science. It is sometimes rather chilling, however; for example, Professor Jim Skea from the IPCC told us that our assumptions about how quickly we can decarbonise are perhaps over-optimistic and based on new technologies that have not yet been invented, so perhaps the discount rate for future technologies needs to be lower than at present. There are some truly profound moments in our Committee, and I am sure my hon. Friend would be very welcome to join it; we also have a couple of spaces for Conservative Members, so I hope we can get some volunteers following today's discussion.

We have been leaders in this, and people still look to the UK for both thought leadership and policy action leadership. We provided that under the last Labour Government with the Climate Change Act 2008. A weakness in that Act has become apparent, however: there was no review process. We set up the Committee on Climate Change, which advises the Government—all well and good—but then it is up to the Government to heed that advice or to ignore it, which is less good, and there is no review process, so now if we do need to set this zero net emissions target, we will need to re-legislate, and I will be interested to hear from the Minister about the necessary policy mechanisms.

We have signed up to the 2015 Paris agreement and to the UN sustainable development goals to create a more equitable, sustainable world. Our Government will subject

us to a voluntary national review at the UN this year, and I urge all Members of this House to participate in that process. It is about how we end poverty, violence and hunger in every aspect of our communities. Our Committee has looked at the hunger aspect, and I welcome the fact that the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office for National Statistics will now start to measure hunger in our country. Real sustainability comes not just with social justice, but with climate justice as well.

I want to talk about why net zero emissions matter. In October 2018, the UN's leading scientists—some of whom were British—showed what could happen if we do not get to net zero. Extreme weather is already happening; the warming is already with us, as we are seeing with the tragic events on Saddleworth Moor, the heatwaves in the Arctic last year and the fact that we have had the hottest February day on record. The Arctic is warming twice as quickly as the rest of the planet, and in February 2018 temperatures at the North Pole rose above freezing during the polar nights, which is when the sun has not even started to come up; it was 30° higher than normal. When we talk about an average of 1.5°, that means a 7° rise at the North Pole. That is catastrophic for the melting of the sea ice.

We had a deadly summer last year, and we also had the highest number of excess deaths last year because of the beast from the east; we had 40,000 excess winter deaths in this country. So when we talk about climate, we are also talking about ourselves; we are talking about the fact that we are conducting a vast experiment on the only system on which our life depends. We do not know what we are doing; we do know how to stop it, but there is a kind of collective passivity around the action needed. When we see cities such as Cape Town in South Africa running out of water, and when we see power stations in Australia unable to work because it is too hot, we have to ask ourselves what a 1.5° or even a 2° warmed world will look like.

The IPCC also showed us what the difference is between 1.5° and 2°. At 2° sea levels will be 10 cm higher. That means 10 million more people will be affected by flooding and coastal erosion. That is what the difference between 1.5° and 2° means. At 2°, all coral reefs die. Our children will never see a coral reef at 2°. If we keep the increase to 1.5°, one third of reefs might survive. We have cold water reefs on our shores that we do not know about. We do not value what is beneath the ocean.

Our species are becoming extinct at a rate that has not been seen since the last global mass extinction. We have just been hearing about the insect Armageddon. Our planetary health inquiry found that rates of extinction are between 100 and 1,000 times higher than what is considered to be natural diversity loss. This affects our food systems, because if pollinator populations are devastated, we will have to pollinate our fruit trees by hand, as is already being done in parts of China.

Soil is the only carbon sequestration system that is known to work at scale and for free, yet we keep treating our soil like dirt. [*Laughter.*] That was my little joke. Soil is the Cinderella ecosystem. We like clean air and clean water, but what we should really like is dirty dirt. The more dirt that is in our soil—I do not mean bad dirt; I mean organic content—the better it is. In Paris, we signed up to increase our soil carbon content by four

parts per 1,000, but I have not yet seen any policy to support that, either in the public goods debate around farming or from the Minister. I would be grateful if we heard something about how we will incentivise farmers to achieve that and to incentivise urban guerrilla gardeners such as myself to achieve it in our own homes. If I knew how to do it, believe me I would.

Sir Oliver Letwin: This is actually a serious interjection, unlike the previous one. I completely agree with the hon. Lady that we have neglected the soil, even though it was clearly identified in the national ecosystem services review, but does she not agree that the move to payment for ecosystem services should enable successive Governments to engage farmers in precisely that kind of activity?

Mary Creagh: Indeed it should, but there has to be a baseline measurement, and somebody has to pay for the measurement and the monitoring. The tragedy is that, if we leave the EU, this type of global thought leadership that we are now getting to will be lost and will no longer be able to be transmitted to our friends and colleagues in the EU.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important point. In the Peak district, we have Moors for the Future, which is seeking to sequester as much as possible of the 580 million tonnes of carbon that is captured within peat. At the moment, we are seeing 3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere each year because of the degradation of those peat moors due to climate change, industrialisation and lack of care. Will she welcome any commitment that we can get from the Government to finance those important projects?

Mary Creagh: Absolutely. I was walking on Lost Lad in my hon. Friend's constituency at Christmas, and it is an absolutely wonderful part of the world. It is above the Derwent reservoir, and we could actually see the village of Derwent because the water levels were so low. The draining of our peat bogs has been a catastrophe, and we have to re-flood them. Globally, the top 30 cm of soil contains double the amount of carbon that is in the entire atmosphere, so it is vital that our precious peatlands—lowland and upland—should be protected for future generations. They are of global importance.

Vicky Ford: May I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the amazing work being done on soil at Cranfield University, whose Soil and Agrifood Institute is the world leader? By investing in our universities, Britain is leading the thought on how to protect our soils not just across Europe but in many other parts of the world.

Mary Creagh: I passionately agree with the hon. Lady. I taught at Cranfield School of Management for seven years, although we never got too deep into the soil at that point because we were busy trying to start businesses. She is right to suggest that we have a long database of soil systems. A lot of people in this country like to collect things and keep them, and that is a great thing to have. We have samples that go back 100 years in some cases.

I want to talk about our carbon budget. The IPCC has calculated that a budget of 420 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide would give us a two-thirds chance of staying

[Mary Creagh]

within 1.5°C, and that a 580 gigatonne budget would give us a 50:50 chance of doing so. Those are not betting odds. If I were told that I had a 50:50 chance of something happening, I would not think those are great odds, so 580 gigatonnes is not a good budget to have.

This larger budget, 580 gigatonnes, is the equivalent of 10 years of global emissions at 2017 levels. To achieve that, the global production and consumption of coal must fall by 80%—again, we have done important and good things on that in our country—and the global production and consumption of oil and gas must fall by 50% by 2030. That is why I have come to the conclusion that fracking is not compatible with the 12 years we have left, and it is why I regret that it is being treated as a national infrastructure project rather than onshore wind, which has the power to give us the clean energy we need.

We know there is uncertainty, and we know there are tipping points. We do not know what will happen if we get to 1.5°, but we know that, for example, if the permafrost thaws, releasing methane, or if the sea ice collapses, these things can accelerate.

We can tackle emissions and deliver healthier cities, healthier people and a healthier planet. The Committee's latest inquiry on planetary health is looking at how these complex systems deliver. We have seen exponential growth of wind and solar, and we are experiencing an industrial revolution. We have done things we thought impossible 10 or 12 years ago, for which I pay tribute to politicians on both sides of the House. The revolution is happening at the speed of the technological revolution, which is good. Big data will help us in this fight, too, but we will need renewable energy to supply between 70% and 80% of all global power by 2050.

In this country, we have done a lot on electricity, but the Committee on Climate Change has said that this progress has

“masked failures in other areas.”

We have seen very small reductions in agriculture and buildings-related emissions. At a time when Persimmon is paying its chief executive £75 million, we have to ask why we are subsidising the Help to Buy scheme. Why are we not subsidising ground source or air source heat pumps, as is happening in Sweden, to make sure we have zero-carbon homes?

Kerry McCarthy: The Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee is making an excellent speech, as would be expected. She mentions that very little progress has been made in agriculture. I know this is part of the planetary health inquiry to an extent, but nearly 10 years ago, on 25 March 2009, I had a debate—I think it was the first such debate in Parliament—on the impact of the livestock sector on the environment. I was laughed at and ridiculed by most people, but I still keep banging away at it. The public are now with us, and so many people are reducing their meat consumption for environmental reasons. Does she think it is time that politicians had the courage to grasp that nettle and make improvements?

Mary Creagh: I totally agree. There is always a danger that we get called a nanny state, but if nannies are good enough for people on very large incomes—naming no names—we should provide the nannying for people with less money.

It is encouraging how, in some ways, the public have got ahead of politicians, such as with the rise of flexitarianism. We are all trying to eat less meat because of our knowledge, particularly about processed meat and the risks from nitrites. What does a net zero diet look like? What does a net zero city look like? We will have to start mapping out these big changes. Where we lead, other countries will quickly follow.

My hon. Friend is right that we need to examine the livestock sector and work out how we cut its emissions globally and at scale.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and she makes an important point about the way in which individual behaviour needs to be complemented by Government policy. That is particularly resonant for me today, because today I have got rid of my car and have become entirely reliant on walking, cycling and public transport. I am able to do that only because Nottingham has invested significantly in public transport. Is it not really disappointing that transport is one sector that is not pulling its weight at the moment? There has been little change in the level of transport emissions since 2008. Do not the Government need to get their act together to enable more people to make greener choices?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I appreciate the importance of the hon. Lady's point, but, sadly, her intervention is too long. And I am sure the Chairman of the Select Committee will soon be drawing her remarks to a close.

Mary Creagh: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend is right to say that there has been a net increase in transport emissions over the past five years.

I want to conclude by talking about what we need to do and what policies the Government need to adopt. Government is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country. I have been banging on about the need for the NHS, which has a huge budget, to decarbonise its fleet rapidly. We have had the NHS sustainable development unit before our Committee; there is talk about doing this by 2028, but that is too late. We need electric vehicles in every town and city. There is no sense in midwives and district nurses going out and polluting the cities, and then talking to parents about treating their kids' asthma—that is absurd. We need cross-government working on this.

We need to talk about the difficult-to-decarbonise sectors, particularly heavy industry and transport. We come back to things such as bus regulation here; mayors could have the powers to state where buses go. We have Stagecoach today saying, “The stuff in Manchester is outrageous,” but it is running profitable bus services. We need to force these companies to invest in new, cleaner vehicles. We also need to look at our energy systems. Some 31 million homes in this country run on gas. How are we going to get them to a clean gas source? Is it going to be hydrogen? Is it going to be air source heat pumps? How are we going to lag those buildings? This is not that hard, but we need to choose our policy sectors. When we choose our sectors and our actions, we can have a just transition. We can have that new green deal. We know that the mayors are willing to do this.

Finally, we need to make sure that our financial systems are looking at the risks: the physical risk from flooding; and the transitional risk from stranded assets in coal and oil and gas-fired power stations, which our pensions are currently being invested in. We also need to make sure that we have a stable policy environment. The Government can be a leader on this. The Minister has proven that she can be a leader, not least in the actions she took in heading off a no-deal Brexit in the past couple of days. We need to practise what we preach. Net zero is not the end; it is just the start of the next mountain to climb.

3.26 pm

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), the Chair of the Select Committee, of which I am proud to be a member. I am delighted that we are having this debate today, and I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who secured it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) said, this is the most important issue. In an effort to chip away at my gigantic constituency majority in Richmond Park and North Kingston, one or two local opponents enjoy telling my constituents that I care more about the environment and climate change than I do about Brexit, and they are right—I do, for all the reasons we have just heard. So they can stick that on their leaflets.

This is already a year of records. Last year, we had record snowfall in March in this country. We had the joint hottest summer on record. Two days ago, we had the record temperature in any February ever. Clearly, we cannot attribute individual weather extremes or events to climate change, as that is just not scientific and not possible to do, but the trends do tell a story. The most recent Met Office report, from November last year, tells us that the UK is experiencing an increase in weather extremes: hottest days have become hotter; the number of warm spells has increased; the coldest days are not as cold; and there has been an increase in rainfall levels. None of that, individually, is catastrophic, but it is a sign.

Globally, the signs are even more alarming. The five warmest years in recorded history have been since 2010, with 2014 being the hottest year ever recorded—until 2015. It became the record year—until 2016. In 2016, at the time the warmest year on record, eight of the months were the warmest the individual month had ever seen in history. So the implications of all this, if the science is right, are truly alarming: ecosystems forced through such rapid changes that they are unlikely to be able to adapt; lands becoming harder and harder to farm; and refugees on a scale we have never had to deal with before as a species. We heard in an intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) about Bangladesh, which is probably the most extreme and alarming example. We should commit right here and now to trying to secure a debate on the issue—it is extraordinary that we have not debated it—but Bangladesh is just one among other examples. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that an average of 21.5 million people are already displaced each year because of weather-related sudden onset hazards. That figure will only grow if any of these predictions are correct.

Last year's IPCC report painted the most alarming picture yet. The House will remember that the Paris agreement of 2015 commits the world to a target of limiting global warming to 2°C. The report looked into the difference between what we can expect if we achieve the 2°C target and what we can expect if instead we limit increases to 1.5°C. It tells us that the number of people exposed to water stress would be 50% lower if we kept to 1.5°C. It tells us that half a degree would mean hundreds of millions fewer people, particularly in the world's poorest countries, being at risk of climate-related destitution. The half degree of extra warming would lead to a forecasted 10 cm additional pressure on our coastlines. That half degree is the difference between losing all our corals and managing to hold on to 10% of them.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the IPCC report on a 1.5°C target said that we need to make the necessary reductions to our greenhouse emissions by 2030? Unfortunately, the Government are telling the Committee on Climate Change that they cannot look at that reduction until 2050. That seems to me to be a little bit late in the day.

Zac Goldsmith: I will address exactly that point shortly.

Let me conclude my remarks on the IPCC report. If one looks at the trends, one sees that currently we are not heading for that apocalyptic 2°C rise; we are heading towards something that looks more like 3°C, the consequences of which we cannot possibly estimate. In that light, the idea that children missing a few hours of geometry or physical education to ring the alarm bells and wake up our political system is somehow a wasted opportunity or the wrong thing to do just seems churlish. It seems absurd and mean-minded.

Sir Oliver Letwin: My hon. Friend is on the central issue, but of course he is referring to a global problem and it has only a global solution, because we are talking about 2.6 billion people in China and India for the first time in 250 years returning to the historic norm of their occupying half of global GDP, with massive consequences for energy consumption and other things. Does my hon. Friend agree that we therefore need to talk not just about our own activities and those of the west, but about the question of how we restructure the international order, which is probably the biggest challenge facing the western world and the eastern world at present?

Zac Goldsmith: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend. My final remarks will relate partially to the point that he just made, and he is right. It would be madness for those countries that have not yet developed in the sense that we have to develop in such a way that required them to become addicted to the same system that is causing this problem. They have an opportunity to leapfrog into a much cleaner, leaner and more efficient future. The technology is there.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury pointed out earlier, there are still doubters. Of course we can quibble with the predictions, because climate systems are complex. There is not a computer model on Earth that is capable of fully taking on board the complexity of the natural world and the realities of the positive and negative feedbacks that impact on climate. Nevertheless, we are faced with a pretty simple calculation:

[Zac Goldsmith]

what happens if we ignore that overwhelming scientific consensus, listen instead to the sceptics, and are then wrong? The IPCC predictions have told us that we would be risking life on Earth as we know it. We would be risking civilisation.

What happens if instead we listen to that consensus, take action and are wrong? Well, by accident we would end up with a cleaner and eventually cheaper energy system. We would end up protecting more of the world's forests and ecosystems. We would end up with an economic system that was more circular and less wasteful. It really is not a difficult calculation to make—and that is even more true given that almost everything we need to do to tackle climate change is something that we need to do irrespective of climate change.

The challenge is gigantic and no one doubts that—we are told that if we are to meet that 1.5°C total global emissions target, we need to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest—but we can do it. In fairness to the Government, it is worth highlighting that we are already making progress—not enough, but progress all the same. We have already heard about the world-leading Climate Change Act, on which I am not going to dwell, but since 2010 the UK has reduced emissions by 23%. We have reduced emissions faster than any other G7 nation. I am delighted to acknowledge that the Government have instructed the Committee on Climate Change to look into how we can go further and move to a net zero emissions target. It also needs to be said, though, that at the current rate of progress, despite our having met the early targets and being on course to meet the next one, we are not on course to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, so we do have a long way to go.

Clearly, we will have to change much of what we do not just in terms of how we generate electricity, but in terms of how we use it, how we manage the land, and how we organise our transport, food and industry. There has long been a belief, a fear, that there must be a direct correlation between emissions and economic growth. That has been true. For much of the industrial revolution, there has been a direct link: emissions go up, growth goes up. However, it is not so clear now. Since 1990, we have cut emissions in this country by 42%, even while our economy has grown by two thirds. As we enter this gigantic economic transition, there will, of course, be losers—the polluters—but there will also be winners. Last year saw a record amount of power generated from renewable sources—more than 30% is now coming from renewables.

A much quicker transition to electric vehicles—something on which we really need to push—will mean more jobs and more investment. Supporting new, clean technologies means both jobs and investments. That transition will happen whether we like it or not. It is the old story of the whale oil. In 1850, every home in America was lit by whale oil. Nine years later, Edwin Drake struck oil, and we had the oil rush. Almost immediately, the whale oil sector simply evaporated. There is a cutting in a diary of the biggest whale oil trader at the time who said that he was astonished that he had run out of customers before he had run out of whales. That is what will happen. Old industries and old technologies will give way to new ones, and it is in our interests as a country to lead the charge.

Hon. Members have covered lots of areas on which we need to get going, but I want to focus on just one last point that has been neglected in almost all of the debates that we have had on climate change, and that is forests. Apart from transport, deforestation is the single largest source of emissions. It accounts for around 20%—a fifth—of all carbon emissions. Forests are one of the world's largest carbon sinks, absorbing around 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon a year and storing many billions more, yet we are losing 18.7 million acres of forests every year, the equivalent of 27 football pitches every single minute. It is self-evident madness that that is happening—not just because of climate change. Forests provide us with clean air, water and soils. We do not fully understand their influence on world weather patterns, but we know that it is defining. They are home to 80% of terrestrial biodiversity. More than 1.5 billion people depend directly on forests for their livelihoods, many of whom are the world's poorest people, so we need to protect them. That needs to be a priority.

The UK can be proud that we are the only nation in the G7, and indeed in the G20, to hit the UN's target on overseas aid the year before last—we were the only country to do so. Only a tiny fraction of that aid—as little as 0.4%—goes towards nature, and we can do much more than that. The very existence of DFID is to tackle poverty, but the surest way to plunge people into desperate poverty is by removing the environments, the ecosystems and the free services that nature provides. Those are the things on which people depend. Of course, the world's poorest people depend much more directly on nature than we do here in this House, but, ultimately, we all depend on the natural world.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is right to say that this country needs to help developing countries. One of the best ways that we can do that is by using our expertise in organisations such as the Met Office. Kew Gardens in his constituency has some of the world's greatest scientists. We should work with other countries to make sure that they can adapt and indeed mitigate climate change.

Zac Goldsmith: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I love the fact that he mentioned Kew Gardens and I thank him for doing so. I am trying to push through a private Member's Bill, but it keeps being blocked by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope)—cue boos from people who happen to be watching this discussion. It would deliver about £40 million or £50 million extra to Kew Gardens without dipping into the public purse, and it would enable the scientists to do exactly the work that he has just mentioned, much of which focuses on helping developing countries, poorer countries, adapt to the reality and the risks of climate change. Those scientists do extraordinary work, and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to put that on the record.

In addition to being at the forefront of the new net zero revolution, which is what it is, let us also be world leaders in restoring ecosystems on a scale that finally matches the problem.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I have let the debate run because it has been so well-balanced and constructive, but I am now anxious to make sure that everyone who has indicated that they wish to speak has a chance to do so, so we will have to have a formal time limit now of five minutes.

3.39 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for her role in securing the debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). I agree very much with what he was saying about deforestation.

My starting point is that climate change is not some kind of future threat; climate change is here and now. The climate has changed, and that is the reality that we have to confront. Records have again been broken in the UK this week, as several hon. Members have already mentioned. On Tuesday, temperatures reached 21°C in London—Britain's hottest February day on record. The records keep being broken not just in the UK, but right across the world. In January 2019, Australia had its hottest month ever, and prolonged droughts worsened California's destructive wildfires last year. Nine of the 10 hottest years on record have occurred since 2005.

To be clear, this is not normal. We are not in a time of normal. The implications of these seismic changes for the future of life on Earth and human civilisation are profound, yet even after all the international conferences and pledges on climate action, the Earth is still set to warm by 3°C or 4°C. In that scenario, huge swathes of the Earth would be rendered uninhabitable, while extreme weather would ravage whole countries. Time is quickly running out to limit warming, even to the still dangerous 1.5°C or 2°C aspirations of the 2015 Paris climate agreement. We face a climate emergency and we must choose now how we respond. Above all, I believe that this calls for unprecedented boldness and vision, and a new way of thinking, to find a new way forward.

Here at home, the Government's response to the climate crisis has been nowhere near ambitious enough. Since 2010, almost every existing sensible climate measure has been torched: zero-carbon homes scrapped; onshore wind effectively banned; solar power shafted; the Green Investment Bank flogged off; and fracking forced on local communities. On the Opposition Benches, while many hon. Members grasp the severity of the situation, the policies proposed by some of their parties simply are not good enough either.

It is not possible to tackle the climate crisis and expand airports or build new runways. We cannot tackle climate change while ploughing billions of pounds into North sea oil and gas. We cannot tackle the climate crisis while chucking billions into new roads. And we cannot tackle the climate crisis while our economy is built on the assumption that precious minerals, fresh air and clean water can magically regenerate themselves in an instant—that somehow the Earth will expand to meet our ever-expanding use of resources.

The IPCC says that we need to cut emissions to net zero by the middle of the century, but during that very same period the global economy is set to nearly triple in size. Let us be clear that that means three times more production and consumption than we already see each year. It would be hard enough to decarbonise the existing

global economy in such a timespan; it is virtually impossible to do so three times over. That is why we need new thinking and it is why I am calling for a green new deal in this country—not to be mistaken with the green deal, which is a very different, failed British policy.

I am really proud to have been a co-founder of the first green new deal group here in the UK, 10 years ago. The green new deal is now getting real momentum from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the US. It takes its inspiration from Roosevelt's new deal in the 1930s, which saw massive investment in jobs and infrastructure in order to pull the US out of the depression. What we need now is a similar massive investment—not in infrastructure per se, but in green technology and green infrastructure. That means a complete and rapid decarbonisation of our whole economy on a much faster scale than our current national climate framework dictates. It means a huge programme of investment in clean energy, creating hundreds of thousands of well-paid jobs. It means transforming huge areas of our country and allowing those proud communities that have been hollowed out through deindustrialisation and austerity to regenerate and thrive as they join a collective endeavour to protect the planet. To that extent, it might just be a way of bringing our country back together after all the divisions and polarisation of Brexit.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this very important debate. In Scotland, the Scottish National party and the Green party in the Scottish Parliament have been able to work together. I am not saying that everything is perfect, but does she welcome that cross-party collaboration to try to drive forward sometimes quite difficult decisions that will help to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change?

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; cross-party collaboration has to be central. The less that we depend on fossil fuels, the better, but I appreciate that that is something that we are all trying to do and it is incredibly important that we do.

This is urgent. That is why the alarm call that young people gave us in the climate strikes a week or so ago was so very important. They know that in this moment of political paralysis and morally unforgivable inaction on climate, only something really big will shift our politics in a new direction and attempt something new. I am really proud that across the country we now have over 25 local authorities that have declared a climate emergency, with our schools and universities doing the same thing.

This Parliament must also declare a climate emergency. These are extraordinary times and they call for extraordinary measures. Declaring a climate emergency would mean that it would not be another two years before we have a debate like this in the Chamber. It would perhaps mean that we have a cross-cutting Select Committee on climate breakdown and make sure that climate change is part of every inquiry that Members undertake. It would mean that every new law must be climate-proofed. It would mean redefining and reshaping the debate on climate change.

We have made some progress. I hear the Government saying what wonderful progress they have made. But if we take into account our consumption emissions—the

[Caroline Lucas]

emissions linked to all the products that we consume because we have outsourced manufacturing—then actually our progress looks an awful lot less good. Let us be honest about the scale of the challenge that we face and deliver on the future for those young people.

3.45 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Last night in the other place, the inspirational Lord Rees of Ludlow, who has been the astronomer royal since the mid-1990s and is a former president of the Royal Society, gave a deeply inspirational lecture about what the world might look like after 2050. It struck me that that is actually not very far away, because by 2050 my daughter will only be the same age as I am now. By then, the world's population will have reached at least 9 billion. He pointed out that that means that the population of Nigeria will be larger than the population of the EU, the UK and the US put together. The world will be much more crowded and much warmer.

The UK has come very far with regard to addressing climate change. I am very proud that we have cut emissions by 40%—more than any other developed country—and that we have led the world in areas like renewables, which now account for about a third of our energy supply. Because we know that this is a global challenge, we have put in that diplomatic effort. I have seen how it was often the UK pushing the rest of Europe to act, if perhaps sometimes not as fast as we would have wanted. I know how our leadership at the Paris agreement negotiations was absolutely fundamental in getting those 181 countries to sign up to take the temperature changes seriously.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): We have seen that not only in Paris but at the recent COP24, where the Minister herself was a star turn. Many people reported back to me in my constituency that her performance, vision and ambition in representing the UK Government were inspirational for many other people who were present.

Vicky Ford: Absolutely. The Minister is a force to be reckoned with on climate change, and I thank her for her leadership not just in this country but across the world.

If we are to leave the planet a safer and better place not just for our children but for their children and grandchildren, then much more must be done. The science is very clear. We cannot continue to pump more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and we must achieve the net zero target by 2050, or sooner if possible. However, it is not good enough just to talk about the targets—we must also think about the actions that we need to take as a society, as individuals and as Governments.

We must also think about how we harness the powers of science and technology to help us to find these solutions. I serve on the Science and Technology Committee. We are in the middle of doing a study on the technologies that we will need in order to meet the clean growth targets. It is a fascinating study. We are in the middle of taking evidence. I do not want to prejudice the final report, but perhaps I can make some comments on some of the actions taking place. First, on energy supply, it is absolutely vital that we continue to work on

more zero-carbon energy sources, investing in renewables. I know the Minister knows that I would like to see a pathway to market for onshore wind again, especially to re-power the old sites that are often in the windiest parts of our country but now have very old turbines. We could make them much more efficient. There is very exciting technology being developed. We have heard about floating wind—going out to our deeper oceans and having floating turbines. As a physicist, I will always campaign for continued investment in nuclear fusion, because the potential benefits are too enormous to be ignored. We then need the storage, batteries, air compression and smart grids to go with it.

We must do more on the energy efficiency of homes. In my constituency of Chelmsford, the district is building 1,000 new homes every year. Our new homes should be zero carbon, and we need to reignite the discussion about how we retrofit old homes to make them more efficient and decarbonise heat.

Net zero means that we need strategies to take carbon out of the atmosphere, which is why the Agriculture Bill is such an opportunity. We must incentivise tree planting in woodlands, but in a way that does not take away from our carbon sinks.

I would like to thank the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for the paper it has produced. I am a sucker for a puffin, and I have visited puffins all over the UK. The RSPB made the excellent point that peatland in the UK is estimated to hold more carbon than the forests of Britain, France and Germany combined. We must protect our peoples.

The food that we can grow and eat will fundamentally change because of climate change. In universities and institutions such as Rothamsted Research and the John Innes research centre in Norwich, we have world leaders in food technology, and we must continue to encourage their work.

I want to wrap up by talking about plastics. I am pleased that the Government have taken action on bags, beads and bottles, launched their “producer pays” tax and are looking at better ways to recycle. However, this is a global problem. Plastic is a true disaster in developing countries, where plastic waste is blocking waterways and causing flooding and disease, and uncontrolled burning of plastic is polluting the air.

This time last year, I led 41 Conservative MPs in giving up plastic for Lent, to make us all think about our environmental footprint. Yesterday, Tearfund held an excellent drop-in where it encouraged Members across the House to do the same again but also to partner with it on the work it is doing in some of the poorest parts of the world. I encourage Members to not only give up plastic but think about other things they will do this Lent. I will be going lentil for Lent and giving up meat. Any Member who would like to take up a pledge for the environment this Lent should let me know.

3.51 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I am going to be slightly partisan in what I say, and not for the sake of it, but more as a polemic. I genuinely feel that those young people called their school strikes because they think this place is sleepwalking off a cliff edge, not in terms of Brexit—although we may well be doing that—but ecologically. I am happy for Conservative Members to challenge me at any point.

I am speaking from the Back Benches, but I was appointed by the shadow Chancellor as the first ever shadow Minister for sustainable economics. The next Labour Government understand that we can no longer allow the Treasury's short-termism and obsession with neo-classical economic orthodoxy to block the bold and radical fiscal, monetary and regulatory changes we need to deal with the climate crisis. Labour understands the scale of the challenge before us and the national and international purpose that we must set ourselves. It can be nothing less than a radical transformation of the way our economy works.

That is a problem for people who are tied to an economic system, as the Conservative party is—it is a conservative party, so it wants to keep the economic model we have. Some Labour Members understand that if we want to make these radical changes in the timeframe we are talking about, we need to radically change how the economy works and who it works for. That will be a challenge to some Conservative Members, and I will tell the House why.

We know that the wealthiest 10% are responsible for more than half of all greenhouse gas emissions on our planet and in our country, and yet we also know that the poorest 50% are responsible for just 10% of greenhouse gas emissions. This is not about a false choice between consumption for the poorest and the environment. The poor cannot cut what they are not consuming. We need to see a contraction and a convergence. The poorest in the world and in this country will need to consume more, and the wealthiest—not just individuals, but corporations—will need to do more of their fair share. That is a challenge to the economic orthodoxy that those on the Conservative Benches champion.

That is the challenge before us, and we can see what happens when we do not ensure that social justice is at the heart of the changes we make. If we look at the gilets jaunes movement in France, we see that it happened because of the technocratic centrist fixes the Macron Government were trying to make. There were €40 billion of carbon taxes, yet only a small fraction of that was invested in public transport or for the poorest, and it fell disproportionately on those least able to pay, who are actually those consuming the least carbon. As a result, there was not one single tax on French aviation fuel. That is what caused the frustration and anger in France—inequality and a lack of justice at the heart of that economic policy.

This is why the green new deal mentioned by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is capturing the public imagination. There does not need to be a trade-off between the environment and jobs, or between economic and social justice and the environment.

How did we respond to climate change and the sustainability issues facing us in the UK? We decided to expand Heathrow—fantastic! I think the Heathrow issue is probably one of the most decisive splits we will see in politics in the coming years. It is the biggest single source of emissions in the UK, and the expansion has now given the green light to 300 million tonnes more of carbon being poured into our atmosphere. No Government who aspire to tackle the climate crisis and to keep temperature rises below 1.5°C would ever allow Heathrow to happen.

Let us quickly run through some of the failings of this Government. They have slashed solar subsidies, blocked onshore wind and prevented a closed-loop

reuse and recycling sector. They have supported fracking, privatised the Green Investment Bank and supported Heathrow expansion. They have blocked mandatory climate risk-related reporting for the finance sector, they have never issued a green bond, and they have axed their own flagship energy efficiency policy. Those young people were not just calling for incremental change. They were calling not for climate change, but for system change.

3.56 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I add my congratulations to the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this vital debate.

Climate change is not a new concept. For millennia the earth has oscillated through periods of warmth and of cold, but for the first time in Earth's history natural trends are changing. Unlike in times gone by, however, human beings have their finger on the scale: we have tipped the balance. Our impact on the environment is often hidden, out of sight and out of mind, but international scientists are clearly telling us that our actions have dire consequences—consequences that we are starting to see and feel. Heatwaves, hurricanes, wildfires and flooding are just some of the realities we now face. The positive news is that we know it is happening. We know a key driver of this change is our relentless production of greenhouse gases, so we have to take action to change that and work towards a net zero carbon economy.

I am proud that the UK is leading the way in tackling this issue, and I do think that we are leading the way. Since 1990, we have cut emissions by more than 40%, and we have done so faster than any other G7 nation, all at the same time as our economy has grown by two thirds. Our emissions will continue to fall as we generate more of our power from clean sources, and we are on track to deliver 35% of energy from renewables by 2020-21.

Stephen Kerr: Another way in which the United Kingdom can take a first mover advantage is in relation to using carbon capture and storage. If we were to make a commitment as a Government and as an economy to implement it, that is an area in which we could really make a startling difference to what we are achieving in carbon emissions in this country and in exporting such technology across the earth.

Gillian Keegan: I completely agree. That is certainly much-needed technology, and technology with which the world leader, which I hope we will be, would certainly be able to make a massive difference, as well as a huge economic difference for businesses here.

This change is often being driven from the ground up by businesses, as my hon. Friend says, and by local councils, supported by Government initiatives, and I have seen this in Chichester. Covers timber merchants in my constituency has transformed its business to incorporate sustainable business practices. It has installed solar panels across its sites, which has allowed it to save 810 tonnes of carbon dioxide from being emitted in 2017 alone. On my last visit there I saw its newest introduction of electric forklift trucks, which were operating in the yard silently loading lorries. That business and many others are doing what they can to minimise their

[Gillian Keegan]

environmental impacts, and West Sussex County Council has been developing its renewable assets, with solar panels now on more than 30 schools, as well as on council buildings and fire stations. Today the council produces an average of 23,350 MWh of renewable energy per year, which significantly exceeds the 14,000 MWh consumed in delivering services across its core estate. Such innovative efforts are slowly but surely changing the way we operate our businesses and services in this country, together with our individual actions as consumers.

As many Members have said, this is a global issue and we need a global solution. Our role in that is becoming increasingly important, and reports of international underachievement and key players pulling out of international agreements make the need for us to remain steadfast and show continued leadership all the more important. We need international collaboration and to support developing economies to grow in a more sustainable way than we did. The Government have committed £5.8 billion of international climate finance from 2016-20 to help developing countries mitigate the effects of and adapt to climate change.

We must consider best practice adopted in other countries, and support the development of new technologies such as carbon capture and storage, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) referred to. As an island nation we should continue to develop and support growth in marine energy. I welcome the Government's ambition to become a world leader in clean technology and services, and I look forward to them further developing those opportunities with our world-class universities. Sustainable growth can ultimately be more profitable in every respect.

We owe it to the next generation to make every effort to mitigate climate change. Several Members have referred to the 15,000 schoolchildren who came here to tell us that they care, and we are here today to say that we care too! Their voices are being and will be heard by every one of us.

As MPs we cannot fail to be impressed by the knowledge of the younger generation in every school we visit, as well as by their knowledge of the impact on the environment, and their passion to take action and combat climate change and create a more sustainable world for their future. I promise—I am sure we all do—that we will continue to support every effort to improve our environmental plan and support our 25-year strategy, our clean growth strategy, and the forthcoming environmental Bill, which shifts focus on to the environment and should therefore be welcomed.

On a personal level, we will all give up something for Lent—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) has been on to us all. I gave up plastic this year, and I think this year I am picking up litter and might even try lentils as well. Tolstoy famously said:

“Everybody thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing themselves.”

We need to do both.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am afraid I must reduce the time limit to four minutes.

4.2 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan). Earlier this month I attended a question and answer session at Green End Primary School in Burnage in my constituency. One of the young people said, “What do you talk about in Parliament, and what do you wish you talked about?” I said, “Well, we talk about Brexit, endlessly, but I wish we talked about climate change.” That is why I welcome today's debate and the opportunity to make a brief contribution.

As we speak, fires are raging for the second year running on Saddleworth Moor on the outskirts of my constituency. I remember the smoke drifting across my constituency last year, and I do not want to see that again this summer. The weather may have been glorious over the past few days, but this February was the hottest on record and the past five years have been the hottest five years on record. The scientific evidence is clear.

On my regular school visits, the two issues regularly brought up by young people are plastic pollution and climate change. It is heartening that they are engaged and want to make a difference, but we cannot afford to wait for those 10-year-olds to get into positions of influence before we see faster action. For relatively prosperous inhabitants of a windy, rainy island, we are not taking fast enough action.

Climate change is already having a catastrophic effect on biodiversity and the environment. Two years ago I visited Australia and went to see the barrier reef. That was my second visit because I went previously about 25 years ago. What I saw shocked me because, even though it was a long time since my first visit, I vividly remembered the colours and life on the reef; it was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I went back to the same part of the reef on the same boat. It was bleached and looked as though the life had been drained from it. It brought it home to me that the environmental emergency is already happening. We urgently need to listen to the warnings of the scientists and the environmental experts who are trying to alert us to the danger.

With the Committee on Climate Change recommending a review of the 2050 target, the time to act more quickly is now, and a first step would be for the Government to commit to a target date for net zero emissions. As a prosperous country, we are committed under the UN climate convention to be more ambitious than developing nations, and we need to lead by example. Greater Manchester Combined Authority is a good example. We need change in all sorts of areas—energy production, transport, green infrastructure, housing—and the authority has just published a draft plan for homes and the environment. A key aim is that all new buildings and other infrastructure be net zero carbon by 2028. It is an important step towards its pledge to become a carbon neutral area by 2038, which I welcome.

We have a huge opportunity. There is an environmental and economic benefit to retrofitting older buildings, and in the longer term the growth in green technologies has to be part of any future industrial strategy. We also have to take personal responsibility with a cultural move away from cheap disposable products and a throwaway culture, whether that be single-use plastic bottles or single-wear clothing. I congratulate Emily

and Michael Eavis, the organisers of my favourite weekend of the year, the Glastonbury festival, on banning single-use plastic bottles for this year's festival, which will take 1 million plastic bottles out of circulation. We also need a personal emphasis on using fewer resources, eating less meat and using public transport. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), I gave up my car about six months ago, but I can do that only because in Manchester we have a very good tram and bus system—by the way, the bus system needs regulating.

It is in our grasp to act quickly on behalf of those children in my constituency who are telling me that we have to act quickly. I want the Government to act more quickly so that pupils in my constituency worried about their future can see that this generation are acting on their behalf.

4.7 pm

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate, and I pay tribute to the West Yorkshire fire authority officers who worked so bravely to put out the moorland fires in Saddleworth and Marsden this week. They are heroes.

It took a 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, to speak the words that needed to be spoken about the destruction of our planet and to prick the world's conscience. Now our children and young people are grasping their future, condemning the irresponsible actions of past generations and demanding a cleaner, greener, more sustainable environment, which is their right. Article 24 of the UN convention on the rights of the children states that every child has the right to the best possible health and that Governments must provide good-quality healthcare, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment, and education on health and wellbeing so that children can stay healthy. We owe it to future generations to be doing all we can to give them a clean environment to grow up in.

In England and Wales, hundreds of thousands of children are being exposed to illegal levels of damaging air pollution from diesel vehicles at more than 2,000 schools and nurseries. The World Health Organisation estimates that around 7 million people die every year from exposure to polluted air. Air pollution alone causes many adverse health effects for children, from neurodevelopmental issues, child obesity and asthma to childhood cancers and higher infant mortality rates.

Article 12 of the convention states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously. I was proud to see children protesting earlier this month, engaging in political action, to share their concerns about the future. I believe that environmental studies and climate change should be an integral part of the curriculum, but it needs to be part of a society-wide rethink on the environment. Yes, positive steps have been made, but there is much more to be done. Labour's green transformation, covering the economy and the industrial strategy, aims to address the calls from our youngest citizens. It will be driven by science—by what is necessary, instead of what can be achieved through political compromise. In addition to

supporting the target to build a net zero emissions economy by 2050, Labour will ensure that 60% of the UK's energy comes from low carbon or renewable sources within 12 years of coming to power.

I want children and adults to work together to drive forward the UK's progress towards making net zero emissions a reality. To the children and young people worldwide who took a stand a fortnight ago, I say thank you for making your voices heard and for advocating a better future. We hear you.

4.10 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all parts of the economy: that was the call to action from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Without acting on it, we will miss our climate change targets and global warming will cause fundamental damage to our planet and the way we live our lives. So why is this the first time in two years that we are debating climate change on the Floor of the House of Commons? Why is this debate not being led by the Prime Minister herself? Why is not climate change at the heart of every major statement from this Government?

The IPCC has given us 12 years. The independent Committee on Climate Change has said that we are falling behind and not acting with enough urgency. The climate strike protestors, whom I visited in Bristol, are rightly demanding more radical and urgent action now. What has been the response? The response to the IPCC report was to write a letter to the independent Committee on Climate Change, asking for advice. We should have been amending the Climate Change Act 2008 by now to upgrade our climate change targets in line with the Paris accord. We should be setting out how on earth we are going to finance the huge investment needed in upgraded infrastructure, energy and food security and in the technologies needed to meet our negative carbon emissions in future.

Richard Benyon *rose—*

Darren Jones: I cannot give way because we are so short of time. That is the problem: it has taken two years for this issue to get to the Floor of the House, and we have four minutes—four minutes!—to deal with an issue of this enormity. There is no time at all to talk about how we will not be able to meet our electric vehicle targets without investment in the infrastructure system; no time at all to talk about the efficiency of energy use in our homes; and no time at all to talk about food security, agricultural reform or the need for investment in the energy network. That is completely unacceptable.

I do not think that climate strike protestors from my constituency will be particularly pleased with the idea that their Member of Parliament—and many other hon. Members here today—has only four minutes to deal with this issue. When will it come back to the Floor of the House? Will the Minister tell us in her summing up when we will have days' worth of debates to get into the issue of climate change?

There is a total lack of vision about the long-term risks. A world that is 3° warmer than pre-industrial levels is unimaginable yet is within the lifetime of my daughter. The United States and China—gone; Africa, southern Europe, the middle east, India, South America

[Darren Jones]

will be uninhabitable, based on models from universities. Refuge for the world will be focused on Canada, the United Kingdom, northern Europe, Scandinavia and Russia. Hundreds of millions of people will be displaced as climate refugees. The world will be dominated by Canada and Russia. Agricultural and food supply chains will be completely lost. This happens within the lifetime of people born in the past year or two, yet we have four minutes to talk about it.

How we live, what we eat, how we collaborate in a global community: how on earth will we meet the cries from the independent advisers, from the community, from young people, from the scientists—from everybody in the world who says we are not doing enough to tackle this problem? We have four minutes to deal with those issues.

We are talking about the future of our planet, the world that we want to live in and the role that this country must play, and it is all up for grabs. I stand in solidarity with those young people, the next generation, who took their time away from school to strike on this very issue and say that not enough was being done, and I say that this debate is not enough, although I congratulate the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing it. I look forward to the Minister's confirmation later of when more time—Government time—will be allocated to this important issue.

4.13 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Time is short for this debate and for the planet. I am going to speak up for the 3,000 young people who came out in Leeds two weeks ago on the youth climate strike and all the other thousands of young people who came out in every other town and city in the country. I spoke to those young people and said that I would come to the House and support their call for us to address the climate emergency. I call on the Minister today to say that the Government will declare a climate emergency as they would a civil emergency, because we are on the precipice of disaster.

NASA's latest measurement of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is 411 parts per million. The historic high for this planet is 300 parts per million in 325,000 BC. In 2005, it was 380 parts per million. We are on a trajectory towards the global extinction of humanity. The insects are the canary in the coalmine of our planet. There has been a 75% reduction in flying insects in Europe in the past 25 years. Where the insects go, we will follow. How are we going to tackle this scale of emergency?

We need a rapid programme of decarbonisation. We need to become a leader in decarbonised technology in this country and in Europe. We need a world in 2030, not 2050, that looks radically different from the world we have today, a world where petrol stations are as common as coaching inns, if we are to avoid climate disaster. We need electric vehicle charge points in every parking bay. All new houses need to be made in factories from airtight and energy-efficient timber. We need to harness the internet and open and smart data, so that everybody knows everything about their lives, from the quality of the air to the amount of carbon in their clothes.

This is the brave new world we need to aspire to. We do not need gradual change; we need a paradigm shift in our system. I call on us not to have a green new deal; I call on us to have a Marshall Plan for the environment across Europe and across the planet.

Vicky Ford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Sobel: Time is very short, so I am going to continue.

After the second world war, we got together and we rebuilt this continent. We need to rebuild a planet free of emissions. That needs to be our single, unifying goal. We need to readdress the COP process to that point. We need to re-energise our relationship with our European Union partners—I say that in the strongest sense—to engage and to create this plan. That is where we need to be. If we do not get there we are failing not ourselves, but our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. At the end of the century, they will look back on the Governments of the early part of the century and say, “They failed us. They did not do what was needed.” They will be looking at their own extinction—the extinction of our race.

4.17 pm

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this very important debate.

This surprisingly warm weather has been a pleasure for most of us this week, but I know I am not the only one who feels unnerved by it. We must be cautious about attributing every single extreme weather event to climate change, but the evidence of our senses, as well as what the vast majority of climate scientists tell us, is overwhelming. The Met Office has already warned that changes to our weather are unprecedented. In 2018, global carbon emissions, a key driver of global warming, reached an all-time high. We are going in the wrong direction.

It is difficult to know why political leaders have taken so long to address climate change when the public want them to, and it is impossible to comprehend why some are still wasting such precious time denying it. I am pleased that Bedford Borough Council has committed to declaring a climate emergency, but the older generation is really letting young people down on this issue. They have every right to be angry about the future that we shall pass on to them. Rather than criticising them for taking time out of school to protest on the biggest issue facing our planet, it is time we listened to them and shared their sense of urgency and alarm.

Sir David Attenborough stole the show at the World Economic Forum in January. He said:

“We are destroying the natural world, and with it ourselves.”

Many of my constituents were moved and compelled to write to me after the shocking scenes in “The Blue Planet”, which showed the impact of human activity on marine life and the extent of plastic pollution in our oceans. There is a huge appetite from the public to stop this.

I am pleased that the UK has signed up to the Paris agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, but we are a long way off achieving it. Tougher action is needed, which is why I

support the target of net zero emissions by 2050. The Government claim to support the target but that has not been followed up with action. The scale and scope of our policies to address climate change should be defined not by political compromises and unambitious targets but by what is necessary to keep temperatures within safe levels. I agree with Sir David Attenborough: unless we sort ourselves out now, we are dooming our children and grandchildren to an appalling future.

4.20 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I am very pleased to be co-sponsoring this important debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) on securing it, but why are we holding this hugely important debate only now? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones), I, too, would like to see this debate in Government time. Over the last year, we have had only two debates in Westminster on this hugely important issue. One was led by me and the other by my hon. Friend. That is not good enough. We would like to see more of this and more action from the Government in this place.

My Westminster Hall debate was on the UK Government's response to the UN climate change conference in Katowice, and it was well attended by Members here today, but I was baffled by the lack of an oral statement from the Secretary of State on what was achieved at COP last year. That is even more perplexing when we think that it was the first UN climate change conference since the release of the deeply worrying IPCC report, which, as we all know, was hugely stark.

One of the iconic images from the conference was that of the teenager speaking out on behalf of her generation, pleading for more action. It is our children who will bear the brunt of our lack of action. I am really pleased that the climate strike from just a couple of weeks ago has spread to more than 14 countries worldwide. I am proud to have supported that strike in Cardiff the other week, supporting our young people in having that voice and being with my 15-year-old daughter there, and I am proud that she wanted to have that voice.

In the decade since COP 15 in Copenhagen, there has been an unwritten agreement between countries and Governments that we must pursue climate action, but only in so far as it does not jeopardise our neoliberal economic model or damage any incumbent interests. Despite its success, the Paris agreement did not fundamentally change the situation. It was non-ambitious and non-binding enough to get signed, but I am pleased that it did send a signal to the world that we have to have a very clear trajectory towards a zero-carbon economy.

As I speak, the UK is currently on course to miss its carbon reduction targets and the legally binding 15% renewable target by 2020. It has sold off the Green Investment Bank and scrapped the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and it must take much more action to meet those targets. If we crash out of the EU with no deal—I am pleased to see that the Minister has done what she can to try to prevent that—our environmental record will be even worse, with just a race to the bottom and the loss of EU environmental legislation, which covers roughly half the UK's emissions reductions targets.

We need to get working on this, but we need to do so now. We need to see action across every single Department. Every Minister should be responsible for achieving those carbon emissions cuts. They should be taking action on climate change, and as I said in my Westminster Hall debate, we need to

“think more like the Welsh”—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 443WH]—

like the Welsh Government, leading the way on climate change and leading the way for future generations.

4.24 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and particularly to my involvement with community renewable energy and solar energy.

Many colleagues have talked about the huge challenge that is climate change, and they were absolutely right to do so. We must act much more quickly. If we are to do that, however, we must ask what is the real barrier. Of course there are political barriers, whether they are represented by President Trump in America, President Bolsonaro in Brazil or Brexit, and we need to break them down. There are also some technological barriers, such as the need to improve the efficiency of storage, although that is coming along much faster. But the biggest barrier now, in my view, is finance. We must change the way in which our financial system works.

Fossil fuels have been the energy leader for 200 years, so they have seeped throughout our society and our economies. Whether we are talking about the City, our banks, our pension funds or hedge funds, fossil fuels are entwined with their investments in a very deep, profound way. In our stock markets, we have Shell and BP, which are very successful companies, but a significant part of someone's pension may well come from the returns expected from a BP or a Shell investment. That is the challenge that we face. If we are to green our economy, we really must get serious about finance.

In my experience—both my experience as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and my experience of working in the renewables sector—too many of our financial institutions do not really get the fact that investments in renewable energy can be fantastic; nor do they get the fact of climate risk, which will cause investments in fossil fuels to fail. The so-called carbon bubble will burst and people who thought they would get returns from fossil fuels investment will have their fingers burnt, and that could affect the pensioners of the future.

Alex Sobel: Does the right hon. Gentleman regret signing off the Hinkley Point nuclear power station? Surely that will be a stranded asset in the future.

Sir Edward Davey: No, because Hinkley Point is a low-carbon asset—and I did not actually sign it off; I did the heads of terms agreement. It was the current Government who signed it off. We could have a discussion about nuclear, but the difference between Hinkley Point and the fossil fuels investment to which I am referring is that Hinkley Point is low carbon.

The real issue that I am trying to bring to the House's attention is the huge number of vested interests in the fossil fuels sector that seep throughout economies

[Sir Edward Davey]

and finance. If we are to be really radical, we need to decarbonise capitalism. We need new regulations and new laws to change the incentives completely, so that any investor will need to factor in climate risk. Let me give some practical examples.

I hope to meet the Governor of the Bank of England in due course. It will be a private meeting. What I want to say to Mark Carney—whom I consider to be a hero in this area—is that I think the Bank of England should include in its reserve requirements a requirement for banks to be weighted according to how carbon-intensive their investments and portfolios are. That will encourage banks to lend to green initiatives.

I want to ensure that the pension regulators are looking at the pension portfolios and determining which are low carbon and which are high carbon, and supporting the low-carbon initiatives. I want to ensure that, through corporate governance, there is complete disclosure in a company's accounts and its assets and liabilities of how much of that involves fossil fuels, so that investors can decide whether they really want to invest in a company that is so exposed to carbon risk. I want to ensure that if a company wants to be listed on the UK stock exchange, it must be transparent and disclose how much of its activities will be in fossil fuels.

I want a new treaty to back up the Paris treaty. I would call it a fossil fuels non-proliferation treaty. It would be a global treaty, and it would say, "We have enough fossil fuels. We do not need any more. In fact, we will not be able to use those that we have." That is the sort of radical change that we need if we are to tackle climate change. This is not just about the policies in this country, although we have made some real progress.

Anna McMorris: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that UK Export Finance should also consider ceasing to invest in the fossil fuel infrastructure throughout the world, on which it is largely focused?

Sir Edward Davey: I do agree. I do not think the position is quite as the hon. Lady has described it—I think that that investment has been dramatically reduced—but it still needs to be go down further.

Anna McMorris: We are looking at this in the Environmental Audit Committee, and that is not the case. The investment has gone up hugely, and we think the Government need to put a stop to it.

Sir Edward Davey: If the investment has gone up, I am very alarmed about that and will want to read the Committee's report in due course.

The agenda I am putting to the House tonight is radical. It would mean that we needed a system-wide review through the Bank of England, the Prudential Regulation Authority, the Financial Conduct Authority and others to make sure we have the right incentives and regulations in our country to change this 200-year relationship between finance and fossil fuels.

The climate change agenda is also significant globally. If we get this right, we can take a major step forward in tackling human poverty, because we will bring electricity to rural Africa and rural India, and the children and families there will have the light and be able to keep

their food and medicines cool, to educate themselves better and to be part of the global economy. So this is one of the biggest ways, particularly through solar energy, that we can tackle poverty. But it is even better than that: this is a way of promoting peace and reducing conflict and tensions throughout the world. Fossil fuel control is held by a small number of men in our world: Vladimir Putin, the dictator in Venezuela and so on. If we can get renewable energy, we can take the power away from those people and give it to all people—to all humanity.

4.30 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) and other learned Members on this issue.

One of my constituents wrote to me about climate change recently. Monica was concerned that her "children would never know about the beautiful natural world that is ebbing away", and she told me:

"We need to act fast."

Monica is 10 years old and I had the pleasure of meeting her at St Mary's Primary School the other week. She showed me around each class in the school; they all asked me questions and every group asked some about global warming. Children care about this; my 12-year-old's most frequent question to me about politics is why in this House we spend so much time on Brexit and so little on climate change, so it gives me especial pleasure to speak today, and I hope he is listening.

In High Peak we are seeing the impact of climate change on the moorland of the Peak District national park. Not only was there the largest wildfire on Saddleworth Moor after the driest June on record last year, but even in February we are seeing wildfires. It is a sign that parts of our peat moorlands are drying deep down.

Peatlands are among the best carbon sinks on the planet. In England we store 580 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in our peat, but degradation caused by industrial use, climate change and fire means that those peatlands are releasing 3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

I pay tribute to Moors for the Future and the moorland indicators of climate change initiative, which brings secondary school children up to the moorlands from our towns and cities to measure the impact of climate change on our peatlands. They are one of the best indicators.

Moors for the Future has EU funding until 2020 but after that it needs a long-term commitment to investment, and I call on the Minister to look at this and make a commitment to its vital work. Alongside beautiful moors, between Manchester and Sheffield we have seen cuts to our bus services and trains, with little opportunity for off-road cycling. People in my constituency are obliged to drive, and not just our cities but even towns in the countryside like Glossop and Tintwistle are seeing air pollution exceeding safe levels. But we have only one public electric vehicle charging point in High Peak. Electrification by 2040 is just too late.

Our bus services are still being cut, and there are cuts to commuter trains, giving my constituents little choice. But I pay tribute to all my constituents in Sustainable Hayfield, Transition Buxton, Transition Hope Valley

and Transition New Mills who are working locally on developing sustainable transport and energy solutions, on tackling plastic, on refillable water bottle schemes, on locally grown food and on the first community-owned hydroelectric scheme in the UK in New Mills. Our communities are acting, but they see us in Parliament doing little, as colleagues have mentioned. We cannot just pay lip service. We have great recycling bins with big stickers on, but all the rubbish from Parliament goes into the same bags. We must commit to doing, as well as to just talking. We must commit to zero carbon by 2050 and to reinstating the Department of Energy and Climate Change, which will offer a much better opportunity for Conservative Members than fishing, I am sure. This will help us as a Government but it will also create a better society.

4.35 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George), and I congratulate the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this long-overdue debate. Surely we have seen evidence of global warning this month in the record high temperatures for February, as well as in the disturbing reports of melting polar ice caps. Collapsing ice at the poles is a powerful indication of a warming world.

Tackling carbon emissions is absolutely a matter of urgency, and achieving the necessary emissions reductions for the world that we leave to our grandchildren will require the collective efforts of all peoples and decision makers on a global scale. Young people recently walked out of lessons at their schools in protest against what they see as the lack of interest in and commitment to green issues. Their action showed how aware communities are of this important topic. We as individuals must all do our bit and show leadership, and our debate on our UK carbon emissions is an important step. We must explore cross-party support and progress towards net zero carbon emissions.

The threat of climate change is more real than ever, and it absolutely must be taken seriously. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change has estimated that to obtain net zero carbon emissions, or carbon neutrality, global society will have to balance its carbon emissions with carbon sequestration by 2050. Failure to limit global warming to 1.5° or less could result in sea levels rising as well as the occurrence of natural disasters such as extreme weather conditions. This in turn would result in the mass displacement of people and the disappearance of entire ecosystems such as tropical coral reefs.

The UK signed up to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 when the EU ratified the Paris agreement in 2016. Under the Climate Change Act 2008, the UK Government committed to an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Under their 2017 clean growth strategy, they pledged to work with other countries towards achieving net zero carbon emissions in the second half of this century. The Government have also promised to use legislation to provide legal clarity that this target will be met at an appropriate point in the future. I would like some clarity on that point. Are these plans working?

The Scottish Government's 2018 Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill raised their commitment on carbon emission reductions to

90% by 2050, a target that the UK Government Committee on Climate Change currently considers to be at the limit of feasibility. In March 2016, the then United Nations climate change secretary, Christiana Figueres, said that Scotland's progress on climate change had been "exemplary to the world". We have now established a climate change Bill that will set new statutory targets for reduction by 2050, moving into a net zero emissions target as soon as possible. Scotland has long been recognised for punching above its weight on tackling climate change. Roseanna Cunningham, the Cabinet Secretary, has stated:

"To be successful, we must create an environment in which industries can transition smoothly to a low or zero-carbon future."

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mc Nally: I am very sorry, but I do not have time.

It is worth mentioning that a new stock exchange is opening next week in Scotland, and I am delighted to have been invited to the opening in Edinburgh. Bourse Scot is focusing on social and environmental companies. This new social and environmental exchange will involve rules on the activities of firms, with the staff requiring participating firms to prove what they claim about social and green outcomes. Bourse Scot hopes that the renewables industries will see it as a place to raise funds. For me, the opening of that stock exchange plainly demonstrates that there is long-term certainty and confidence in Scottish ambitions across all parties, and that Scotland is indeed a centre for excellence. I know this cannot be achieved overnight, as it is a generational challenge. We are moving in the right direction, and the quicker we move in that direction, the better.

I think the UK Government are politically and geographically broken. If we want to change the world, we must follow the girl who was mentioned earlier and get busy in our own little corner, and Scotland is doing exactly that.

4.39 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): This has been a tremendously good, positive and applied debate, and, from my 21 years in this House, I cannot say that has always been the case. I have attended virtually every climate change debate in this House, and it is shocking that we have not had one for two years.

Those previous debates were usually characterised by a clique of climate change deniers who regularly attempted to derail them. This debate is perhaps a reflection of where we have got to now. I thought that one of the last remaining serious climate change deniers in the House, the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), would take part, but it turned out he wanted to talk about Welsh tourism, which is a mercy.

We are all together this afternoon, perhaps for the first time, when it is almost too late. Everything that has been said by climate scientists, and that has been said in all the debates I have been involved in during my long time in the House, is coming true and proving to be right. We should perhaps talk not about a climate change debate but about a climate is changing debate.

I am not smug about the fact that what I was saying in our previous debates has been proved right, and what those climate change deniers were saying has been proved

[Dr Alan Whitehead]

wrong; it scares me stiff. We are now at two minutes to 12 on the climate emergency before us. I thank all the hon. Members who, in different ways, have contributed this afternoon on that central point.

I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for securing this debate, and I thank the hon. Members, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) and for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), who pointed out just how little time we have had for these debates. When we get the advice of the Committee on Climate Change on a net zero future, it might be appropriate for the Minister to make sure that we can have a debate in Government time, for at least half a day—or a whole day, if we want to be ambitious—on that advice and its implications and ramifications so that hon. Members are allowed the proper time to put across what they want to say about this climate emergency and what we need to do to deal with it.

I am scared stiff because I know that the ability to do anything about this climate emergency is on our watch. Members of Parliament over the next 12 years, as mentioned in the IPCC report, will have to get their act together on climate change or forever miss the opportunity to do anything about it.

Mr Sweeney: My hon. Friend is making an important point about the time constraints, and about how this House has not done nearly enough to debate this issue. Does he agree it is critical that other Government Departments, not just BEIS, focus on the implications of climate change, particularly the Department for Transport, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Defence and so on? We must understand the impact those Departments have on Government policy in shaping a holistic approach to policy making across all parts of Government.

Dr Whitehead: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is that the action we need to be taking in this House for the future must not just be the province of one Department, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) pointed out. It needs to be something that seeps to the core of every part of government and of this House. Everything we do must be judged by whether we are making progress on reducing carbon emissions and fighting the effects of climate change or whether it is going in the opposite direction.

In that context, I want to draw the House's attention to what we have done so far and what we are—we hope—going to do for the future, because that is crucial in terms of moving from our current target of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 to that net zero target. Of course a net zero target does not just mean doing things that reduce carbon; it means doing things that actually put carbon back in the ground. We are talking about negative carbon emissions, as well as positive carbon emissions. It means planning a whole different system of doing things, as my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) and for Cardiff North drew attention to. We need to do things in different ways in order to make that change in our economy, so that we have a permanent low-carbon, sustainable economy for the future.

Sir Oliver Letwin: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off that point, would he agree that one of the more encouraging signs is that technology is being developed for carbon reuse, which does not necessarily mean putting it back in the ground, but at least recycles it?

Dr Whitehead: Yes, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct about that; using carbon cycles so that they are as long as possible and in the end the carbon is sequestered is a good way of ensuring that we make our economy as circular as possible, in addition to sequestering the carbon arising from it.

We have been given the Government's clean growth plan. It was set out in response to the fifth carbon budget requirements, which, among other things, require us to get our carbon emissions down by 57% from 1990 levels by the end of the fifth carbon budget. I have to say to the House that the clean growth plan fails to do what it says it is going to do about the fifth carbon budget. Indeed, it suggests that we may be as much as 9.7% over the targets for the fifth carbon budget in terms of the things that the Government are setting out to do. So absolutely the first thing we need to do in considering our progress towards zero carbon is to fundamentally make over, that clean growth plan so that it actually works. Not only must it achieve the terms of the fifth carbon budget, but it must go beyond that so that we are ready and setting ourselves up for the advice we are going to get from the Committee on Climate Change as to how we get to zero carbon. I invite the Government to start work today on getting that clean growth plan reorganised so that it can meet the terms of net zero when they come to us. Were the Government to embark on that strategy, they would have the full support of the Opposition in making that work and making sure that we are ready for net zero, and not running along behind, as we have for so many years in this House since the climate emergency started to come upon us.

4.48 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): I wish to say a genuine thank you to all Members for coming here on a one-line Whip Thursday, after a long and hard few weeks of Brexit debates. Again, I wish to pay tribute to the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing what has been a really high-quality debate. We have heard some excellent speeches and suggestions, and I will try to pay tribute as I go through some of the main points raised. Of course, there were so many good questions that I am not sure I will be able to respond to all of them, but if any colleague wants to stop me to ask me about specific points, or to put them in writing, I will be happy to address them.

What a joy it was to debate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) said, something that will affect us all for the next 30 years, rather than the next three years—something that is so fundamental to the way we live our lives that it deserves much more time in this place and much more discussion outside it. I would be delighted to spend many more hours in this place, on the Front Benches or wherever, debating these issues.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I entirely agree with everything the Minister just said about the importance of this issue. Perhaps she would agree that, given that an

opinion poll has found that 72% of the public are either very concerned or fairly concerned about climate change, if we spent more time talking about it here, that would be welcomed by them as well as by us.

Claire Perry: I entirely agree. Many groups out there will be waiting to see what we say today, including those young people who took to the streets with great energy and verve. It was an absolutely amazing thing to see. I note that in applying for this debate the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon said she was

“very supportive of them but as a teacher”

a little concerned

“because it would really have annoyed me in my physics classes”.

I am afraid she probably would have been cross with me had she been my teacher, because I fear I would have been out there with them at their age—although, of course, I was studying geography and meteorology, not physics.

I wish to address a few points: first, where we are; secondly, why we need to do more; and thirdly, why this is so incredibly important. By the way, I welcome the really collegiate cross-party tone of the debate. There were some political digs, but I am not going to get into political point scoring, because unless we pull together on this, we will not make progress. This has to be a cross-Government, cross-party, global initiative, and we need a lot more consensus than we have had.

Following the previous debate, let me say happy St David's Day for tomorrow to the very many Welsh Members. As Members representing all four nations in this great group, we can take pride in the UK's record on tackling climate change. We were among the first to recognise the problem. Indeed, Mrs Thatcher spoke about the impact of human activity on the climate at the UN in 1989; Sir Nicholas Stern's incredible work in 2006 laid a pathway for how we had to think about the problem; and we used cross-party strength in this place to pass the world's first Climate Change Act 10 years ago.

I am one of probably a tiny number of Ministers who has statutorily binding carbon budgets, given to us by the CCC and upon which we have to agree, and who has then to defend those budgets and the record on them to the House of Commons. It is worth noting, as others have, that we are on target to drop our carbon emissions by 57% by 2032. Of course, we need to get to 80% by 2050. Some will say that we have not yet set out exactly how we are going to reach those targets. We published the clean growth strategy—the most comprehensive document I have ever seen from a Government—setting out policies and proposals to decarbonise right across our economy. I am happy to say that we have delivered almost all the action points and commitments that we have made so far. We know that we have to do more and we will do more. We have to go further than those budgets, which is the point of the debate.

Sir Oliver Letwin: My right hon. Friend and I have often discussed this question, but I hope she will acknowledge that the provision of the basic charging infrastructure on the trunk road network now proposed by Next Green Car would be a huge step forward. If we can cure range anxiety for electric vehicles, we might see a tipping point, which would have a big effect, even on

the things mentioned by the former Energy Secretary, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey).

Claire Perry: My right hon. Friend makes the point well about some of the things that the Government can actually do. So much of this is about a combination of the public and the private sector working together, but there are absolutely parts of the equation on which the Government can and must lead, such as through legislation and incentives. I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab) *rose*—

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) *rose*—

Claire Perry: I will of course try to take as many interventions as I can, but I just want to respond to some of the points made in the debate.

After the very startling and worrying IPCC report, we were the first developed country to ask for advice on how we would achieve that target. We have asked how, by when and how much it is going to cost. We have to be pragmatic about this: we have to recognise the need for urgency, but we cannot bring forward policies and proposals that do not command the support of the people we represent. We can see just across the channel what happens when we do that.

Sir Edward Davey: While the Minister is talking about the targets and the request for the CCC to comment on net zero, will she say whether it will be possible for the CCC to recommend a new net zero target for 2050, following her letter?

Claire Perry: The current advice is that it is not technically possible, so I have asked the CCC to set out clearly when it thinks we should be able to achieve it. I look forward to sharing that information with the House and think a debate would be appropriate.

This is about not just actions, policies and words, but delivery. As others have noted, PricewaterhouseCoopers has said that the UK is at the top of the G20 leader board in this space. Since 1990, we have cut emissions by more than any other developed country—as a proportion of our economic growth. That is important because the best way to cut emissions is to have recessions, which is not a good thing for the prosperity and the future of our constituents. It is extremely important therefore that we recognise and celebrate that progress, but that we commit ourselves to do more.

Caroline Lucas: My question really is what would our position look like on that league table if we were to take into account consumption emissions. My general point is that, although the Minister says that we cannot go faster than the country as a whole wants us to do, there is also a role for Government to show real leadership. The way to do that is to make sure that social justice is at the heart of the approach to climate. That way, we will not have the problem of the gilets jaunes.

Claire Perry: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Of course the role of Government is to set ambition and to lead. I wish to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and

[*Claire Perry*]

Pinner (Mr Hurd), who was in his place earlier. He, along with many other Members in this place from all parties, has contributed so much time and ingenuity over the past few years to come up with these policies. I accept the hon. Lady's point about the calculation, but that is the basis on which that chart is calculated. The consumption emissions of all countries are not necessarily allocated. The point is that, on that basis, we have led the world, and that is something on which we should absolutely focus.

I will talk about some of the other things that we have delivered—things, I hope, that the hon. Lady will feel pleased about for once. Last year was a record year for the generation of power from renewables. We were at 32%. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Lady is heckling like one of the gilets jaunes. I wish that she would listen and behave like the elder stateswoman that she could be. We have had the world's first floating offshore wind platform in operation. We have set out an auction structure for offshore wind. [*Interruption.*] Offshore wind is rather important in decarbonising our energy. We also had the first set of coal-free days in our energy generation since the industrial revolution, which has allowed us to take global leadership in the Powering Past Coal Alliance to encourage 80 other countries, states, cities and companies to operate in a coal-free way.

Thangam Debbonaire *rose—*

Claire Perry: I will give way briefly to the hon. Lady.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Minister very much for giving way. I know that she is very short of time. Although I welcome all of those achievements, does she not agree that, if we really are to meet the highest possible necessary carbon neutral targets, we need to invest more and more in renewables and less and less in fossil fuels?

Claire Perry: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. That is why I am about to bring forward the offshore wind sector deal that sets out how we will continue to drive that capacity. It is why we are spending almost £6 billion over the course of this Parliament—

Anna McMorris: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Claire Perry: I would just love to make some progress, because I have only three minutes left. I wish to leave some time for the hon. Lady who called this debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, the Minister has one minute left.

Claire Perry: In that case, having given way very generously, I will say this: I entirely accept the challenge of working further and faster. We must keep leading from the front so that we can avoid the climate catastrophe that others have been so eloquent about. We must find the new opportunities that this transition presents. We must repair our ecosystems so that we can look the next generation in the eye and say that we did what we had to do to protect our planet for their future. We protected planet A because there is no planet B.

4.58 pm

Layla Moran: I simply wish to say thank you so much to all those who have contributed to this incredibly important debate. I am pleased to hear from the Minister that, next time, Government time might be available to debate these things. I had a number of emails from other Members in this House who were desperate to be here, but who could not make it for other reasons. The fact that this is a Thursday afternoon and we have managed to more than fill the time suggests that this is a subject that everyone across this House finds incredibly important.

I will end by saying to those young people who got together and made us act: may this not be the last time that we do this, but the first of very many times that we come together to try to solve this problem for them.

Claire Perry: Oh!

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister is right to note that there are a few seconds left, which has surprised me given that this has been such a well-subscribed and well-ordered debate this afternoon. There, I have taken up the few seconds that were remaining. Thus, we are at the point where I can put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the UK's progress toward net zero carbon emissions.

Yemen

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Iain Stewart.)

5 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am most grateful to Mr Speaker for granting this debate. I am glad to see the Minister for the Middle East, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), present today, for he is a person of great knowledge and experience regarding this matter. I am also glad to see other colleagues in attendance.

In a world beset by multiple crises, Yemen continues to exhaust all comparisons as a political and humanitarian crisis. There has never been a conflict quite like it. In 26 days' time, we will be approaching the fourth anniversary of this gruesome and tragic war, when the first bombs fell near the city of my birth, Aden. By the minute, by the hour and by the day, Yemenis continue to die. Whether by air raids, landmines, starvation or illness, Yemenis from the north and the south are suffering unimaginable trauma, and are being killed.

Yemen holds that bleak title of the world's worst humanitarian disaster. The scorecard of shame brings tears to my eyes. Eighty-five thousand children have starved to death, 24 million people need humanitarian assistance, 3.1 million have been displaced and 60,000 have been killed since conflict began in March 2015. That is 294 each week, and 42 every single day.

Yemen is still suffering because, despite recent discussions and negotiations, in Yemen itself nothing has changed. When I meet and speak to Yemenis, they are crying out for peace. But they are asking searching questions of this Parliament and our Government: "Why is this still going on? How much more suffering can we take? And why is the world appearing to do nothing about it?"

This humanitarian situation is a tragedy. For six months, until only last week, there was absolutely no access to the Red Sea mills in the port of Hodeidah, which can feed up to 3.7 million people in a month. A UN report published just 14 days ago on 14 February reported that 14.3 million Yemenis are now in acute need. BBC News on 4 February revealed harrowing images of children starving; 10.3 million children do not know where their next meal will come from. Yet the war continues. Bombing runs—155 in January this year—are terrorising people, and destroying buildings and 1,000 years of Yemeni heritage.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for doing so much to highlight this cause; he is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the bombing of medical facilities—five medical facilities run by Médecins sans Frontières have been bombed since 2015—is a criminal act, and that medical facilities should never be a target in such a conflict?

Keith Vaz: I absolutely agree and I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for all the work that she has done on Yemen, keeping this issue very much alive in this Parliament and elsewhere. She is right that there is no excuse for bombing medical facilities.

In fact, 19,200 airstrikes have hit since those first raids in 2015. Violence is being perpetrated on all sides. A total of 267 civilians have died because of landmines

that are now hidden in the landscape of western Yemen. In January 2019, five charity workers were killed while trying to de-mine. There is no point in the UK Government generously pledging funds if the aid cannot actually reach the people of Yemen.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) for yet again bringing this subject to this House and for his tenacious pursuit of justice for the country of his birth. In addition to the extraordinary litany of human tragedy, just some of which he has reeled off, and the fact that, incredibly, it seems that no fewer than 80% of Yemeni people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, does he agree that there has also been a particularly worrying increase in gender-based violence in a country not best known for its women's rights? Aid agencies estimate that there has been a 63% increase in gender-based violence, including rape and sexual assault, during this conflict—just to add to the woes of the bombs, the famine, the disease and the warfare that is going on as well.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I pay tribute to him for his work in the all-party parliamentary group on Yemen. The last time I was in Sana'a, it was with him; he took some beautiful pictures of the wonderful heritage there. He is right: these figures on assaults are even more worrying. In the middle of all this war, there are still these assaults going on. They need to be addressed and they need to be contained.

Following the failure of the Geneva talks, the sides convened in Stockholm in December 2018. Two bodies were established, one to oversee the exchange of prisoners—the Redeployment Co-ordination Committee—and the other to monitor the agreement: the UN Mission to Monitor the Hodeidah Agreement. Critical was the establishment of a ceasefire in the governorate of Hodeidah; that would free a vital port and allow much-needed humanitarian aid into the country. But the peace talks appear to have stalled. The original deadline for troop withdrawals was 1 January 2019, yet agreement as to how to implement the first phase was made only on 17 February. Despite Stockholm, the most up-to-date figures suggest that 568 incidents of violence occurred in Hodeidah alone, along with six coalition airstrikes. I ask the Minister: on what date will the peace talks reconvene, and why do bombs continue to fall on Yemen during the peace process?

I thank the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for their efforts to support the peace process. The Foreign Secretary himself travelled to Stockholm—an indication of where his and the Government's priorities lie. I am also grateful to the Foreign Secretary for, earlier this month, meeting me and other members of the APPG: the hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who are in their places; the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman); my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg); and the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

A meeting of the Yemen Quad of the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates took place in Warsaw on 13 February. When is the next meeting of the Quad going to take place?

[Keith Vaz]

There have been only five meetings since 2015. They must meet every month until we have peace. These high-level meetings must be followed with action on the ground. We need to ensure that the Yemen Government and Houthi rebels implement the agreements made in Warsaw and in Stockholm.

I understand that the Foreign Secretary is visiting Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates over the next few days. I welcome his efforts to keep pressure on and maintain dialogue with those key countries in the region. I urge him to go to Yemen during that time. What better message could we send our allies and the Yemeni people than to have the British Foreign Secretary himself present in the country and, subject to security considerations, opening a diplomatic presence in Sana'a and Hodeidah? The work of the Yemeni ambassador to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Dr Yassin Saeed Noman, has been important in maintaining our dialogue with the Government in Yemen and President Hadi, who is in Riyadh. I hope that those strong links will continue.

The United Kingdom has long been one of the greatest financial backers of Yemen's relief effort. That includes £175 million in 2018-19 and £2.5 million for the functioning of the United Nations civilian coordinator's office, including to assist in de-mining efforts. The £200 million funding announced by the Prime Minister on Sunday 24 February in Sharm el-Sheikh with the Minister for the Middle East, who was in Egypt with her, brings the total amount that the United Kingdom has pledged to £770 million.

But pledges of financial support alone will not feed the victims of this conflict, nor provide the medical help they need, unless the money is spent. We are horrified to hear reports of executions. The Lords International Relations Committee has published a devastating report suggesting that UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia may have been used in Yemen. If that is true, it is a negation of our international obligations.

I commend again the work of the United Nations, the Security Council and special envoy Martin Griffiths for bringing forward resolution 2451 on 21 December 2018 and resolution 2452 on 16 January 2019. Earlier this week, the UN raised \$2.6 billion in Geneva at its annual high-level pledging conference, but to the people of Yemen—those who are starving and dying—that is Monopoly money. Around \$8 billion has been raised over the past decade, since Prime Minister Gordon Brown's first pledging conference, but where has the money gone? Where has it been spent, and where is it being held? Since this week's pledging event, 126 people have died in Yemen.

I am glad that the pledging conference has brought attention to this crisis. Daily, we see individuals and celebrities appealing for financial support on behalf of the Yemeni people. I want particularly to thank Eddie Izzard—who, like me, was born in Yemen—as well as Michael Sheen and our recent Oscar winner Olivia Colman, who have made appeals for Yemen over the last few weeks and who speak in their campaigns for the silent of Yemen.

At last, parliamentarians in other countries seem to be paying attention to Yemen. The US Congress passed House joint resolution 37 on 14 February, calling for an

end to American involvement in the Yemen conflict. Congressman Ro Khanna from California, in particular, and Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont have been instrumental in maintaining pressure in the United States. It would be good if President Trump could follow their lead and personally participate in these peace discussions.

In Paris in November 2018, at the first inter-parliamentary conference on Yemen, along with Sébastien Nadot, the Assemblée Nationale Member for Haute-Garonne, the APPG and the Assemblée Nationale brought together MPs and activists from across Europe. Following our conference in Paris, a petition was put forward calling for an end to the war in Yemen, which has been signed by 7,600 people.

The next inter-parliamentary conference on Yemen will take place in May in Edinburgh, hosted by the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife and the hon. Member for Glasgow Central, who is the secretary of the all-party group. I extend an invitation to the Minister of State to attend that meeting in Edinburgh and join parliamentarians from Europe and all over the world.

Today, we will send a letter, co-signed by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), to the Foreign Secretary, urging him to keep Yemen as his top priority and to maintain pressure on our allies for immediate peace. I hope others will sign it. The all-party group is having a meeting next week on the rule of law in Yemen, and on 19 March, just a week before the bloody war's anniversary, a meeting on the humanitarian situation.

This is what we want the Minister to commit to tonight: we need an immediate ceasefire—the bloodshed has gone on for too long—and we need a date for the next peace talks. Stockholm was a breakthrough, but it was only the beginning, and it needs to be implemented. When will the next round of talks take place? They need to happen now.

I commend the aid agencies, such as Oxfam, the International Rescue Committee, Médecins sans Frontières, CARE International, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children, which have provided food and medicines. They have food and medicines waiting at the border, but they cannot access the country while there is fighting around the vital entry points. They are coming to Parliament in 10 days' time. Without them, so many more Yemenis would have died. The United Kingdom Government must work unceasingly with international partners to allow immediate and comprehensive access for the aid agencies to ensure that humanitarian support can reach those most in need. This Parliament, this Government, our country must lead the world movement for peace in Yemen. There is no point holding the pen for Yemen if we do not use it.

I want to end by quoting Amani, a young Yemeni woman currently living in Yemen who wrote this poem:

“Three years have passed and
an English newsreader told
me home was only
a lost young man holding
his Ak47, with no shoes.
But the shackled arms,
malnourished hips stare
into the distance and arcs

of bones screech waiting
 for food parcels to arrive
 and slouching shoulders
 sitting with an empty
 stomach it growls, hoping
 war could speak, it would
 chop it's tongue, loose it's
 limbs and hide under the
 rubble shattered in regret.
 Three have passed and counting
 You watch your home
 collapse to its ground,
 the same ground your
 fathers fed this soil with
 their blistered hands.
 The same ground that
 raised you, fed you and
 taught you to stand
 up straight.
 Three years have passed and counting
 You ask yourself, 'Do they know
 who suffers the most?'
 The people in-between.
 The ordinary lives.
 The survivors.
 The forgotten people,
 The forgotten Yemen."

I beg the Minister to spend every working moment in the Foreign Office keeping Yemen at the top of his agenda. I yearn to return to the country of my birth, to the happy times I spent with my parents and sisters, and to take my son and daughter and wife with me. To do this, we need to stop the bombing, save the children and prevent this beautiful country from bleeding to death. It is in our hands.

5.18 pm

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): I thank the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) for securing this debate. I am very grateful to him and to all the members of the all-party group on Yemen for their ongoing work and commitment to ending this devastating conflict.

The right hon. Gentleman accurately and emotionally describes the horror of the background to this war. While he is here, while the all-party group is here and while Foreign Office Ministers are here, Yemen will not be a forgotten conflict. I do not think anyone can articulate it any better than the right hon. Gentleman, who speaks both from practical political knowledge and a relationship with Yemen that few others in this House have. It is beyond desperation to recognise that the complexities of this conflict, with all the agonies of the people whom the right hon. Gentleman described, do not allow for external actions and concerns to be, on their own, definitive in bringing this conflict to an end. Would that it were up to us to end it, and that we could.

Let me demonstrate what we are trying to do and update colleagues on developments in the political and humanitarian situation and on all UK Government actions to support the UN-led peace process, help the Yemeni people and bring about lasting peace. As the conflict approaches its fifth year, millions of Yemenis

are being subjected to appalling suffering. Today, more than 24 million Yemenis—a staggering 80% of the population—are in need of humanitarian assistance. The threat of famine remains, with almost 10 million people at risk of starvation, and that dire situation must be brought to an end.

The Government are clear that the only way to end the suffering of the Yemeni people is for the parties to the conflict to agree a political settlement. That has been difficult because of the lack of trust between them and the complexities of the conflict, about which the House has spoken a number of times. The UN-led talks in Stockholm were a great achievement, and they brought the parties to the conflict together for the first time in more than two years. However, time is running out for the people of Yemen, and that progress must now be mirrored on the ground. It is crucial that the parties implement the agreements to move us closer to the end of this crisis.

We have seen some progress. Since 18 December, the fragile ceasefire in Hodeidah has continued to hold, and there has been a general de-escalation by both sides around the city. Although imperfect, that ceasefire in Yemen is the longest since the conflict began in 2015. A nationwide ceasefire would have an effect on the ground only if it is underpinned by a political deal between the conflict parties, as we saw in Hodeidah. During the last meeting of the Redeployment Co-ordination Committee, the parties also agreed to an initial redeployment of troops away from the ports of Hodeidah, Ras Isa and As-Salif and from critical humanitarian sites around the city of Hodeidah.

Although there have been delays, the UN was able to access the Red Sea mills on Tuesday for the first time in more than six months. Those mills contain enough grain to feed more than 3 million people for a month, although some of it may be spoiled and the UN is assessing the damage. Why was that not done before? It was not done because the Houthis mined the area substantially and regularly, to prevent humanitarian workers from getting there. Some of the stuff has probably also been stolen, but that will be discovered only once the UN gets to those mills. We should be in no doubt about how some of the parties to this conflict have behaved, and the Houthis and Houthi-controlled areas have been the worst for that.

I commend the work of UN agencies—particularly the World Food Programme and its director, David Beasley, whom I met a couple of weeks ago in London—for the work they do, and the risk that all humanitarian workers in Yemen take in doing that work.

Tim Loughton: The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) mentioned a financial commitment of more than £700 million by the British taxpayer, which is phenomenal and generous. How much of that money has been spent, and how much has not been, simply because of some of the obstacles to aid going in that the Minister has described? What more can we do to speed up that aid getting to places where it is most needed?

Alistair Burt: I cannot give a precise figure, and the current UN pledging conference held in Geneva this week—the right hon. Gentleman referred to that—was seeking a further \$4 billion. A lot of money has been spent, but the figure is imprecise—I will provide an exact figure in due course. We give funding to the agencies,

[Alistair Burt]

but they cannot always get through and sometimes the grain is not available. Money has to be pooled to be used, but practical difficulties on the ground mean that straightforward easy accountability, and providing a profit and loss account on a regular basis, is more difficult. It is important to ensure that resources are there. The tragedy is that although, as Mr Beasley tells me, food resources have been there, we must keep up the interest in Yemen to ensure that resources exist to provide for more, and the difficulty is in getting it into Yemen.

I will put my brief to one side because I do not have time, but let me get to the practicalities of this issue. The right hon. Gentleman asked about process and when the next conference will take place. Martin Griffiths, the special envoy, has described a process of trying to encourage confidence between the parties, because confidence is extremely low.

I will be blunt about something else. There are people who want to keep the war going. Everyone in this place and in our country assumes that people want to end the conflict. Would it were so. People make money out of the conflict on the ground. If someone can secure a position of power and control the flow of goods, they can do well out of it. We have to make sure that it is no longer profitable for people to continue to wage war, and that requires people to have the confidence that others will not take advantage of them and that there are benefits to peace.

That is what Martin Griffiths is patiently working at. There is no easy timetable. It is not possible to say, “In three weeks, you must meet again and decide” so and so, because they will not. We have to work on a process to get people together and know that, when they do meet, they are prepared to make an agreement and stick to it, and that takes time. It takes much too long, but if it was a process in which we demanded people do things, we would not be where we are today.

Keith Vaz: What is the key blockage? I know that it is very complicated and there are lots of different factors, but is there one key issue? It was prisoner swaps before. Is there something else holding this up?

Alistair Burt: I do not think so. Actually, the parties are still discussing prisoners, but the fact that they are talking—through the UN envoy—is an advance on where we were. It is difficult, even impossible, to urge patience on the people about whom the right hon. Gentleman spoke so eloquently, but this will be brought to an end only by that gradual development of confidence between the parties—confidence that is so delicate at the moment.

We do what we can. The right hon. Gentleman rightly says that the Foreign Secretary is there this week with those involved in the coalition. I was there just last week. I spoke to the Government of Yemen in Riyadh, to the Saudi Government, to the UAE and to Bahrain. Ministers are constantly engaged in what we can do. We speak to those who have some opportunity to influence the Houthi as well—we do not speak directly, but we try to influence them. We raise all the issues that he did about the misery and the suffering of people. There is no part of this conflict that justifies the suffering of people, but we are constantly trying to do this, and we work through agencies to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman and the House can be sure that our political efforts will always be designed to support the work of the UN special envoy and to encourage progress. In conflict, as we know, there is weariness. It must be clear to all the parties that there is no military solution, but people who have established positions, including those involved in the coalition, want to make sure that Yemen does not become ungoverned space—a Beirut in Sana’a with Hezbollah available in empty space to conduct actions against Saudi Arabia—and we want to make sure that the Yemeni people can bring forward a political process. We are working on all this while also providing the economic and humanitarian aid he described. We will continue to do so.

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Minister for his efforts in this space. I am aware that Mark Lowcock, the UN relief co-ordinator, prior to the pledging conference, met women’s groups in Yemen. Can he tell me any more about what is being done to reach women in Yemen?

Alistair Burt: I remember some years ago—the right hon. Gentleman may remember as well—when we had that interlude after Ali Abdullah Saleh, and we looked at the national dialogue and at women’s opportunities in Yemen. It is a shorthand, but it is true: men cause wars and women finish them. The engagement of the women of Yemen will be particularly helpful. I have no doubt that when the political process gets going, they will be a key part.

I have one more minute and, with apologies to the House, will conclude simply by saying that the House can be assured that, as far as the Foreign Secretary and I are concerned, this issue is a top priority—the top priority—in the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, and it will remain so. We will continue to apply ourselves as much as possible.

With the House’s indulgence and just a few seconds left, I want to refer to the fact that this is Sir David Natzler’s last day in office. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, David—you look as if you do not want to hear it all again, but allow me. We go back a long way. Sir David refereed me a number of times in an all-party parliamentary group. We have known each other well over many years. The plaudits he received in the House from those much more eminent than I am a few weeks ago said it all about his devotion to the House of Commons and the work he has done on the public’s behalf. Speaking personally, I will miss him, and I am sure that the House will miss him and the work that he has done. We know that, both through him and those he represents in giving the best service to the House of Commons, we have been richly and well served. We wish him well in the future. Thank you, David.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): In adjourning the House, I will have one last word from the Chair as a final farewell to Sir David, who is sitting in his accustomed place for a final few moments. David, we know that you do not want to hear all this yet again, but it is because we will miss you very much. We wish you and Hilary all the very best.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 28 February 2019

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

First 1,000 Days of Life

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

1.30 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): We begin with the Select Committee statement. Dr Paul Williams will speak on the publication of the thirteenth report of the Health and Social Care Committee, “First 1,000 days of life”, for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call hon. Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Dr Williams to respond to these in turn. Members can expect to be called only once and their questions should be brief.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Sharma, for inviting me to address this Chamber, so that I can present the Health and Social Care Committee’s report into the first 1,000 days of life.

I have been studying and working in health for the past 27 years and I have concluded that if our society wants the most effective interventions to improve health, we must act in the period from conception to the age of two. That is because the seeds of health inequalities are sown during that time. Good social, emotional, physical and language development during that time is crucial to building healthy brains and children, and having a healthy society.

This week our report set out an ambition challenge to the Government and all our colleagues in the House. We want to kick-start the second revolution in early years services, as recommended by the Marmot review in 2010, so that our country can become the best place in the world for a child to be born. Building that kind of society drives me, not only as an MP, but as a father and doctor.

I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for letting me take the Chair of the Committee for this inquiry. It is typical of her generosity of spirit that she seeks to give opportunities to others. I hope that I have done justice to the chance she gave me. I thank my Committee colleagues—of all parties and of none—for their support and guidance during our inquiry. I thank our Health and Social Care Committee staff team, particularly Lewis Pickett, Dr Joe Freer and Huw Yardley, who played a crucial role in helping us to make this report a reality.

Almost all research into this subject demonstrates that our path in life is set during the crucial first 1,000 days from conception to the age of two. Healthy social and emotional development during that time lays the foundations for lifelong good physical and mental

health. Yet, our current political system invests a fortune in reacting to problems much later in life, leaving a gaping void where we should be warriors for a fairer and healthier society.

During the first 1,000 days of life, more than 1 million new brain connections are made every single second, and babies’ brains are shaped by the way in which they interact with others. However, more than 8,000 babies under the age of one in England currently live in households where domestic violence, alcohol or drug dependency and severe mental illness are all present. Over 200,000 children under the age of one live with an adult who has experienced domestic violence or abuse. Two million children under the age of five live with an adult with a mental health problem.

We know that many children who experience such adversity become happy and healthy adults, but adversity in childhood is strongly linked to almost all health problems and many social problems. Children exposed to adverse childhood experiences are much more likely to get heart disease, cancer and mental health problems than those who are not. Children exposed to four or more ACEs are 30 times more likely to attempt suicide at some point in their life, 11 times more likely to end up in prison and three times more likely to smoke as adults than those exposed to no ACEs. Our politics is currently failing some of these babies and other children who are born into families where poverty strongly affects their chance of achieving good health.

As part of this inquiry, our Committee read 90 submissions of written evidence and held three focus groups with stakeholders. I thank those who made superb contributions to our three oral evidence sessions. I particularly thank David Munday from Unison, Sally Hogg from Parent Infant Partnership and Viv Bennett from Public Health England for their guidance to me.

Our Committee was keen to reach outside Westminster for evidence. We hosted an online forum on Mumsnet, where we heard 80 stories from parents telling us about their experiences of pregnancy and early childhood, as well as their views on services. We visited the Blackpool Better Start project, run by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. We held focus groups with representatives from councils, clinical commissioning groups and charities from across the country.

We all know how austerity has affected our councils and the NHS over the last nine years, but we saw how a relatively small Big Lottery Fund investment had helped local authorities to redesign their services. Staff were able to take time to reflect. The extra money brought added capacity and outside expertise. We saw joined-up, effective collaboration between the council, NHS commissioners and providers, the voluntary sector and the police.

We also saw the importance of investing in long-term goals and service transformation, rather than just using money to firefight short-term challenges. We heard how having a one-stop shop for families helped to provide better support, and helped professionals to have better relationships with each other and to share information. We visited community spaces across Blackpool, including a library and a local park, which had been transformed by members of the local community, to make them more suitable for families with young children. We heard

[Dr Paul Williams]

about the importance of a father in a young child's life. Some fathers say that they lack parenting skills and other fathers felt that the system excluded them.

I firmly believe that we need to devote much more attention and protection to resources for this crucial period of life. There are many people across the political divide who share that belief. This is an area where politicians should be working together. It was very encouraging to hear that the Early Years Family Support Ministerial Group, led by the Leader of the House, was announced shortly after the start of our inquiry. That has the potential to take forward some of our Committee's recommendations. I will soon be meeting with the Leader of the House to hear about the group's progress.

Our inquiry has identified the need for a long-term, cross-Government strategy for the first 1,000 days of life, setting demanding goals to reduce ACEs, improve school readiness, and reduce infant mortality and child poverty. Our report recommends that the Minister for the Cabinet Office should be given specific Cabinet-level responsibility for the oversight of this national strategy.

We want communities, the NHS and voluntary groups to be led by local authorities, to develop their plans to bring this Government strategy to life, inspiring improved support for children, parents and families in their area. We think that a Government transformation fund should be established to encourage these different groups to come together, to pool their resources and deliver shared, agreed actions. We also think that a single nominated individual in each area should be accountable to the Government for progress.

Our report also calls for the existing, and actually very good, healthy child programme to be improved and be given greater impetus. It should be expanded to focus more on the whole family rather than just the child, begin before conception, deliver more continuity of care for families—something we found families really valued—and extend health visitor engagement beyond the age of two and a half, to ensure that all children become school-ready.

We heard from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and parts of the United Kingdom that had enhanced the healthy child programme. However, we also heard from too many areas where some of the contact with health visitors was just a letter, and we were told that 65% of families do not even see a health visitor at all after the six to eight-week check. That clearly is not good enough. Our report recommends that information sharing needs to be significantly improved. Information needs to be better shared between organisations so care can be better co-ordinated and the long-term impact of an intervention can be tracked and assessed.

Alongside that, we need a workforce strategy to address the reduction in health visitors. That does not seem to have been a deliberate strategy, but happened because local authorities were given the funds for the healthy child programme at the same time as they had their budgets cut. We also want the strategy to make sure that knowledge and skills are improved, especially knowledge of ACEs and the importance of using motivational interviewing techniques.

If we get this crucial 1,000 days of life right, it will have huge benefits for everyone in our society. As politicians, we should try to get it right not just because it makes

financial sense, but because every single one of us in Parliament has a moral responsibility to our country's children. Every child deserves the best start in life.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his excellent chairing of the inquiry, his drafting of the report and his speech. Children in their first 1,000 years do not have as much of a political voice as other lobby groups, but does he agree that when Governments face difficult decisions about spending priorities, spending money on those children makes more sense than spending money on older young people in higher education, many of whom are well-off and talented and will do perfectly well in the rest of their lives? The best investment is in those first 1,000 years.

Dr Williams: I agree with my right hon. Friend's proposition that investment at the beginning of life is likely to pay the greatest dividends, particularly in reducing inequalities. As politicians, we should represent all members of our communities, not just those who are old enough to vote or who choose to vote. There is an opportunity in the comprehensive spending review to make the case for long-term investment in that group of children.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his effective chairing of the inquiry, and for his powerful speech. I also pay tribute to the other Committee members and the wider Committee team for the excellent report. It is fantastic that it sets out effectively the importance of early intervention in the first 1,000 days if we are to make the greatest difference and have the greatest impact on reducing inequalities.

Will the hon. Gentleman join me in paying tribute to a group in my constituency, the Dartmouth Nurlings, for its work to support breastfeeding mothers through peer-to-peer support? Will he touch on the evidence about the importance of breastfeeding in the first 1,000 days of life, and how effective it can be? Will he also join me in hoping that we can reduce some of the fragmentation that means there is not a consistent level of support across the country? I hope that such groups will receive the support they deserve.

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Order. Hon. Members should keep their questions short.

Dr Paul Williams: I absolutely join the hon. Lady in commending the breastfeeding peer support workers in Totnes, and those in many other parts of the country—I have met some in my constituency, too. There is a common theme: when services are reconfigured and new services are put out to tender, the people who have devoted a lot of time and effort as volunteers can find themselves excluded. That is partly because of the nature of commissioning and tendering.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health gave us compelling evidence about breastfeeding. In the United Kingdom, we have some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the whole of Europe, and there are wide socioeconomic disparities. Investment in breastfeeding support is crucial.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I will pick up where the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), left off. I saw from

the report that there was extensive consultation with Mumsnet. Why is there not a more specific recommendation in the report for more comprehensive breastfeeding support? What the hon. Gentleman says is correct, but it would have been good to see it in the report. During the Committee's visit to Blackpool, were the cuts to the Breastfeeding Network's star buddies programme mentioned? That service was lost in 2017.

Dr Williams: I thank the hon. Lady for those questions. One of the Committee's early reports of this session was about childhood obesity. We made specific recommendations in that report that we have not necessarily repeated in this one.

We saw many wonderful things in Blackpool. We did not learn about the specific service to which the hon. Lady refers, but we did learn that many services have come under a lot of financial pressure. Even though there was some Big Lottery investment for transformation, services still needed to be cut, which sounds counterintuitive.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for conception to age two—first 1,001 days, which is slightly more long-term than the first 1,000 days of life, but not nearly as ambitious as the first 1,000 years of life, to which the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) erroneously referred. I am also the chairman of the charity Parent Infant Partnership UK. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) for referring to Sally Hogg, one of our staff members, and Beckie Lang, our chief executive, who gave evidence.

I welcome the report, and particularly the ambitious way that the hon. Gentleman has described it as the “second revolution” in early years services. He is absolutely dedicated to the whole subject, which is so important, and which many of us have been banging on about for some time. I have two questions. First, a slight disappointment is the shortage of space given to the case for investment. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that, as we said in our all-party group report, “Building Great Britons”, the cost of child neglect is £15 billion a year, and the cost of maternal perinatal mental illness is £8.1 billion; that is £23 billion each year that we are spending on getting it wrong. Does he agree that we need to make the case that investment in this area will save substantial amounts financially and, more importantly, socially? The Treasury needs to understand that it is a serious investment case for the future.

Secondly, I approve of what the report says about locally delivered and joined-up services—a point that we put forward in our report, too. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is also a case, which we have made in the past, that that should be time-dated? Certainly, it should not take more than five years for every local area to have a united, joined-up, coherent and co-ordinated strategy for delivering this. It also needs to be measured, just as adoption scorecards were used at the Department for Education to measure the quality of the service delivery, so that it is not just a tick-box exercise. If we can get those two things right, the quality of the delivery will be much greater.

Dr Williams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his advice and input at the start of the inquiry, and for the work that he has done as the chair of the all-party group, which is about the first 1,001 days—what is a day

between friends? The economic case is exceptionally strong, and I am sure that the Minister has heard him make it eloquently. We all need to work together to make sure that we put the case to the Treasury. Ultimately, those spending decisions will have to be made in the comprehensive spending review; that feels like an opportune time.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we ensure that there is a timeframe, that the commitment is not open-ended, and that local authorities have plans within a short time. We learned in our inquiry that local authorities are often left to just get on with it. The Committee felt that there was a need for much more central control and measurement, and for more accountability by central Government.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) on setting the scene so very well, and I thank the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), and the other members of the Committee for all that they have done to produce what I regard as a very helpful and significant publication.

The Government do not provide financial or practical help for parents of multiples. That needs to change. If someone is blessed with twins, triplets or more, they are on their own. What consideration did the Committee give to addressing this issue, as we have many concerns in this Chamber about the two-child tax credit limit?

Secondly, each year thousands of parents are forced to go back to work when their baby is still critically ill, as provisions for maternity and paternity leave are inadequate. Again, what consideration did the Committee give to combating this? It is not unreasonable to extend statutory leave and pay for parents whose baby is admitted to neonatal care by a week for every week that their baby stays in hospital. I will just explain that, because I may have rushed through it as quickly as I can, in my usual quick way. The parent of a baby who is premature, and whose peers at four months are rolling over, will be told by a health visitor not to worry, as their baby is not considered to be four months old. However, the fact is that when it comes to wages and money, that baby is considered to be that age, and the cost is £2,256 per family, so there is a financial strain.

Thirdly and lastly, nearly three quarters of multiple birth families get no discount on their childcare costs, and for triplets those costs can be as high as £2,500 per month. It is quite clear that that is not sustainable; unfortunately, it usually rings the death knell for someone's career. What consideration was given to that issue in this report?

Dr Williams: I thank the hon. Member for so eloquently making the case on an issue that we did not look at specifically in the report; we did not look at multiple-child families. However, we made some comments in a more general way.

I will make two points in response. The first is that providing services to families is not enough. The whole environment in which they live, including the poverty that many families find themselves living in, is probably as important as the provision of services. The second point, which we make in the report, is that we should consider the impact on the early years in all policies as a principle—as a “health in all policies” principle—and

[*Dr Paul Williams*]

we should particularly consider the impact of all policies on the developing brain of children. We state that very clearly as a recommendation in our report.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) on chairing an absolutely transformative report, and I also congratulate all the other members of the Health and Social Care Committee for their excellent work in putting the report together. All too often, trauma has been excluded from the work that we have done; we as a society have not recognised the importance of trauma in a young child's life. I think trauma is at the root of many societal issues, as the hon. Gentleman says.

My question is on the work that the hon. Gentleman said had been done to involve fathers. What are the recommendations to involve fathers further, and to make sure that the system does not exclude them? Also, a number of grandparents, particularly paternal grandparents, who come to my surgeries feel excluded, but very much want to be involved in the first years, because those are the transformative years.

Dr Williams: I thank the hon. Member for the contribution that she has made to the Health and Social Care Committee, and to our thoughts in developing these ideas. We learned during our inquiry that fathers often feel excluded—systematically excluded. Much of the literature and many of the interventions are targeted at mothers. Culturally, services tend to push fathers a little bit further away, rather than bringing them in.

We recommend that the healthy child programme becomes a healthy family programme, and of course we know that every family is different. Families have different members; in some families, grandparents play a huge role, and in others, a lesser role. Our main recommendation is about a cultural emphasis, or a cultural change, in the healthy child programme, to make it a more holistic family experience.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on a very thoughtful—indeed, excellent—speech, and I look forward to reading the report in full. I am also very grateful to him for the work that he does on the all-party parliamentary group on the prevention of adverse childhood experiences.

I will talk a little about the service in my area through which mums who may be prone to post-natal depression are identified, even prior to conception. If men and women who are thinking of conceiving have a history of mental illness, or perhaps even fairly low-level depression

or anxiety, they are identified, and the mental health support team work with that couple throughout pregnancy and then after the child is born. I note that my hon. Friend identified mental health as one of the key issues in relation to adverse childhood experiences, but would he welcome a wider roll-out of this kind of work, to support children's first years?

Dr Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for emphasising maternal mental health. The Government have made significant progress in improving services, particularly for people with more severe perinatal health problems, but we still have too many cases where people are likely to develop mental health problems, even if those problems are not predicted, and who say they have mental health problems in the perinatal period, but services do not detect those problems. The National Childbirth Trust has estimated that perhaps up to 50% of mothers with perinatal mental health problems never get asked about their mental health. It is welcome that some areas of the country are responding to that issue in an assertive way and seeking to prevent perinatal mental health problems, rather than just detecting them early. However, we are left with a lottery, whereby some areas do this work exceptionally well, and other areas still have to catch up.

The idea of a local authority-led plan, with some central accountability, might help to bring the kind of services that are obviously being provided already in Dewsbury to many other parts of the country.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): May I, too, thank the Committee for its excellent report?

As Members are aware, tackling inequalities is part of my brief and, frankly, there is no more obvious place to start than in the very early years. If we can get all children a good start, we will not only be well on the way to making life better for them, but will, as the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams) has observed, make savings for the taxpayer, too. I encourage him to continue pushing this work. As he is aware, prevention is very much at the heart of this Secretary of State's agenda, and what we can do in the first 1,000 days is clearly a big part of prevention.

I note that the hon. Gentleman will meet the Leader of the House very shortly. He will find that she is very enthusiastic about and receptive to a lot of the themes that are discussed in this report, so my message—indeed, my plea—to him is this: please carry on with this work.

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): It is the end of the time for the statement and questions about it. Thank you all very much. We move on to the next debate.

Carrier Strike Strategy

1.58 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered carrier strike strategy and its contribution to UK defence.

It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. May I at the outset refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?

I thank the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), who are co-sponsors of the debate. We will each deal with one of a trident of points, namely the strategy for operating large carriers, which I anticipate I will largely deal with; the foreign policy element; and a celebration of the industrial impact of the large defence procurement policy being rolled out by this country. My overall ask of the Minister is for an overarching national carrier strategy, to deal with every aspect of this afternoon's discussion.

I will start by placing myself on the date spectrum, as it were. One of my earliest memories is of HMS *Hermes* returning from the Falklands war. I was very young at the time, but I remember very well that very large grey carrier nosing slowly into Portsmouth harbour, surrounded by many small ships welcoming it back. I was particularly struck by the fact that she was rusted and battered from having been at sea for months on end—battered but victorious at the end of that unique campaign. I well remember the white uniforms of the sailors lined up in perfect formation on the deck, and the noses of our little Sea Harriers, which in the freezing south Atlantic of 1982 had proved themselves to be an air defence system second to none.

HMS *Hermes* was laid down during world war two as HMS *Elephant*, the last of the Centaur-class of light fleet carriers. She entered service in 1957 as an angled-deck carrier before being converted into a commando helicopter carrier, and then being adapted again with a ski jump to operate the then new Sea Harrier, which was coming into service. We have not had large fleet carriers since the decommissioning of the Audacious-class HMS *Eagle* and HMS *Ark Royal* at the end of the 1970s, and the absence of the Royal Navy from the big carrier game has been sorely noted by the Navy and the nation.

The Sea Carrier was unquestionably a brilliant aircraft but was limited in its range and payload, while the RAF's land-optimised Harrier was severely limited by the absence of an air-to-air radar, meaning that it was never an adequate fleet air arm aircraft. While that Harrier-Invincible class concept—the combination of those small carriers and the vertical take-off and landing jets—was a potent combination in the unique circumstances of the south Atlantic, or in the north Atlantic as part of NATO groups hunting Russian submarines, there is no doubt that the inability to operate conventional fast jets of the nature of the Phantoms and Buccaneers that we lost at the end of the 1970s has severely restricted the power that Britain can exercise. The country has mourned that loss ever since, resulting in Governments of all colours seeking to restore that capability.

The years have shown that although the end of empire has meant a smaller country, it has not meant a retreat from expeditionary warfare. Every 10 years at least,

Britain has been involved in a capacity that has meant it has required expeditionary air power, often from sea. The country's desire to express power and its values has not diminished at any stage over the course of the past 40 years. In 1966, the country took the decision to run down the fixed-wing carrier fleet, which was part of a series of extraordinarily inept defence decisions taken during that time. I am not making a party political point, as all Governments were involved. Within 10 years, that decision was regretted. In a curiously British fudge, to get around the politics of why we were not having aircraft carriers anymore—except we were—the three Invincible-class carriers were called through-deck cruisers. That always amuses me; it strikes me as the most absurdly daft political euphemism imaginable.

Although the ambition to return to the big carrier game is long standing, the political chicanery around re-establishing carrier capacity has meant that the philosophical, strategic concept of what big carriers are for, how they are to be used, who with, and under what circumstances, is lacking. To a large extent, that culture has been lost, and we need to re-establish it. I suggest that now is the time to do so, because so much of carrier design throughout history has been British, be it the first carriers such as HMS *Furious* during the first world war; the angled flight deck that came in with the advent of fast jets at the end of the second world war and in the 1950s; or the ski jump in the 1980s. British technology and British ideas were leading the world, with others having no alternative but to follow. The same is true now: we are not the only people using the F-35B, but we are the only country in the world using it in combination with aircraft carriers designed from the keel up in order to support that aircraft. We are not the only people using the F-35, but I can say with total confidence that the aircraft carriers we are using are better than anyone else's.

The return of Britain to that big carrier game must also be accompanied by a strategic philosophy of what carriers are about and how they are to be used. For 20 years or so there has been a tacit, if not expressed, understanding that Britain will probably not act alone in another military conflict, or at least not a major one. We will act with allies, most likely with NATO, and hardly ever without the Americans offering support in one form or another. It is sadly inconceivable that we could undertake an operation such as the Falklands again. In 1982, we had approximately 60 destroyers and frigates. That taskforce comprised 127 ships, consisting of 43 royal naval vessels, 22 from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and 62 merchant ships. At the end of the 1980s, the Royal Navy had two aircraft carriers, seven amphibious ships, 13 destroyers and 35 frigates. After the 2010 strategic defence review, their combined number declined to approximately 19, and remains at roughly that level. In November 2018, there were 75 commissioned ships in the Royal Navy. Twenty of those are major surface combatants, including six guided missile destroyers—the Type 45s, which are primarily air defence destroyers—as well as 13 frigates and the new aircraft carrier.

Let us look at what a modern carrier group demands of a modern Navy, so that we can match what we are asking for with what we currently have available. We need to think innovatively about how to address what we need and what we have. No carrier strike group is a

[Robert Courts]

fixed body: its composition depends on the circumstances, what it is being asked to do, and the allies it is operating with.

If we look at the US Navy, we will see that a typical carrier strike group would include the supercarrier—of course, we would have a supercarrier—and the carrier air wing. The Americans would have one or two Aegis guided missile cruisers of the Ticonderoga class and a destroyer squadron with two or three guided missile destroyers of the Arleigh Burke class, which are roughly comparable—I stress the word “roughly”—to the Type 45s. That is a multi-mission surface combatant, used primarily for air defence, and it is air defence and under-surface defence with which I am particularly concerned. The Americans would have two attack submarines, which would be used to screen the carrier group against other submarines and surface combatants, and they would of course have support ships.

The Italians, who also have a carrier battle group, would have the carrier, two destroyers, two support ships and three amphibious support ships. However, they may have to accept that they would need to expand or to operate with allies if they were to go into a near-peer environment.

This is not a lament for lost naval power, although I make no secret of the fact that, as far as I am concerned, we do not spend enough on defence. Our armed forces are constantly being asked to do too much with too little, and I will not even start on the pastoral aspects of armed forces funding, the combination of pay and conditions and the overall offer, which is a serious issue for recruitment and retention. I do not have time this afternoon to start on that topic. I know that whatever the Minister can say publicly, he almost certainly agrees with me, and I accept that I should be making this plea not to him but to the Treasury. However, I ask the Ministry of Defence to give serious strategic thought to how the carriers are likely to be used and with whom, to ensure—putting it bluntly—that we have sufficient mass and capability to ensure that there is space to be able to sustain loss or damage, either during a conflict or in its immediate aftermath. If we do not do that, we will probably be unable to use those carriers at all.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is making a superb case. There is a great need for the supply chain to be in place in order to repair and build again, and I would like the benefits of that supply chain to be spread across the whole of the United Kingdom. I know that rebuilding and repairing can take place only in specific places, but none the less there is a need for that supply chain to be representative of the four regions. Does the hon. Gentleman think that such a supply chain is in place and that all the regions are getting the benefit of it?

Robert Courts: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that excellent point. I will refer to it in a little more detail shortly and I know that some of my hon. Friends will, too. I am keen to make the point that while the carriers are big grey ships that live in Portsmouth, they are not purely a Portsmouth matter. They have been built by constituents in all our areas and by companies across the whole United Kingdom. That has

sustained the building of the carriers, but we need to ensure that they can be maintained and kept in service for decades to come. For that reason—it is exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman made—I am asking the Minister to consider a strategy.

We need a whole-Government approach. It is no good us just looking at this purely as a Ministry of Defence issue. I am conscious that I am asking the Minister to do more than is in his power, but it has to be a cross-Government approach. We have to look at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to see whether we have the industrial base to ensure that the supply chain that built the carriers remains in place to sustain and maintain them in the years ahead. The hon. Gentleman's point is absolutely the point I wish to make.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He is making a brilliant speech. I am just thinking about the point he made earlier about the improbability or unlikelihood of us using the carrier fleet to act unilaterally. Although it might be difficult to imagine such circumstances, we cannot rule them out. There may be a time when we will have to act unilaterally, possibly on a smaller scale than the Falklands conflict. It is also not strictly easy to make a comparison between the carrier fleet today and what we sent to the Falklands. The capabilities are infinitely greater, even if it is smaller in size.

Robert Courts: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who must have read my speech in advance, because I will go on to make exactly that point. If he will forgive me, rather than respond directly to his intervention I will move on to the next part of my speech.

In the Falklands, as I have said, we had approximately 60 destroyers and frigates as escorts. Of those, eight destroyers and 15 frigates were part of the taskforce. In the course of that conflict, four of those were lost and many more were damaged, some very seriously. The initial concern is that a similar impact today would destroy about one third of the Royal Navy's air defence fleet, which would be unsustainable. Of course, we need more than the minimum deployed in case such damage takes place. I appreciate, as my hon. Friend said, that history never repeats itself exactly, and I entirely accept that the Falklands was a one-off, probably unique event. We would need many more ships available if we were looking to support an invasion force, as we were then, particularly when operating at the other end of the world, a long way from supply chains. I entirely accept that, and the parallels are not precise.

I accept entirely that the Type 45s are vastly more capable than the Type 42s that they replaced. It is also true that they are the best in the world as air defence destroyers. Essentially, they combine the Ticonderoga and Arleigh Burke mission platform into one. They are better than each of them on a platform-to-platform basis, but it is not always the case that we can do the job with fewer. The Type 42s were the cutting-edge destroyers of their day, but as soon as the Falklands war started, we found their weaknesses ruthlessly exposed, particularly with regard to the survivability of damage. That was so horrifyingly exposed in the case of HMS Sheffield. I simply suggest that there comes a point where we need mass.

Although I want us to be able to act unilaterally—I do not disagree with my hon. Friend at all—we need to consider that in most cases we will not be doing that, so I simply ask the Government to consider a strategy for that. I am instinctively very reluctant to follow a line of argument that says that because a single platform is more capable than what it replaced, we can make do with less. I say that simply because all these high-tech platforms—this is true across the whole military capability—can turn out to be horribly vulnerable in ways we do not expect. I am thinking of the USS Cole incident with the speedboat packed with explosives. I am thinking of small drones, cheaply and easily available on the internet, that are packed full of explosives in a swarm capability, such that they overwhelm even the most potent defensive systems. I am thinking of the carrier killer missiles that we know are being developed by some potential adversaries. We can already see where the threats are. I simply say no more than this: while I accept that the parallels are not precise and the capability is streets ahead of what we saw when I was a child, there comes a point where we need mass, and we need to think about how we are going to provide that, given our finances.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an outstanding contribution that I cannot stop listening to. I pay tribute to him. As well as capability, there is another basis for mass and numbers, which is that we have commitments spread around the globe, including commitments to our allies. It does not matter how good the platform is; to maintain those commitments, we also need numbers.

Robert Courts: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I could not agree more with him. If we look at the ratio of ships available in 1982 against the number deployed in the taskforce, we can see that the Navy was highly tasked as it was. There has been no downscaling in the amount of commitments that we have practically.

The Government are addressing that in many ways, and I entirely applaud the Type 31e concept, which would mean we can try to rebuild mass with a smaller, perhaps cheaper, modular type of ship that we can export. We can perhaps have some platforms so that a cutting-edge Type 45 is not needed to deal with anti-piracy operations, but instead a smaller corvette-type frigate could be used. I entirely agree with that. The hon. Gentleman's essential point is right: there comes a point where mass is needed because no ship, however good it is, can be in more than one place at any one time. I could not agree more with him.

My point is that countermeasures are being developed for all the threats I have mentioned—drones, speedboats and so on—but as von Moltke said,

“no plan survives contact with the enemy”.

It is equally the case, as I have referred to in the case of the Type 42, that no platform's wartime capability ever quite matches up to its paper peacetime capability, because no war ever takes place if the other guy does not think he also has a chance. As much as we think our platforms are great, others are looking at ways to undermine them. They only have to be right one time out of 100 and they will cause us damage. There is a time when mass is required.

I know the Government are thinking along those lines already, and I welcome the October announcement that the Royal Netherlands navy will send a warship to be part of the carrier battle group for the first operational tour. That is an important part of the strand of thinking that the warship will form part of a combined NATO battle group. However, I suggest that a broader strategy is required to involve other allies. It is easily foreseeable that allies may not wish to take part in all operations, such as when France—a very close ally—decided that it did not wish to be part of the action we undertook in 2003. That is perfectly understandable, but it should not mean that the UK's carrier group is unable to put to sea because a certain ally does not wish to take part. The MOD has refused to be drawn thus far on exactly which vessels will deploy, but part of my ask for a strategy is for that thinking to be fleshed out to ensure we can go to sea in all circumstances in terms of numbers, capacity and national partners. We need to ensure we address all the different possibilities.

Those possibilities must also include potential operations. Because it is a fleet carrier and a return to the big carrier concept that we have lost in the past, I have tended to think in terms of fleet carrier and carrier strike operations, but I know the Government are thinking about the utilisation of the carrier in the littoral role. That will mean we have different troops and machines on board, and the support vessels required will be different, too. Coming back to the point made by hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), in 1982 we had sufficient mass that we could put together a taskforce over a weekend and go to sea. That is not likely to be possible anymore, because we simply do not have the mass or the numbers. We will have to think in advance about how we will do that for each potential likely scenario.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent and comprehensive speech. He will note that the carriers are being used in the littoral role, which they are not designed for. Does he lament the decommissioning without replacement of HMS Ocean, and note the excellent work that Intrepid and Fearless did in that role during the south Atlantic conflict?

Robert Courts: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. The Secretary of State recently made an announcement regarding ships that will take on at least some of the capabilities of HMS Ocean, with the commercial vessels refitted to take helicopters in the littoral role. Essentially, yes—I do mourn the loss of HMS Ocean, although I note that she required a heavy refit at the time, and there was an economic case surrounding that. I could not agree more that we should have a proper littoral capability with a platform designed for it, which was the essence of the hon. Gentleman's point. Although the carriers will have a littoral role, it is not something that they are really designed for, and it strikes me that we will keep them as far out to sea as possible if we are in any kind of near-peer environment.

Without the strategic thought and overarching strategy that I urge, we risk being faced with a wonderful carrier capability that simply cannot be used without running an unacceptable risk to the carriers, or to the Royal Navy's overall capability. I do not know whether many

[Robert Courts]

hon. Members have read General Shirreff's novel "War With Russia". It is worth reading. General Shirreff describes a British Prime Minister who, desperate to make a strong political gesture, sent the new Queen Elizabeth carrier to sea without an adequate escort, with the result that she was sent to the bottom by a ruthless Russian regime, which had been listening for months to the carrier's precise acoustic signature, as we can guarantee all our potential adversaries in the world will be doing at this very moment. The book is meant as a warning; it is one that we should all take seriously.

I will try to speed up, as I know that others wish to speak. I am not talking just about royal naval ships; the biggest change in British maritime strength post-Falklands lies in the drastic reduction of merchant vessels sailing under the British flag. In 1982, approximately half the taskforce was requisitioned—the Royal Navy merchant reserve. These days, for such a capacity, the Government would have to look at chartering foreign vessels, with everything that that would mean—although I accept, as my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) said, that that may not fully reflect what we are doing. Again, it is part of the strategy, and something that we should look at.

I have spoken mostly about escort warships, and will now spend a little time talking about the aircraft. Each carrier can have up to 36 aircraft embarked, and we are expecting a first squadron of 12 for an initial operating capability to be ready shortly, with two by 2023. I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on 11 February that the US marines' F-35Bs will be ready for the carrier's first deployment cruise. That is good news, not just because it means that the carrier will be operational sooner than it otherwise would have been. It seems to provide a potential template for future operations, with embedded, close co-operation with allies to achieve our common military aims.

However, as central as our relationship with the Americans is and always should be to our defence and to NATO, I suggest that we look further. Italy, Japan and Turkey, all of which are scheduled to operate the F-35B, are all potential partners—I know that the decision has not been made—for Team Tempest, the next generation replacement for the Typhoon. If we are looking to co-operate on one programme, it seems a good idea for us to consider operating, as part of an overarching strategy, with other international partners in terms of carrier air groups. Italy, as I noted, has one of its own.

I am delighted that the Crowsnest platform to provide airborne early warning is being brought forward. Ever since the lack of one in the Falklands, it has been clear that there simply must be a carrier-borne, organic, airborne early warning capability. However, let us think about stores and supplies. We have talked about the littoral role. I suspect that it is likely that carriers will be kept out at sea, simply to reduce their vulnerability. In that case, lift capability will be required by helicopters, which have limited range, payload, speed and load-carrying capability. Otherwise, we are looking at ship-to-ship transfers at sea. I would merely observe that the V-22 Osprey, which is used by the US marines and navy, is very expensive and has been built to hold an F-35 engine. What is more, it can do so with speed, lift and range. We

currently do not have that capability. I note that Lord West in the other place has made the same suggestion. It is something that we should consider.

Since 2010, as a country we have turned our back on the need for close air support operating from and within a naval task group. That is being put right, which I wholeheartedly welcome, but we need to ensure that we do not replace that issue with a strong core operating capability that lacks the support in terms of ships and supplies to sustain it. Before I let others have their say, I will make two other brief comments. The first is about foreign policy, and the second is about industry, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned.

Recently, there has been much talk of global Britain. Personally, I do not see that as a reaction to Brexit, or an attempt to find a role, but simply a reassertion of a natural British desire to act globally. As an island nation, we have always had very broad horizons. Much of the brilliance in our island history has been down to the way in which we have explored, found new cultures, adapted, assimilated, exported the best of our values and adopted the best of that we have met elsewhere. The sacrifice of this country in defending freedom and democracy through two world wars needs no explanation here.

Britain has always been a global nation, and we should view the carriers within that tradition. We should consider the ability to project world-leading global air power around the world as an opportunity to act as a force for good—to defend democracy and human rights, and to defend the weak and downtrodden. Clearly, there is a major foreign policy aspect that should be considered in partnership with the defence agenda that I have laid out. I ask for that strategy to be adopted across the Government, in the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and BEIS.

I welcome the announcement that a deployment to the Pacific will be part of the first Queen Elizabeth deployment. A combined Defence and Foreign Office strategy should be worked up to address those circumstances—and I do not mean purely for warfare. Let us never forget the prestige of the Royal Navy. Its soft power, and by reflection that of Britain itself, is enormous. It demonstrates the very best of British skill and professionalism, and I am delighted to see from my time on the armed forces parliamentary scheme—I am on the Navy scheme this year—that the Royal Navy is once again utilising its enormous prestige to bring together parties abroad, who otherwise would not necessarily be able to come together, in a diplomatic capacity. How much more could be done with world-beating carrier capability as a showcase for British industrial and military prowess? Let us see a tie-up with the Foreign Office, DFID and the Department for International Trade.

My last few remarks will celebrate industry. As I have said, they are not just big grey ships that benefit the people of Portsmouth, although they unquestionably do. They also benefit the whole United Kingdom, because they have been built by our constituents in companies all across the country. UK industry is set to benefit from a 15% build share of the jets—£13 billion to British companies. UK shipbuilding employs 23,000 people and contributes £1.7 billion a year to the UK economy.

We are lucky to see coming into service the finest ships of their type anywhere in the world, crewed by the most professional Navy. They are bringing the glory of

the Royal Navy's history together with the technological, industrial prowess that is our hallmark for the future. The carriers can help us to unite new friends around the world in times of peace, and to defend freedom in times of war. They are the very best of our country, and I wholeheartedly celebrate them, as I hope we all can.

2.29 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): May I correct my friend and colleague, the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts)? Women will be serving on the aircraft carrier, too; it will not just be men.

Robert Courts: The hon. Lady is quite right to correct me. I meant "men" in the global sense of "humanity", but of course I was referring to men and women. I am sorry about that.

Ruth Smeeth: Moving on, may I alert the Chamber to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests? I am also a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the armed forces, and its lead on the Royal Navy—something that I am incredibly proud, as a woman, to be doing. You are going to get some grief today, my friend.

Let me briefly give my own perspective on some issues that have been already been addressed. The Queen Elizabeth class is exquisite: its ships are beautiful and will be a wonderful addition to our Royal Navy, as long as we ensure that we have enough crew to staff them—I will not say "man" them. The people who will serve on those platforms are incredibly important and we face challenges in recruiting them, but today I wish to speak about the wider military family, because the people who make the platforms are just as important for our national security.

Our capacity to continue to be a tier 1 military country depends on having a wider military-industrial complex to build our national security capabilities. Whenever I visit Rosyth shipyard or other defence establishments, I am always struck not only by people's professionalism, but by their dedication. As the Minister knows, they build our ships because they know that their friends and family may well serve on them. It is important that they know that they are doing a perfect job to ensure that the best possible platforms are afforded to our service personnel—the best in the world for the Royal Navy.

The Queen Elizabeth class is an extraordinary feat of engineering. Some 11,000 people in six shipyards have touched the pieces of metal that were used to build its extraordinary capabilities. The platform represents £6.2 billion of capacity and equipment, not counting the F-35s that will be on it, or even the tableware that our service personnel will eat off; as MP for the Potteries, I am sure that the Minister will reassure me that the tableware will be purchased from my constituency. Please, Minister—give me a nod.

I want to consider the aircraft carrier in the widest possible context, because it demonstrates the challenges that we face in the sector, not only in procurement for the carrier itself, but in securing the carrier strike group over the longer term. It has been 12 years since 2007, when the then Secretary of State signed off the paperwork for the aircraft carrier and finally launched the programme

to start the process of building it. Flight trials are happening this year. Even from the moment we agreed to build, it took us 12 years to get to this point, but prior to that there was a decade of debating, designing and determining the concept of our future aircraft carrier.

The project has challenged our shipyards. It has challenged us on whether we have the resources, the skillset and the domestic sovereign capability to build the platform. During the lifespan of the Queen Elizabeth class, we will have to replace the Astute programme and update and replace the Type 45. We will also have to replace the Type 23 with the Type 26, and then start talking about the Type 26's replacement—all in the lifetime of this capability. By that point, we may even have seen one Type 31e.

Just ensuring strike group capability for the Queen Elizabeth class requires a long-term plan for procurement, so my urge, demand and request to the lovely Minister is that we look at the longer term. We need to consider the steady drumbeat of orders needed for our domestic industry to deliver the long-term capabilities that we require. We are still not sure how many fleet solid support ships we will actually get—we could probably do with three.

We should recognise how fabulous these platforms will be and what is required for their use, both from a military perspective and from one of diplomatic and soft power. We should also remember the people who made them: our constituents up and down the country. My constituency could not be more landlocked, but my constituents helped to contribute to the Astute class and the Dreadnought class. This is a national programme, with national consequences, making a national contribution to our GDP. I urge the Minister to give me my steady drumbeat of orders.

2.35 pm

Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this debate, and an enormous honour to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth)—a woman who deserves all our support and respect for her resilience and extraordinary tenacity in the face of personal challenges in her political life. She certainly has the support and respect of all hon. Members present.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): What a decent thing for the hon. Lady to say. We all associate ourselves publicly with her remarks about my hon. Friend.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. It is no hardship to commend the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North for her extraordinary resilience; all of us who believe in what this House stands for would do so. If every member of our armed forces were as resilient, tough and determined—not to mention charming—as she is, we would be able to take on the world without any trouble at all. However, let me return to the matter at hand and speak about a ship that I am particularly proud of.

The United Kingdom is a maritime nation and a coastal state. More than 90% of our trade in goods flows into and out of our ports on domestic and global sea lanes. Our trade flows remain entirely dependent on

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

ensuring that home waters and international waters are kept open and safe for commercial sea traffic. This year is the 80th anniversary of the start of the battle of the Atlantic, the longest battle in the history of naval warfare. What was critical then remains true: our Royal Navy's primary responsibility is to keep the high seas safe for the free flow of our trade in goods, energy and food. It can do so only if it has the best world-leading equipment and weaponry and the advantage over potential enemies.

As an island nation, the United Kingdom was highly dependent on imported goods, even in 1939. Britain required more than 1 million tonnes of imported material every week to survive, feed our population—albeit on rations—and fight. In essence, the battle of the Atlantic was a tonnage war, in which the allies struggled to supply Britain while the axis attempted to stem the flow of merchant shipping that enabled Britain to keep fighting. From 1942, the axis also sought to prevent the build-up of allied supplies and equipment in the British Isles in preparation for the invasion of occupied Europe. The outcome of the battle was a strategic victory for the allies—the German blockade failed—but it came at great cost.

The battle of the Atlantic has been called “the longest, largest, and most complex naval battle in history”, but at its essence was a critical message, which perhaps we have become a little lazy about: we are an island. Unless we choose policies to make us entirely self-sufficient, which would limit our choices dramatically, we must always invest in our Royal Navy to keep our sea lanes open.

As Brexit approaches and our view of ourselves as a maritime nation comes to the fore once again, there could be no more timely moment to discuss, and call on the Government to implement, a clear whole-of-Government strategy for our aircraft carriers and the carrier strike group of ships that sail the seas and oceans of the globe to keep the flow of goods to and from the United Kingdom's shores as certain as possible.

Of the two new aircraft carriers being introduced into Royal Navy service, the first, HMS Queen Elizabeth, is already working her way up to full service, while the second, HMS Prince of Wales, is following closely behind. If I may, I will tell hon. Members a little more about these two extraordinary feats of British industrial design, construction, skill and innovation. I have had the honour to watch them grow from boxes of steel made in shipyards across our country and put together in Rosyth, with engineering so sophisticated that the margin of error was millimetres only on these vast steel structures. The ships have grown into their present form under the watchful eye of highly skilled shipyard workers in Rosyth, with a unique partnering relationship of industry and the Ministry of Defence with the Royal Navy. The Aircraft Carrier Alliance was the first of its kind as a procurement project. The end user was genuinely involved throughout the process to maximise value for money for the taxpayer and to create the most user-friendly vessel for the Royal Navy to live and work aboard.

In HMS Queen Elizabeth, we now have the most sophisticated and comprehensive carrier capability in the world. Her sister ship HMS Prince of Wales will be

coming into service close behind her. The increasing speed of build with the second vessel demonstrates so well why ship classes get better and more finely tuned as more are built.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the Treasury decided that two was enough, at £3 billion each and a crew requirement of 800 or more sailors. We are at an all-time low in manpower terms for the Royal Navy. All those factors are important. Mind you, £3 billion for a 50-year lifespan strikes me—even as the critical friend to MOD that I am, sitting on the Public Accounts Committee—as a pretty good investment return, considering the choices the carrier group can offer Governments and NATO.

It is to be hoped that in the months ahead, as the modernising defence review progresses and real changes in the business model take place within the Department, the imbalance in funding between the three services' top-level budgets since the 2010 strategic defence and security review will be sorted out, so that the Royal Navy can meet its activity requirements—a point which my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) raised earlier—and be able to increase its output, after nine years of trying to meet requirements and the challenges of the continuous at-sea deterrent commitment without ever quite enough funding. We want to be able to maximise the outputs—in the Royal Navy, that is time at sea—so that our sailors and our ships are out there doing what we ask them to do.

Unlike the French, who only have the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, the beauty of having two of these great ships is that we can ensure that we have that at-sea capability 365 days a year. I hope the Minister will reassure the House today that rumours emanating from Treasury sources that it might be fine to mothball or sell Prince of Wales are unfounded. We need two ships to provide 365 days of output.

I could talk about the Queen Elizabeth class military capability in more detail, but I think it is safe to say that my colleagues are all over that already. However, I have had the privilege to visit these ships in construction and to watch Queen Elizabeth leave Rosyth on her maiden voyage. That was a real hold-your-breath moment, because she had to squeeze under the bridge with her hinged radar lowered to get out into open seas on the lowest tides in the summer of 2017.

I then had the even greater privilege of being aboard this mighty vessel on 8 December 2017, when she was formally commissioned into the Royal Navy and her ensign changed from blue to white. The Queen and I—and a few others—were inside this enormous hangar, as the Princess Royal took on the weather on deck to perform the formal ceremony.

Amid all the pomp and circumstance, and the real honour of hearing my monarch speak of her own naval life, in her words, as the daughter, wife and mother of her family, who had all served in the Royal Navy, I looked at the young sailors, some of whom looked very young indeed, though that may be a reflection on me. These young men and women standing to attention before their commander-in-chief. The young sailors were simply brimming with excitement and pride at their opportunity to be the first sailors to serve on a ship that will be in service for 50 years or more—a ship that will be the cornerstone of our UK defence and military

posture for decades to come, both at home and across the globe; a ship whose last commanding officer has not yet been born.

Why do these state-of-the-art aircraft carriers make even the US Navy jealous? For anyone who knows my interests, they will know of my enduring respect for those in our silent service, who have for the past 50 years served on our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent under the waves. Our submarine service has been deployed 24/7, 365 days a year since April 1969, with no pomp or circumstance—just the silent invisible defence of our citizens, NATO allies and our interests, bearing the unimaginable responsibility of holding our greatest weapon of peace, the Trident missile, at readiness in case it is ever needed.

The aircraft carrier is the surface equivalent. Our carriers will, between them, provide our surface at-sea conventional deterrent, if that makes sense. With their fighter jets aboard and the strike group of ships with them, they will provide the most effective defensive capability for the United Kingdom and our allies. Crucially, both in home waters and in maritime theatres of operation around the globe, HMS Queen Elizabeth and Prince of Wales will also be able to operate offensive capability as determined by our Government, either alone but most likely in concert with NATO and other allies. As with the continuous at-sea deterrence—our nuclear deterrent carried on submarines—the carrier is a national asset whose deployment will be determined and informed by political and diplomatic priorities.

Some of the narratives that question our carriers and why we have bothered to invest in them raise issues such as vulnerability and purpose. If the carrier group is questioned, why is it that the Chinese are building aircraft carriers as quickly as they can? Why is it that the Americans are so keen to work with us and our carrier groups in the years ahead? It is quite simply because this is a powerful and effective tool. Critically, however, these are not ships to be mothballed and only put to sea when needed for naval warfare, as some of our illustrious naval ships of old were.

I love ships' names and I think we should take a moment to consider those ships of old, and the men who served, and died, in them. Early aircraft carriers in the Royal Navy have included, in the first world war, HMS Furious, Argus and Hermes; in the 1920s, HMS Courageous and Glorious; in the 1930s, HMS Illustrious, Ark Royal, and Formidable; through the second world war, HMS Indefatigable, Indomitable, Unicorn, Colossus, Edgar, Audacious, Ocean, Vengeance, Mars, Venerable, Warrior, Theseus, Triumph, Majestic, Terrible and Magnificent. These are powerful names for powerful war fighting machines—floating airbases from which to command battle space since world war one and the creation of air power—but they are nothing like our latest carriers.

The 21st-century aircraft carrier is not only a warfighter—the only dedicated fifth generation platform in the world equipped and designed to deliver the F-35B fighter jet—but she can serve in any number of roles supporting and promoting our national interests.

As we leave the EU and seek to stand tall on the global stage once again as a sovereign nation, these platforms can provide a range of opportunities for diplomacy, intelligence gathering, trade, humanitarian support and disaster relief. That is really why we have called the

debate today, because if we are to reach our stated aims of becoming once again a global-facing Britain, reaching out to old friends and new in trade and alliances, it is vital that we make full use of these extraordinary ships.

The carriers are diplomatic tools for our country—the royal yacht Britannia of the 21st century, perhaps—able to deliver a diplomatic message, hard or soft; to assist with trade delegations, as indeed HMS Queen Elizabeth has already done in New York last autumn; and to provide humanitarian relief on a scale never before seen by the UK, if needed, anywhere in the world.

The Government's PR and official statements to date about these carriers of ours have been focused on size, tonnage and capability. All of those are impressive, but the important conversation that we need to have with the UK citizen needs to be about much more than those good stories of skills, jobs and next generation ships. As these great ships cruise our vast oceans, they will be a hub for intelligence collection and dissemination to assist all our allies in keeping our world as safe as possible. The platforms are the epitome of the vision created by our national security adviser, Sir Mark Sedwill, the fusion doctrine, which properly joins up all the strands of defensive, offensive and humanitarian activity, ordered and put into effect by Government. These great ships of ours are the epitome of fusion afloat.

The aircraft carrier in its carrier strike group, from whichever nation, is operated by navies, but is programmed by Prime Ministers and Presidents. The President of the United States receives a daily brief on the whereabouts of the US Navy carrier battle groups. The French President personally authorises the deployment intentions of the Charles de Gaulle. Leaders visit their carriers as part of their demonstration of national pride and, of course, power.

We have restored to our naval capabilities two great ships and the opportunity to create carrier strike groups with huge reach, for the next 50 years. They are the cornerstone of a naval taskforce to project UK power and influence in many ways in the decades ahead, in a way we have been unable to for several decades. I look forward to hearing from the Minister how the Government are making progress, across departmental silos—everybody knows they drive me crackers—in building an effective and coherent strategy for our state-of-the-art carriers, the latest in a great historic line of British aircraft carriers. This is a great opportunity and I urge the Government to take full advantage of what a constantly at-sea carrier strike group can offer global security and British power projection.

2.49 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate led by the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who gave an excellent introduction. He set out the history of carrier strike capability in the UK with aplomb, and spoke highly of our capability and future opportunity, which was fantastic.

[**SIR GRAHAM BRADY** *in the Chair*]

I share the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), who raised issues about industrial capability. I speak with a degree of interest: I think I am the only Member who was

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

actually involved in the design and construction of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers in Glasgow. Let me mention one of the most striking aspects of being involved in the project. When I first started as a graduate at BAE Systems, the chief engineer gave us a briefing on the Queen Elizabeth class and talked about the complexity of the project. One thing he said really struck home; he put up an aerial photograph of RAF Lossiemouth and said, “You’re looking at 5.6 million square metres of real estate. We have to condense the same number of aircraft movements into 0.3% of the space. That’s how we deliver the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier.”

That shows just how complex the delivery of an aircraft carrier is; an airfield is being compacted into 0.3% of the usual space, and we are trying to deliver the same intensity of operations at sea in all weather conditions. That is why, in a nutshell, an aircraft carrier is such a complex project. It is probably among the top five most complex engineering projects ever undertaken by mankind. It is a great testament to British engineering that we have been able to achieve this capability, despite the challenges posed by the inconsistent construction runs and feast-and-famine orders that have plagued our shipbuilding industry for decades. I think that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North hinted at, as did the hon. Member for Witney. He talked about the bad decisions made in the 1960s. An example is the cancellation of the CVA-01 aircraft carrier project, which was intended to be called HMS Prince of Wales and Queen Elizabeth—we got there only 40 years later. The TSR2 strategic bomber was also cancelled at that time.

It seems that history has a habit of repeating itself. I lament the very poor decisions made in the 2010 strategic defence and security review, which destroyed the Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. That is now recognised as a failure of judgment, and we are trying to replicate what we had, but with the loss of British sovereign capability to build large fixed-wing aircraft like the Nimrod. Looking at the failure to adapt our shipbuilding capabilities for the long term, I fear that the national shipbuilding strategy has a series of flaws that we have to be aware of.

On the construction of the aircraft carrier, there was real difficulty getting match-fit again in order to deal with the scale of the project. That is largely what I was concerned about in Govan. I have a photograph of me standing in bay 1 of the ship block and outfit hall at Govan as lower block 4 was being transferred out of that hall and on to a barge in order to be taken to Rosyth. The size and beam of the aircraft carrier was dictated by the fact that the shipyard was built by a Norwegian company to build gas tankers in the late 1980s and 1990s. The width of the aircraft carrier was determined by the size of the hall. We were building it in a shipyard that was never designed or constructed to build an aircraft carrier—the whole structure of the carrier was designed around our industrial limitations.

It feels like we have not learned from the mistakes made and the constraints imposed by industry in this project, which is why we have not really looked at how the national shipbuilding strategy is getting us to upper-quartile performance in world shipbuilding. That is a glaring omission from the document. I hope that the work of the all-parliamentary group on shipbuilding

and ship repair, which is bringing forward a review of the national shipbuilding strategy in the next few weeks, will offer constructive and positive suggestions of how we can improve that strategy. It is critical that we get this right.

Looking at the threat to the shipbuilding industry, in Glasgow, 2,723 people are supported on a full-time-equivalent basis by the shipbuilding industry. It supports an additional 3,220 jobs in Scotland, which speaks to the scale of the aircraft carrier project. It supported 8,000 shipyard workers in—I make a slight correction here—eight shipyards. If Scotstoun and Govan are included as separate, distinct shipyards, there are eight. Never confuse Govan and Scotstoun as a single shipyard—that is a fatal error in Glasgow.

Ruth Smeeth: I think my hon. Friend might want to raise this issue with the Minister, because that the data available on the Royal Navy website says otherwise.

Mr Sweeney: We must correct the Ministry of Defence; otherwise, some fairly indignant Glaswegians will be coming to bang on its door.

The issue goes back to the drumbeat of orders, and stability in the order book. I used to sit with colleagues in the shipyard and we would look at resource planning. We would plug in different projects and see the curve of labour demand over the next 10 to 15 years. We knew that redundancies or contractions would have to be made at some point, because the loading of the shipyard’s work programme was not smoothed; there was failure by the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury—in terms of financing projects—and the industry to co-ordinate properly to ensure as stable and smooth a curve as possible. That kind of curve would have delivered learning-curve benefits, industrial efficiency and the confidence to invest in world-class infrastructure and processes, and would create a virtuous cycle that delivers a world-class, competitive edge that would mean we could sell ships around the world at a competitive price, and deliver a sustainable and growing shipbuilding industry.

If we can optimise that equation, we will be in a good place, but I fear that the national shipbuilding strategy will not address that issue. One of the symptoms is the Type 31e. It is a laudable aspiration, but the reality is that we are committing the same mistake time and again. We are going to year zero and designing and building a new platform from scratch every time. That is a total failure to understand how industry works. The Americans have been building the same class for the last 30 years, with incremental improvements to the same platform. We need to work to that sort of concept. There is no reason why we cannot adapt the Type 45 and Type 26 hulls for a number of different uses. Building the ship as a raw steel box is only about 8% of the overall capital cost; it is how it is fitted out that drives the cost into the platform. If we can get a standardised, basic ship type for each type of ship needed for the Royal Navy, we can drive efficiency into the programmes, get more hulls into the water, and build a rigorous, carrier strike battle group around the Queen Elizabeth class, which would allow us to get the bulk back into the Royal Navy.

I have spoken to the Royal Navy, which says it has 19 escorts, but it needs 24 to meet all its planning needs. The Navy needs to bridge that gap, but how will we do it? There is no explanation of how that is happening.

I would say that we need another 24 plus. We had 32 escorts as recently as 20 years ago. How do we get back to that situation? I do not think that Type 31s will solve that problem. How do we fix that issue? It is not just about looking at the aircraft carriers, which is a fantastic class of ship in isolation; it is about how we build that resilience into the carrier strike battle group. If we do not get a correct and efficient escort proposition, we will not meet that need. That goes back to getting our industrial capability correct—something that is not being addressed by the national shipbuilding strategy.

Another symptom of the problem is the fleet solid support ships competition. If you ask me, it is absolutely insane even to entertain the idea of an international competition for this, because it belies any understanding of how to drive value into the project. Looking at the fleet solid support ships, 6,700 jobs will be created or secured, including 1,800 shipyard jobs and 450 apprenticeships. Some £272 million will be recycled back into the UK economy through wages and supply of payments to the Treasury. Those figures must be weighted in the judgment for the UK bid on fleet solid support ships, and they must be weighted into the need to sustain the critical mass of industrial capability that the aircraft carrier left as a legacy at Rosyth.

In the next few years, we are potentially looking at over 1,000 job losses across the Babcock group, and at the closure of Appledore, which built the bulbous bows for the aircraft carrier. There are huge industrial capabilities at risk. Look at the Rugby site, which builds electric motors for the integrated electric propulsion system for the Type 45 and the aircraft carrier—one of the most fantastic industrial achievements of the UK. That is at risk again; General Electric proposes closing that strategically important site. These things need to be gripped by the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury, because we are losing a war of attrition on our industrial capability in the shipbuilding industry.

Ruth Smeeth: I want to touch on the capability that we are losing from General Electric. We have already lost one of the capabilities, which was in Kidsgrove in my constituency. We were given assurances that the capability would be sustainable long term after its redeployment to Rugby and Stafford, yet we are losing it. Industry is just not supporting us in the right way if that is not part of the sovereign skills capability and it knows there is a steady drumbeat of orders.

Mr Sweeney: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is critical that we look not just at the first-tier equipment manufacturers, such as BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce, in which the Government have golden shares and can direct operational decision making to an extent, but at the second and third-tier supply chains. After all, 3,000 people involved in the aircraft carrier project were in the supply chains. We need to look at the industrial capabilities that are critical to maintaining sovereign capability. It is clear that General Electric has made an operational decision to move that capability to France. That is not in the British national interest, so we need to make it clear that we will not accept that. It is as simple as that. It is the Government's duty to make that case and use whatever leverage is required to make General Electric change its mind. The Government are there to correct negative market decisions, and that is what needs to happen to sustain our industrial capability.

My vision is of a better national shipbuilding strategy that looks to the future and the capabilities that we need to sustain, and ensures that we have a long-term capital investment proposition with the Treasury that reflects the complexity and long-term nature of shipbuilding programmes, finances them properly on a multi-year, generational basis, and invests in the capital infrastructure that is required to get our shipyards match-fit. It is a great tragedy that the world-class shipbuilding capability on the Clyde has not been realised, and that we are still building Type 26s in the same old hall built by a Norwegian company for gas tankers in the 1980s. It has served us well, but when the business case was made for building that hall in the 1980s, we sure as hell did not think we would be building aircraft carriers and Type 26 frigates in it.

This is about not just the narrow business case of one programme and the investment for building Type 26s in the shipyard, but all the other ships that will follow in its wake. This is a 50 to 60-year capital investment programme. The industrial benefit of doing that is enormous, and the Ministry of Defence has not addressed it. I hope the Minister will address that point, because it is crucial that we start to think about this in those terms. The silo mentality about projects does not serve our defence industrial capability. We need a much broader view and much more integration to secure our skills base. We must infuse our ageing shipbuilding workforce with more apprentices. We need sustainable training programmes and a stable demand pipeline through programmes such as the fleet solid support ships, which should be plugged in to take up the slack that has come from the downscaling of the aircraft carrier programme.

Similarly, why are we not planning for a proper replacement for HMC Ocean, rather than retrofitting merchant vessels? That is a rather foolish and superficial way of doing it. Let us build a new helicopter landing platform, a replacement for the Albion class and a world-class shipyard that is able to deliver them. That is what we need to do to pull all this together and realise the industrial legacy of the Queen Elizabeth-class programme, which was an exemplar of British engineering. It was a truly world-class, world-leading programme. We talk about building the space shuttle and the international space station, but the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier is up there with the most complex engineering projects ever undertaken by the human race. We should have a great national celebration of that achievement. Let us make the most of the legacy.

3.2 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I congratulate all four Members who have spoken so far. Only one of them is a member of the Defence Committee, which I have the honour to chair. Given their depth of knowledge and enormous enthusiasm, the Defence Committee will not be short of worthy members in the future. I encourage those who are not yet on it to redouble their efforts to be so at the first opportunity. The beneficiaries of their enthusiasm and breadth of knowledge will be the House and the country as a whole.

The previous speeches have not left me with as much to say as I might otherwise have said. That is an additional benefit to anybody watching the debate. I will pick and choose a few points here and there from what has been said already, and try to develop them into a theme of strategy and adversaries. When I talk

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about adversaries, I am really talking about one overwhelming adversary: the Treasury. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) that, after bringing in one of the two largest vessels ever built for the Royal Navy, the Treasury might be thinking of mothballing it. I suppose that is a little better than the proposal that I heard from one George Osborne in the run-up to the 2010 election, which was to scrap the project for building the carriers completely. It is amazing how many times we have almost lost the ability to project air power from the sea. In one case, we did lose it. We lost it when we lost the Invincible class of carriers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), in his magisterial opening speech, referred to the fact that those carriers were termed through-deck cruisers, and he was rather critical of that. This is the only minor point of correction I would make to his exemplary exposition. Those ships were from the outset aircraft carriers capable of enabling the Harrier still to offer fixed-wing coverage from the sea to the land. They were called through-deck cruisers to defeat the adversary—the Treasury. If they had been called carriers from the outset, they would never have been built. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to see that my hon. Friend accepts that. Once they were safely in commission, and after a respectable number of years, it became possible to reclassify them as aircraft carriers, which is what they were always intended to be.

Of course, we very nearly had no carriers for the Falklands conflict. We only had them, as I say, because of a bit of subterfuge on the part of the admiralty. When it came to the Libya conflict—a disastrously misconceived conflict, as it happens—we had no carrier capability at all. I recall that when the decision was taken to have a gap between the phasing out of the Invincible-class carriers and HMS Queen Elizabeth's coming into service, we did not anticipate any role for a carrier for 10 years or so. I believe that the Libyan scenario arose after something like 10 months, rather than 10 years. Guess which warship our French allies in that conflict immediately moved to the theatre? It was their one and only aircraft carrier.

Mr Sweeney: The right hon. Gentleman is making a very important point about euphemisms. Another favourite of mine is “capability holiday”, and “fitted for but not with” was a common theme on the Type 45 destroyer. Does he agree that the issue of capability holidays needs to be properly scrutinised? I do not think the Ministry of Defence has recognised the damage that the 2010 SDSR caused, in terms of the loss of maritime patrol capability and carrier capability.

Dr Lewis: The trouble with 2010 was that it was a funded defence review that was totally unstrategic. People say that the 1998 defence review was the reverse: it was very strategic, but almost totally unfunded. Our problem is that we are unable in times of peace to persuade the people in charge of the national purse strings that the best investment they can make in the long term is to have strong armed forces. If our armed forces are strong enough, we will not have to spend all that treasure, let alone all those lives, in fighting conflicts that arise as a result of our perceived weakness.

Robert Courts: My right hon. Friend is making an absolutely outstanding point. Does he agree with this summary of it? We need to have a strategic look at what we want to achieve with our strategic defence goals and then fund them, as opposed to having the funding and then seeing what we can still manage to do.

Dr Lewis: I will go some way towards acknowledging that, with this one caveat: our strategic goals cannot be defined more tightly than the ability to have a full range of military capability to meet whatever threats may reasonably be regarded as likely to arise. I am afraid that all speeches that I make about defence policy and military strategy come back to the same three basic concepts: deterrence, containment and the unpredictability of future conflict. Libya and the Falklands were unpredictable.

The only thing we can predict is that the vast majority of conflicts in which we will be engaged in the future, as in the vast majority of conflicts in the past, will arise with little or no warning significantly in advance, and that is why we have to have a comprehensive range of military capabilities. It is very difficult to persuade budget-conscious Treasury officials not to take a chance with the nation's security. That is why the Defence Select Committee comes back time and again to the same point, which is that defence has fallen too far down our scale of national priorities. When we compare it with other high spending Departments we can see that because in the 1980s, at the stage when we faced an aggressive Soviet Union and a major terrorist threat in the form of Northern Ireland and the IRA insurgency, we spent approximately the same on defence as we spent on health and education. Now we spend four times on health and two and a half times on education as we spend on defence. We can get away with that as long as things do not go wrong, but if they do we live to regret it bitterly.

Mr Sweeney: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his indulgence in giving way. Although I do not think the decisions on spending are mutually exclusive—I think we have sufficient capacity in the state to fund all these things adequately—he makes an important point about thinking we can get away with not properly investing. I think of the predecessor of the new Prince of Wales, which was sunk by the Japanese in 1941 because there were fatal weaknesses in the battleship's design. Its air defence systems had been scrapped because of cost-saving measures in the 1930s. Does he not agree that that is a lesson of history that we ought to probably learn if unpredictable conflicts are to emerge in future?

Dr Lewis: I wondered whether I should make a reference to that terrible event in December 1941 when the Prince of Wales and the Repulse were sunk by Japanese air power. One of the main problems was that they were sent out with inadequate protection and inadequate escorts, and, as I recall from my history books, no air cover whatever. Having said that, we can say that HMS Queen Elizabeth has already claimed one victory. Given that, as I said earlier, the Treasury can be regarded as the main adversary, I think the Treasury has probably sunk more ships in the Royal Navy than any other enemy we have faced. It was gratifying to see a bit of advance retaliation in that HMS Queen Elizabeth appears to have sunk the Chancellor's visit to the Communist

Chinese without even having embarked on its first operational voyage. [*Laughter.*] I hoped to get a laugh at that point, but behind that is a serious point that relates to what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney a moment ago in an intervention: the Government need to have an overall strategy. All too often they look both ways with regard to countries that do not mean us a lot of good.

Let us take the example of China. Before I come to the more recent issue of its behaviour in the South China sea, let us go back to 2013 when I served on the Intelligence and Security Committee, which devoted a great deal of time to a study of foreign penetration of British critical national infrastructure. That was the overall title of the report that we produced, but in reality it was all about Huawei and the way in which that giant Chinese Communist telecommunications firm had penetrated British telecom and been brought into the system without Ministers having even been alerted until it had happened. I remember being somewhat fazed when, within a matter of a few weeks of the publication of that report, with all its dire warnings about the need for it to never happen again, I saw a picture of the then Prime Minister David Cameron shaking hands with the chief executive of Huawei on the doorstep of No. 10 on the basis of some great new deal that was being proposed.

We need to understand that if there is something so sensitive about the idea that a ship of the Royal Navy could even dream of going into the Pacific ocean that a major trade trip from the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom to China has to be called off, there is something terribly wrong both with the attitude of the Communist Chinese in calling off the trip, as it were, and the attitude of the Treasury in wanting the Chancellor to undertake it. I will leave the point at that at the moment, unless I get some in-flight refuelling from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Sweeney: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the concept of ITAR—international traffic in arms regulations—which is a NATO standard, should be extended to such spheres to address the insidiousness of the new penetration by foreign powers?

Dr Lewis: I think that is a very perceptive suggestion. When it comes to the issue of keeping the country safe from threats to our way of life, which now take on new forms that are much more difficult to recognise because they do not operate at a level that would automatically trigger the same sort of alarm bells as traditional military threats, the support that I find as chairman of the Defence Committee from Members of all four parties represented on it is absolutely outstanding. The House should acknowledge more than it does the high degree of consensus among defence-minded people in all the major parties, irrespective of occasional disagreements on specific aspects of defence now and again.

I want to bring my remarks to a conclusion by talking about the 1998 Labour Government strategic defence review, which I described as unfunded but highly strategic. It was a very good review. If the funds had been made available for it, it would have been an outstanding success. At that time in 1998 the threat from the Soviet Union had gone away and it was hoped that we would not have to consider a major confrontation

in Europe. So the thinking behind that review went something like this: given that we do not anticipate our armed forces having to be engaged in the European theatre in future, it follows that if they are to be engaged on a significant scale anywhere, it will be at some considerable distance from Europe. Given that we no longer are a global imperial power with a network of strategic bases around the world from which to intervene, it follows that we need a concept that enables us to have a movable strategic base. At the heart of that strategic defence review of 1998 was the concept of the sea base, which had two central pillars. One was carrier strike and the other was the amphibious taskforce.

Carrier strike was to enable us to exert air power to the land from the sea, and the amphibious taskforce was to enable us to insert land forces on to territory likewise from the sea, taking the whole strategic concept into a way in which we could travel to the theatre where the need to intervene militarily applied.

Only a year ago we faced yet another major potential crisis. It was widely reported in January last year that the core ships—HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark of the amphibious taskforce—were going to be pensioned off 15 years before their due date. I can honestly say that the most influential report of the 27 so far produced by the Defence Committee since I have been chairing it was the one that we brought out in February 2018, which described the proposal to lose our ability to exert land power from the sea as militarily illiterate. I absolutely welcome the intervention of the Secretary of State for Defence, who could see the risk and what was going to happen. Some people have criticised the modernising defence programme for not being quite as substantial as they expected. However, that is to miss the point, because although I welcome the concept of the fusion doctrine, which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to, there was a way in which it posed a risk to the future of our armed forces. The way in which the defence theory for the future was being amalgamated in the national security capability review with newer threats, such as those from cyberspace and disinformation, was conceptually sound but economically dangerous. I shall explain after taking an intervention from my hon. Friend.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: On that point, the great challenge of the fusion doctrine, whose strategic vision is really intelligent, as my right hon. Friend says, is that, as ever—it is difficult to say out loud—the adversary in the Treasury and those who were in my view driving the policy forward saw it as an opportunity to take hold of the defence budget and bring it into a greater whole, without fully understanding the need for hard power to remain in our national picture.

Dr Lewis: I am delighted with that intervention, which has saved me at least the next two paragraphs of what I was going to say. That was precisely the danger. The defence budget was being wrapped up inside an overall defence and security budget and we were being told that that national security capability review would have to be fiscally neutral. So effectively, if £56 billion was going to be put together overall, and if more money was to be spent to meet the new sorts of threats we are constantly told about—threats in space or cyberspace, or threats of disinformation that are not really new but

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are moving into new dimensions—every £1 received for those threats would mean £1 less for the Army, the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force. That is why there were leaks—clearly authoritative—about potential cuts in each service, including about the loss of HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, which would have happened if the Secretary of State for Defence had not fought and won the political battle to strip out the defence elements from the national security capability review and have a separate modernising defence programme. That meant that he was no longer caught in that fiscal or financial ambush.

Let us not be too complacent in congratulating ourselves on the advent of such marvellous vessels, because they very nearly did not happen, first because of the Treasury, back in 2009-10, and secondly because even as we brought in half the concept of the sea base—carrier strike—we were in danger, right up to a few months ago, of losing the other half of the concept. That was amphibious capability, without which we would not have a rounded overall capability to intervene strategically in whatever theatre of the world a threat might arise unpredictably. Believe me, when a threat arises in the future, it will be unpredictable and we will be lucky if we are sufficiently equipped to meet it. That luck depends on the advocacy of people such as those we have heard from this afternoon, in every party represented in the debate. I hope that my hon. Friend who speaks for the Scottish National Party, the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), will presently make a speech and keep up the tradition.

3.24 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee, which does such excellent work and produces such outstanding reports, helping to defend our country and the broader alliance to which we belong. I congratulate the hon. Members for Witney (Robert Courts) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) on their contribution to bringing the debate about.

I, like the Select Committee Chair, have been struck by the unanimity of views expressed and the power of the comments made in the debate. I particularly wanted to take part because, as everyone knows, I am a big supporter of defence and of increased expenditure, but also because I have a sense of frustration, although not with the Ministry of Defence. I feel frustration with our country and with Government as a whole, given the number of debates I have taken part in where Members have said it is crucial that defence and foreign policy objectives, and international development objectives, should be married together. I want the Minister to take that point away; but this cannot be another of those debates where we say such things and, a year later, the right hon. Member for New Forest East gives another report, and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed or, indeed, my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent North and for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) make another outstanding speech explaining that foreign policy objectives must be linked to defence objectives. That is

what happens. I am doing no more than expressing my opinion about what is happening, and that is the subject of my contribution.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):

I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman, so may I draw his attention, as an example of what he is asking for, to the recently published Africa strategy? That is a cross-Government strategy drawing together strategies from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. That is exactly what is happening.

Vernon Coaker: I accept that that has been published, but I want to say something further to the point that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed made, about the UK citizen. My point—and this shows how much work has to be done—is that, as the Defence Committee Chair said, on 11 February the Secretary of State for Defence makes a speech about where the new aircraft carrier will go on its first operational tour, and then a trip by the Chancellor to China is cancelled. Then a furious row erupts, apparently. If that is wrong, it is wrong, but that is what was reported. Somehow or other we have to have an approach where we do not have a row about it and the whole blame goes to the Chinese for refusing to accept that we have a perfect right for our aircraft carriers to go where we want. Instead, it became “Well, yes, the Chinese shouldn’t have done that”—but why are we worrying about it as well?

I have a broader point to make. It is not only about the need to win the debate and the argument in Government. The Chair of the Defence Committee has made the argument time and again, and so have the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North and the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), who speaks for the Scottish National party. Where on earth is the engagement with the UK public? My constituents would see massive spending on tackling the terrorist threat as something to pile money into. The debate about whether we should spend billions of pounds on aircraft carriers is a totally different concept for them: why should we be spending that money? I agree with spending it, but have we won that debate with the British public? I very much doubt it. I would say that there is a need, with respect to Russia and China. On the middle east, people might get it, although they could say “You can already bomb the middle east from Akrotiri if you want to, so why do we have them?” Hon. Members have articulated the argument.

Norway has been mentioned. I had the privilege of visiting the Falklands last week, with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. Our defence of the self-determination of the Falkland Islands is absolutely something of which we can all be proud. We do so much more, but who talks about that? HMS Clyde is there as a projection of naval power—I did not much enjoy being on it myself, but they do a phenomenal job—but it is not there only in defence of the Falklands. It is also there to patrol the waters near the South Sandwich Islands and South Georgia, and to defend the Antarctic treaty, fishing rights and other things that some other nations exploit—or would if we were not there.

That is a role for naval power, but who articulates that in a practical way to UK citizens so that they understand? It is not just the Government who need to wake up to that, but the whole of Parliament as well, so the matter is addressed much more fully.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman rightly points out that through the continuous deployment of those ships across the globe, the Royal Navy is engaged in environmental protection. That is exactly what HMS Clyde is doing. That speaks to my son's generation, who are passionate about the environment, ecology and looking after rare species to make sure that we leave our planet in a better state than we found it. Yet we seem unable to join that up with the importance of what looks like hard power but which, most of the time, is not, thank goodness.

Vernon Coaker: I agree. That supports my point that the use of the aircraft carriers is of course about hard power. I say to the Minister that we ought to put various scenarios to people and explain, "These are the sorts of situations where we might expect the aircraft carriers to be used when it comes to hard power." Of course, as the hon. Lady says, there are so many other ways in which naval or military power of any sort could be used, including for the environment or to support human rights and freedoms, as we have seen so well displayed by our armed forces' humanitarian efforts in the past few years.

In my view, however, we do not explain—or, if you like, exploit—that enough to win public support. That is the major point I wish to make. I repeat that my constituents understand why we spend money on tackling terrorism. Those who support a much broader defence profile, including the hon. Lady and others—and I count myself in this category—need to explain much more clearly to constituents why this country rightly invests in what it does and why we should perhaps invest more in our defence across the world.

The hon. Member for Witney made a powerful point about Britain as a global force for good, but what does that actually mean? We could explain that, but we need to unpick it so that people understand what it means across the world and how we will operate with our allies to achieve it. That is what I mean about joining up foreign policy, international development and defence.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman is very kind to give way again. On his point about reaching out to constituents, I visited Ellington Primary School in my constituency a couple of weeks ago. The children had read a book about landmines and their impact on communities after the war was over. They set me a challenge, as the Minister knows, to make landmines a thing of the past. That is quite a big ask for a single MP, but I hope others will assist.

It is fascinating that the children came across that story in a book. They must have been completely transfixed by it, because it had motivated those 10-year-olds' political activity—their desire to do something better. The challenge that the Minister and I are working on is to see if we can find a member of the Army—perhaps even the Minister himself, who is an expert in bomb disposal—to go and talk to those children about what it

is to be a military person, and the skill and bravery that will help change the world into the better place that they want to see.

Vernon Coaker: I agree. The Minister, with his distinguished background, would be much more able than me to articulate that. That is the essence of what I am saying. Although we often talk about this in Parliament, we never seem to reach the point where we have a scheme to deliver that message more forcefully.

Rather than making broad strategic points, I want to mention a few specifics and it would be helpful if the Minister could address them. What does having two fully operational carriers mean? Does it mean having one fully operational taskforce at sea 24 hours a day, 365 days a year? If so, what is the other carrier doing? If not mothballed, is it tied up or ready to go? Do we have two because we assume that one will be in the dry dock? Can the Minister explain what we actually mean by "two fully operational carriers"?

Can the Minister confirm what the plan is for the number of aircraft on each of the aircraft carriers? He will correct me if I get my figures wrong, but we have ordered 48 F-35Bs. One presumes that those are all for the carriers, so if I have understood correctly, that means two squadrons of 12—one for each carrier—and that all 48 will be on the carriers. Is that right? What does that mean for the purchase of the additional 90 aircraft still to be ordered, and will they be As, Cs or more Bs? Can he say a bit more about how the aircraft strike group will work with NATO and in interaction with the different navies and air forces of NATO?

Can the Minister say a bit more about the aircraft carriers operating in littoral space and what that means? Some parliamentary answers have stated that we cannot do that because it might put some of the operational capabilities of the vessels at risk. I wonder whether Ministers sometimes retreat to that answer. How will the carriers operate with helicopters? What does the loss of HMS Ocean, which has been criticised, mean for our helicopter landing capabilities at sea, and should we expect that to happen on carriers? If so, how near would they have to be? Those are a few of my specific questions to the Minister.

I say all of that as a great supporter of the building of the carriers and the creation of a carrier strike group, and we all wish the defence programme well. The whole thrust of this debate is that the Government need to look at what more they can do to ensure that our foreign policy, defence and international development objectives are married in a much more effective way, and that that is explained to the citizens of the United Kingdom.

3.38 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing the debate—I really enjoyed listening to his fascinating speech. His debate is on a topic of very strong interest to many people in my constituency—engineers, scientists and personnel from MOD Defence Equipment and Support, who have played a crucial part in realising the vision of new UK carrier strike capability.

[Jack Lopresti]

We are fortunate in our country to have both a world-leading manufacturing defence sector and the best armed forces in the world. Many countries around the world use our forces as a reference for how theirs should train and operate. Our defence manufacturing industries ensure that the UK remains one of the top exporters of defence equipment and technical know-how in the world. That gives global Britain a strong platform as we seek to renew and enhance our trading and defence alliances around the world. I am particularly proud of the part that my constituency has played in bringing a new national carrier strike capability into being. Aircraft and the vessels have benefited, and will benefit, from the skill and creativeness of the men and women employed in and around Filton and in the broader south-west.

I will mention a few specific areas. Rolls-Royce's involvement in carrier strike supports several hundred jobs at its Bristol site in my constituency. The Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier MT30 gas turbine, and the anti-air warfare Type 45 destroyer WR21 gas turbine, are supported by Bristol. It is also worth getting on the record that the anti-submarine Type 23 frigates, which are powered by Spey gas turbines, are supported out of the Filton plant, and that the STOVL derivative engines for the F35B, which will fly from the Queen Elizabeth, were designed there.

Thales, a founding member of the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, led the procurement of the glass flying control—FLYCO—position, fitted on to the rear island, which is the operational centre controlling all air operations. That links the ship's operations room, navigation bridge, flight deck and hangar operations centre. Crucially, Thales provides the communications systems for both carriers. The systems, from wireless on board to satellite connectivity, allow personnel on the ships to talk to each other, the aircraft, the rest of the Navy and associated task groups, as well as allies, civilian vessels and air traffic, with complete security anywhere in the world.

BAE Systems has a networked visualisation suite at Filton, which allows the company to engage with the MOD and other customers in design reviews and approvals on an ongoing basis. I also pay particular tribute to the work done at MOD Abbey Wood in my constituency by more than 8,000 dedicated public servants, who will have been central to the acquisition of the ships, and the various sensors and systems on the ships and aircraft.

A national carrier strike capability is a clear outward sign of our intent to play an even bigger part on the world stage. We have heard much nonsense about Britain turning inward because of Brexit, but we have been a global maritime nation since the Elizabethan era, if not before. Our global connections might be underpinned by friendship and history, but such links are crucial and practically utilitarian. In a world where autocracies sometimes seem to have the upper hand, quiet diplomacy must always be backed by a credible capability. Our allies rightly look to us to come to their aid when they are threatened, or to act as a deterrent.

Many countries enjoy the opportunity to train with British service personnel. That helps to enhance and develop good relationships, which sustain a shared commitment to an open and inclusive world in which many might otherwise be tempted to appease or

accommodate more powerful countries that do not necessarily have their best interests at heart, or share our values.

I, for one, was delighted when the Secretary of State announced the decision to deploy the Queen Elizabeth and a supporting group of escorts and auxiliaries in the far east in due course. That is a great reflection of our support for allies in the region, as well as a restatement of the freedom of navigation on the high seas, which is enjoyed by all. That is a tangible benefit that most people can understand of having carrier strike force capability. I am sure that the Minister agrees that if the carrier is going east of Suez and into the Asia-Pacific region, it would be great if it visited Singapore during the 60th anniversary of that country's independence, which will be in 2025, to demonstrate the deep bonds between our two countries, and to emphasise our outlook being much more global.

We would do well to recall that we need to develop the carrier strike concept, and that by using F35s since the beginning, we have cross-trained with US personnel on an ongoing basis. That can only help our ability to operate and deploy with our key and closest NATO ally, the United States.

History shows us that we never seem to know where the next threat will come from. In a multi-polar world, we need to invest in capability that is agile and that will give policy and decision makers real, serious and tangible options. Carrier strike capability represents a sovereign capability, enabling our country to make choices that support our national interest. The challenges that we encountered during Operation Ellamy—the recent Libya campaign, when it was difficult for us to operate individually—demonstrated that the lack of proper carrier capability would inhibit our ability to act unilaterally in future, or even to act as well as we would like with some of our NATO allies. We now have an even greater opportunity to project the United Kingdom as a global presence, distinct from Europe, although we remain a firm European ally that will vigorously defend the continent's freedom and security if necessary, through NATO.

The UK's carrier strike capability will serve as a great way for our country to showcase some of the technology and innovation to which I have referred, specifically in my constituency. We need many more of the outstanding engineers and scientists who played such a central role in making the idea of new sovereign carrier strike capability a reality, so that we can enhance and increase our sovereign defence manufacturing capability well into the future. It brings together the best of British: great people, great ships, and great technical expertise and innovation.

However, we must always remember the purpose of our armed forces: to protect the national interest, our freedom and our way of life, and the security and protection of our people, using lethal force if necessary. I cannot think of a better way of doing that than with our carrier strike, and I cannot think of a better way than our carrier strike of enhancing our global position, being ambassadors to the world and tying together, as others have said, the three Departments of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence. That is something that we need to talk about a lot more.

3.45 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on an impassioned opening speech. I also associate myself fully with the words of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) about my colleague on the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), because what she and many of her colleagues face is an affront to parliamentary democracy. They should have the full support of the entire House.

I agree with a lot of what has been said in the debate. We on the Defence Committee often find that we agree on quite a lot—apart from one glaring, obvious thing. The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) pointed out some of the issues faced in Govan to do with the structure of the yard, which was formerly Norwegian owned and was built specifically for oil rigs. That legacy has impacted the shipping industry across the whole of these islands; I will go into that at some point, as the son of a shipyard worker outside the city of Glasgow. I also agreed with the hon. Gentleman about incremental changes to structures. That links to affordability and capability. Capability is worth nothing if we cannot afford it in the long term.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee, is eloquent on the political dimensions. I might say more about that. His chairmanship of the Select Committee is second to none, and he is welcoming to all Members, no matter if we have slight disagreements on the odd occasion. The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) talked about support. I could not agree with him more. Another element of that support, apart from the construction of vessels of any type, is the naval personnel. I am sure that he recognises, as Committee members do, some of the profound challenges we face in recruitment, not just to the Army but to the entire armed forces. The hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) mentioned the connection between local industry and the industrial complex. He will find no disagreement here. He is correct that those are essential elements to consider.

A few anniversaries were mentioned at the beginning of speeches; it would be remiss of me as a Bankie not to mention that today is the anniversary of the launching of the Duke of York from the John Brown shipbuilding company, the greatest shipyard that ever existed on the Clyde, in the burgh of Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire. My grandfather worked as a riveter in the yard. The shipyard also gave birth to the mighty Hood and to aircraft carriers, the Nairana class—a strike force of some sort—and HMS Indefatigable, which was launched in December 1942. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who is just leaving the Chamber, also mentioned the Britannia. The sad thing about the Britannia's retirement was that she ended up on the east coast of Scotland, rather than where she should be, back in the burgh of Clydebank. My father worked on that ship as well.

Mr Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good speech about Clydebank's shipbuilding pedigree. He might also want to note, for the record, that the world's first aircraft carrier, HMS Argus—a converted ocean liner—was built just downstream at Beardmore's in Dalmuir. That gave birth to the whole concept of the

modern through-deck aircraft carrier, and it is a great tribute to the pedigree of Clyde shipbuilding. I would perhaps dispute his claim that Clydebank is the greatest shipyard on the Clyde; Fairfield has a good claim to that title, too.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: No Glaswegian is ever going to win that argument with me. On Beardmore's, the hon. Gentleman steals my thunder and my speech—perhaps he saw it earlier. Beardmore's was one of the greatest shipyards. It ran from Dalmuir, where I am from, all the way into the borough itself. Its demise was the result of bad planning and ineffectual ministerial planning of the budget between the two great wars—but enough of the history. Well, perhaps I will mention one more thing. As the son of an 85-year-old coppersmith who still has his equipment in the garden hut, I fundamentally recognise the blood, sweat and tears of those who build the carrier force, even in the 21st century. They are to be commended for their sterling work, which they are committed to in Rosyth.

I am sure the Minister recognises that there are three members of the Defence Committee here. The role of the carrier force is well understood, not just by the Committee but in the House, and I hope he recognises some of the concerns that have been highlighted to us as the carriers head into service. A former Chief of the Defence Staff said of the carriers:

“The navy says that in a ‘high-threat environment’ they will be protected by two destroyers, two anti-submarine frigates, a submarine, a tanker and a supply ship. That is a huge commitment for a navy that has just 19 destroyers and frigates and six available subs.”

I hope the Minister takes that on board and considers how we will rectify a situation in which we think we are unable to deliver that for two carriers. In addition, Professor Peter Roberts of the Royal United Services Institute stated:

“it's clear that the decision to pursue two carriers at the expense of everything else in defence has weakened the defence posture of the UK as a whole.”

How do we reconcile that with the contribution of those two carriers to the UK's defence?

Following on from what the Chair of the Select Committee and the hon. Member for Gedling said, will the Minister say more about the impact on post-Brexit trade talks with the People's Republic of China of the Secretary of State's first foray—I suppose in some technical manner—into the carrier strike strategy with his recent statement about using “lethal force” in the South China sea? Indeed, the Chancellor said that the UK's relationship with China

“has not been made simpler”

by that. Can the Minister tell us whether that first foray was a success?

The hon. Member for Witney correctly mentioned some of the Government decisions made. Since 1997, we have seen an overall decrease of around 39% in the number of ships in the Royal Navy, with a 46% decrease in the number of destroyers and frigates.

The Chair of the Select Committee and I fundamentally agree about the north Atlantic. I think some of our colleagues are getting a bit sick of me banging the drum about the north Atlantic, but I think he appreciates it. There is growing concern that, given the Russian Federation's refresh of the bastion theory, we must

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

fundamentally shift our approach to defence of the north Atlantic to maintain sea lines of communication, which the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned, and—we never talk about this—the transatlantic cable network between Canada and the United States, and the UK and the rest of the European continent. Will the Minister advise us how the strategy will enhance capability in the north Atlantic and the High North?

On capability, the Select Committee has consistently raised concerns about issues with the F-35 programme and the impact of expenditure, including about our ability to deliver on the expected expenditure in the equipment plan, given that the Public Accounts Committee stated in January that the Department

“lacks the capability to accurately cost programmes within its Equipment Plan”.

I recognise what other Members said about the F-35s from the United States. That is a great commitment by the United States, but there are concerns about our ability to follow up on it.

On foreign policy, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed reminded us that we are an island. It is a pity that that was missed out of the 2015 strategic defence and security review. The Secretary of State, although he was not in that role at the time, was questioned about that by the Select Committee and said he would ensure that it was corrected. The hon. Lady mentioned the battle for the north Atlantic, which is a stark reminder of the strategic importance of the north Atlantic. As I keep saying, it is in the name—NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The Chair of the Select Committee mentioned the issues with the Prince of Wales, which perhaps should have been called the Duke of Rothesay. I hope the MOD can provide real clarification about its future. If it is sold, will that money be spent on a fleet and continued investment in the north Atlantic?

Essential elements of this discussion are sometimes hindered by short-term political planning. Will the Minister advise us on whether there have been any discussions in the Department about approaching our Scandinavian allies? I have raised that in the Select Committee. From my party's perspective, adopting the Scandinavian model of having SDSRs that cover whole Parliaments would be an appropriate way to approach the planning of defence policy. Although there may not be consensus across the House on one or two elements of defence, I think we could coalesce around the vast majority of defence issues and gain support for them for a whole five-year Parliament. That would give consistency to those working in the field in industry, to the Department, and, essentially, to those in the armed forces who we ask to go on to the frontline. Finally, will the Minister commit to Rosyth being the long-term refitting home of the carrier force?

3.57 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing the debate and allowing us an opportunity to consider this very important capability. May I also take the opportunity to express my agreement

with the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) and for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), and to express my absolute solidarity and support for my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and other colleagues?

In his passionate speech, the hon. Member for Witney summarised the role of aircraft carriers in the Royal Navy's recent history and called for a national carrier strategy and innovation as we look to the future. We also heard from a range of other Members, who spoke with passion about our armed forces, highlighting the support across the House for those who serve Queen and country and for the platforms they work from.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North mentioned the exquisite ships she visited and made the point that we need the crews to staff them. I will return to that. She also mentioned the need to secure employment opportunities across the UK, the need for a long-term plan and the need to consider the steady drumbeat of orders. I hope the Minister responds to that point.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed gave an overview of our maritime tradition and of the new carriers and their capabilities, and spoke of her pride in watching them develop. She also mentioned the need for a clear strategy for carriers into the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) mentioned his very interesting personal experience in the shipbuilding industry, and the complexities and constraints of the shipyards. He also talked about the need to secure employment weighted in the support and supply chain across the UK, which is a key point to bear in mind as we move forward.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who is Chair of the Select Committee on Defence, gave a plea for new members of that Committee and raised his concerns about the 1998 SDSR, which was unfunded, and the 2010 SDSR, which was unstrategic. He raised the need to have a strategic goal and long-term investment in our armed forces, a point that he has raised persistently and will continue to raise in the future, I am sure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) talked about his sense of frustration, as well as the need for foreign policy that is linked to defence policy and for better co-ordination. He raised the growing need to engage with the British public better, to win hearts and minds, which is something that was raised a number of times.

The hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) highlighted the point that many businesses in the supply chain in his constituency, and across the UK, have contributed to the carrier capability.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) highlighted, in order to have an effective carrier strike capability, there has to be the necessary personnel. This is the first defence debate since the publication of the latest personnel statistics, which showed yet another fall in the number of Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel. Can I ask the Minister for his response to those statistics? In 2010 the total trained strength of the Navy and the marines was 35,500, but that has now fallen to just 29,100. That is almost 5% short of the Government's own target of 30,450 for 2020. Can the Minister confirm whether the 2020 targets for all services, but particularly for the Navy and the marines, still stand and how he hopes to achieve them?

Rear-Admiral Jerry Kyd, the first commanding officer of HMS Queen Elizabeth, who is to soon be promoted to vice-admiral and fleet commander—I extend my congratulations to him—has described recruitment to the Royal Navy as a “constant battle”. Based on the latest statistics, it is a battle that the Government are losing. The announcement by the Secretary of State of two new littoral strike ships will no doubt put further pressure on an already overstretched Navy. Can the Minister confirm what efforts are being undertaken to buck those recruitment trends and to ensure that our carriers, our Navy and all our services have the necessary personnel to meet their objectives, namely to defend our country, its values and interests?

The F-35B fighter aircraft will be an essential part of the carrier strike. However, recent reports suggest that a full F-35 carrier strike capability will only be delivered by 2025-26, some four years after the expected first deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling mentioned, can the Minister set out how that gap will be filled? Can he confirm that the Government remain committed to procuring all 138 F-35B fighter aircraft?

The Government’s national security adviser, Sir Mark Sedwill, has previously said that the aircraft carriers would

“inevitably be used in the context of allied operations of some kind if used in a contested environment”.

The hon. Member for Witney made this point. Can the Minister set out how he will work to ensure interoperability with our allies, as the carrier strike capability develops?

Finally, there is the issue of affordability. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have repeatedly warned Ministers of huge funding gaps in their defence equipment plan, of between £7 billion and £15 billion. At the same time, the Secretary of State has already proposed sending our carriers to the Pacific and has even talked about building military bases in the Caribbean and south-east Asia, among many other commitments. Ministers can no longer delay making decisions on those important issues, so will the Minister agree to the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee and come forward with

“a coherent plan to maintain the UK-based capability to develop and deliver the equipment required in the future”

by July of this year? I look forward to the Minister’s response.

4.4 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing this important and timely debate. It has been a good-natured and collegial debate. We can certainly agree on two things: we are all delighted that the age of carrier strike has returned and that the Treasury is the enemy.

A number of colleagues have made thoughtful and intelligent contributions. It has been one of the best debates I have been in as a Minister for some time, which is why I stand in slight trepidation as I make my own contribution. There have been a number of detailed questions. I will do my best to answer them, but I have no doubt that I will not be able to answer all of them, in which case I will write in detail to hon. Members. Many

of the subjects that have come out during the debate are worthy of debates in their own right, be that recruiting or the national shipbuilding strategy. I cannot begin to do those subjects justice, but hopefully I will touch some wave tops—no pun intended—as I respond.

We are a proud maritime nation, dependent upon global access to the sea to build our prosperity and project our influence. For centuries, the Royal Navy has been a vital instrument of sea power, ensuring our unrestricted access to trade routes and protecting our vital interests around the globe. Over the past 100 years, the aircraft carrier has increasingly come to epitomise the strength and ambition of leading naval powers. It is a statement of intent and a manifest example that a state is a player on the global stage, which is able to reach out and exploit the attributes of maritime manoeuvre, organic sustainability, and the speed and flexibility of air power to coerce or reassure. As such, the rebuilding of a world-class carrier strike capability offers a step change in our ability to globally project military power and constitutes a new strategic conventional deterrence.

The United Kingdom’s carrier strike capability has three component parts. The first two are the state-of-the-art Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers and the cutting-edge fifth generation F-35B Lightning combat aircraft, which the aircraft carriers have been specifically designed and built from the hull up to operate and accommodate, as highlighted by several hon. Members. The third element is the Crowsnest airborne early-warning surveillance and control system, which will provide the eyes and ears of the carrier strike task group, and enable command and control to the Lightning aircraft.

Where are we on this journey? Last year we saw HMS Queen Elizabeth complete successful first of class flying trials off the east coast of the United States, which followed the declaration of initial operating capabilities in secondary roles earlier in the year. I will come back to the questions about that raised by hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) in a moment. HMS Queen Elizabeth is now in Portsmouth undergoing a capability insertion period prior to deploying to the east coast to conduct an operational test, which will be the first time we will operate frontline F-35Bs with the ship.

Meanwhile, HMS Prince of Wales is on track to be accepted by the Royal Navy at the end of the year. Last summer we saw 617 Squadron stand up in the UK with the Lightning force, subsequently declaring initial operating capability from land in December. They are now developing their understanding of operating the aircraft prior to deploying with the ship to the east coast. Crowsnest is working to a challenging timeline to marry up the other two components to enable declaration of initial operating capability for carrier strike in December 2020, prior to the inaugural operational deployment in 2021, which will be the start of a 50-year life.

The formidable F-35B Lightning will be at the centre of this. Jointly manned by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, it will be able to conduct strategic attacks, support our troops and be able to work in threat environments hitherto unimagined by previous commanders. This is timely given the sophistication and proliferation of air defence systems in recent years, but the Lightning can do more and possesses an impressive ability to collect intelligence on enemy formations and threat systems. Just as importantly, it is then able to relay that information to other friendly forces working

[Mark Lancaster]

within and around the carrier strike task group, providing unparalleled situational awareness and so contribute to information superiority.

On the questions specifically regarding the F-35, as hon. Members know, to date 17 jets have been delivered and we have approvals to purchase the first 48, of which we have formally ordered 35. Ultimately, we are committed to buying 138. Our 18th is due to be delivered in the summer of 2019 and I am pleased to say that the programme remains firmly on schedule. Our first frontline squadron, the 617, which I have already mentioned, has already arrived in the UK and the operational conversion unit—those that have been working in the US—will arrive next summer. A second squadron, 809 Naval Air Squadron, will join 617 and 207 at RAF Marham in due course.

When it comes to ordering future aircraft, and the question of what type they should be—B, A or other variants—that is a decision we do not yet have to make. It is important to note that we are starting a journey. I will come back to this point when we talk about the strategy. Up to now, as I have described, we have been consolidating the three elements for carrier strike, and now we begin the operational phase. This is a new piece of work and, as that operational phase continues, we will see how effectively these squadrons work together and whether we need more Bs or whether in future we will buy As. That is not a decision we have to make right now, and in many ways it would be wrong to make it right now, before we have experience of operating this platform. It will be made in due course.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: In relation to our future purchasing of more jets, are the Government at all considering purchasing Cs rather than As, which clearly have a more bespoke outlook to them? We would then be able to fly the Cs off American aircraft carriers as well.

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes an important point about interoperability. Of course, that is the whole point of the first deployment, when we will have US marine corps jets on our platform. We have an eye to ensuring that we have that interoperability, which is precisely why we keep our options open on what we will buy next. Narrowing our options right now on what future jets we will buy would be premature.

These attributes, together with other forms of attack from the task group, such as long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, constitute a powerful ability to reach inland—all this in a mobile force able to range 500 miles a day and at immediate readiness, without the need to seek the permission of other nations for the land-basing of our fighter aircraft. Once our Queen Elizabeth-class carriers, including HMS Prince of Wales when accepted at the end of the year, become fully operational—we have already highlighted that timeframe—the United Kingdom will maintain a carrier ready to deploy at very high readiness, that is, within five days.

That goes back to the question that the hon. Member for Gedling asked about how the two carriers will work together. Like any platform, the physical side of the ship will go through a natural cycle. Having been built—or, in future, having been through a long period of maintenance—it will enter the force generation period,

when manpower and jets are married with the ship. We will go through a training period. We always think about the platforms, but we do not always think about the people. They will go through their careers; new pilots and junior sailors come in, and we must ensure that they are trained in the appropriate way. Then the ship goes on deployment. When it comes back, it goes into a period of maintenance—and the cycle continues.

The point of having two ships and effectively offsetting that process is that at any one point we will always have one at very high readiness. There may be times when we potentially have two carriers available; they would not both be at very high readiness, but a second carrier could, for example, go off and do a secondary task. As we said in the SDSR, who knows what is around the corner? Who predicted Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean last year? We were able to send a vessel to deal with that situation. By having two vessels—especially new vessels—and offsetting that cycle, we can maintain the flexibility to ensure we have those vessels available to do a number of different tasks.

While delivery of carrier strike is absolutely main effort—the primary role—the inherent flexibility of the carrier enables a range of secondary roles to be undertaken, if that is what the situation dictates, as I have just tried to describe. Those roles range from supporting our Royal Marines in undertaking amphibious operations, to providing discrete support to our special forces and, as we saw, humanitarian and disaster relief.

The new capability will enable the UK to make an unparalleled European contribution to NATO, the cornerstone of our defence policy. Indeed, carrier strike is “international by design”, with the convening power of the Queen Elizabeth-class carriers already evident. Other European nations have already expressed a clear interest in exercising with, and more importantly deploying as part of, the carrier strike task group. Thus, carrier strike provides not only a potent additional capability to NATO, but also a means of coalescing European naval effort. It will, of course, also be able to operate with our partners’ aircraft, a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) made.

That is especially so with our closest ally, the United States, which will be embarking United States marine corps F-35B Lightning jets alongside our own on board HMS Queen Elizabeth for her inaugural operational deployment in 2021. That level of close co-operation has been reached through extensive work over the past decade between our two nations, requiring levels of information sharing and trust that are only evident between the closest of allies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney talked in his opening comments, which were excellent—I have not heard a better opening to a debate for some time—about a “loss of culture” of carrier strike. I will gently say that that was anticipated, which is why over the past 10 years we have had many Royal Naval personnel and pilots operating on US carriers, so that we have not completely lost that skill set. Personally, I was delighted and honoured to go on board the George H.W. Bush the summer before last, when it was operating in the North sea.

Robert Courts: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that. To clarify what I meant, I did not intend any criticism from 2010 onwards; I fully appreciate that

we have had people embedded with the US navy. I meant operating big carriers, as opposed to the smaller carriers we have had since the Invincible days, and the change in culture from the late 1970s, when we had the Audacious class.

Mark Lancaster: I think my comments demonstrate that we are well placed to renew this capability in the Royal Navy and, crucially, how well placed we are—a point made by several hon. Members—to ensure that we have interoperability with our closest allies.

Carrier strike not only offers political and military advantage to Her Majesty's Government and our allies, but provides significant benefit to the UK industry. Before I get on to the industry element, I will touch on strategy, because the point was raised by several hon. Members. I gave one example to the hon. Member for Gedling of how the Government are genuinely trying to bring a cross-Whitehall approach to formulating strategies in this area. That is something we have already been doing with carrier; as I have already said, the past five years have been getting us to this point. We now have a cross-Whitehall strategy being formed about how exactly we should use this asset.

Of course, that all cascades down from the formation of the National Security Council in 2010, which brought together for the first time the different strands of Government to try to make the very decisions that hon. Members have rightly said we should be considering. The framework is in place and, of course, as we move forward through operations and gain experience, it will be refined.

With regard to industry, the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers have been built over six locations, involving over 10,000 people, in addition to 800 apprentices and 700 businesses and suppliers. This includes 7,000 to 8,000 jobs at the tier 1 shipyards around the UK, plus a further 2,000 to 3,000 people across the UK supply chain. UK industry also provides approximately 15% by value of each of the 3,000 Lightning aircraft scheduled to be built over the life of the programme. That will potentially create a £35 billion net contribution to the UK economy and up to 25,000 jobs in the UK.

In addition, the UK's role as a key partner in the global F-35 programme was reaffirmed earlier this month, with the announcement of a major boost to the F-35 avionics and aircraft component repair hub, which was awarded a second major assignment of work, worth some £500 million, by the US Department of Defence. This is an excellent outcome and will support hundreds of additional F-35 jobs in the UK, many of them at the MOD's Defence and Electronics Components Agency at MOD Sealand in North Wales, where the majority of the work will be carried out. It will involve crucial maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade services for an even wider range of F-35 avionics, electronic and electrical systems for hundreds of F-35 aircraft based globally.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) talked at length and with great, detailed knowledge about the impact and the tempo, if you like, of not losing skillsets, and about the relationship between Government and industry. I accept that he does not support many of the recommendations of the national shipbuilding strategy. Owing to the scope of the debate, I will not get into the procurement of fleet solid support

ships, or that relationship. However, as he probably spotted in February, Sir John Parker announced that he will undertake a review of that strategy, which is due to report later this year. I hope that that demonstrates to the hon. Gentleman that, while I support the strategy, we are not dogmatic in our approach to it, and that we are prepared to review the strategy one year on to see how it is bedding in. He made some important points.

Dr Julian Lewis: On fleet solid support ships, we on the Defence Committee are a little bit worried that it is being presented to us and to the country that the Government have no choice but to run a competition. However, other countries, such as France, have built such ships without running competitions, and have classed them as warships. We worry about what, for example, Rosyth dockyard will do between the completion of the Prince of Wales and the first refit of the Queen Elizabeth. Building such ships would be a perfect way of maintaining that capability. We hope these wider considerations are being taken into account.

Mark Lancaster: Indeed; that is a perfectly reasonable point. My right hon. Friend wrote to the Minister with responsibility for defence procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), with many of these questions on 26 February. Hopefully he now has a reply, because the Minister replied yesterday.

Dr Lewis: I have not seen it yet.

Mark Lancaster: In that case, without going through the letter, I assure my right hon. Friend that it answers his questions, so far as I am concerned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney made several interesting points, not least in highlighting the historical necessity of carriers and—to my mind, as a Defence Minister—about historical SDSRs, with some being strategic and some effectively being written to budget. Rarely do those two factors meet. Getting that right in the future is absolutely key.

Carrier strike provides a new conventional strategic deterrent for the nation, and is a powerful manifestation of Britain's desire to reach out to the world as a nation that remains a global player. It provides Her Majesty's Government choice in exercising influence through coercive power, as well as being an effective tool to reassure our allies around the world. We must continue to innovate with the world-class capabilities of the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers, the F-35B Lightning and Crowsnest to ensure our competitive advantage, and to increase their interoperability with our partners' capabilities. Doing so will ensure that this 50-year capability remains potent into the second half of the 21st century. I am conscious that there were a few detailed questions that I have not addressed. I will look at the record of *Hansard* and endeavour to write to hon. Members.

4.24 pm

Robert Courts: I will canter through some of the points that struck me in the debate, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and from which I have learned a great deal. It really was an example of our all coming together with various kinds of expertise and being able to make progress in an area. I am grateful to all hon. Members for that.

[Robert Courts]

I entirely associate myself with the comments of others about the fortitude of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth). Never mind the aircraft; I very much look forward to the carriers being stocked with crockery from her constituency, off which the men and women sailing on the aircraft carrier will eat. I thank her for her contribution. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) made many excellent points, including on the battleground of the great sea war. Nothing much has changed regarding the importance of the sea. She was quite right to draw attention to the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, a particularly successful, innovative endeavour.

I really enjoyed the detailed knowledge that the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) brought to the debate, and two of his points in particular: first, the point that a carrier covers the equivalent of 0.3% of an airfield—I have never thought about it in quite that way before, but he is absolutely right—and secondly, his point about the industrial legacy of the space shuttle. Again, I have never thought about a carrier in that way, but he is quite right that we must make use of carriers in the way the Americans did with the space shuttle.

I feel terribly impertinent saying anything about defence in any room in which my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) stands, because of his expertise. He is absolutely right about the predictability of unpredictability, and I loved his point that the Treasury has sunk more ships than our enemies ever have. I could

not agree more with the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on linking foreign policy with defence, and on engaging with the UK public—something that I hope we have started to do today, at least in a small way. My hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) made a similar point on the need for links between DFID, the FCO and the MOD, and I entirely agree with him on that.

I thank both Opposition Front-Bench spokespeople, the hon. Members for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), for their contributions. Both seemed a bit startled by the extent to which we all agreed in the debate. It happens occasionally, and maybe we should all celebrate it when it does.

I thank the Minister for all his detailed answers. My final request to him, which I think every Member here made, in different ways, is for an overarching carrier strategy that brings together all Departments and everything we have discussed in one document that we can then debate and take forward. That is the central ask of the debate. I look forward to working with him and with every colleague in doing battle with, if not foreign countries, at least the Treasury.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered carrier strike strategy and its contribution to UK defence.

4.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 28 February 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Capacity Market for Electricity

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): Last week I informed the House that the European Commission had moved on to the next phase in their investigation of the GB capacity market. This is an important first step in restoring state aid approval for the capacity market as soon as possible.

On 19 December 2018, the Government consulted on a range of changes to the capacity market. These changes would allow for a capacity market auction to be held later this year for delivery in 2019-20. The consultation also covered how existing agreements would be managed during the current standstill period.

The Government have today published a response to that consultation. The vast majority of respondents supported the proposals to allow for an auction for capacity for winter 2019-20 to be held, with payments conditional on a positive state aid approval. They also supported the consequential changes to milestones required as a result of the auction being held later in the year than usual. There was also support for the proposed changes to the management of existing agreements to ensure that scheme obligations continue to be enforced in a pragmatic and proportionate way.

In the light of these responses I can confirm that the Government have today laid draft regulations for the approval of the House to enable these changes to be made to allow an auction to be held in summer 2019.

In our consultation, we also covered the issue of how suppliers can make provisions for suspended payments. In their response to the consultation, capacity market agreement holders identified the importance of them having confidence that they will receive their suspended payments in full after the end of the standstill period. They therefore favoured suppliers making adequate provision to make these payments. We have considered the consultation responses carefully and considered how to ensure that we can deliver this ambition in the most effective and timely way.

I can therefore confirm that the Electricity Settlements Company will establish a system to facilitate suppliers' meeting their supplier charge liabilities during the standstill period. The inclusion of supplier charges within the price cap already means that all suppliers should be factoring this into their variable tariffs during the standstill period and making prudent provision to enable them to be paid immediately after the end of the standstill period. During the standstill period, the Electricity Settlements Company will:

- issue a schedule of post-standstill supplier charges on a monthly basis setting out their liabilities apportioned according to the current formula based on suppliers' demand in 2018-19. This will enable suppliers to manage their finances effectively;

- accept payments against that schedule in an interest-bearing account.

Ofgem will continue monitoring the financial resilience of suppliers, including to understand how any suppliers that are not paying into the Electricity Settlements Company system are making suitable provision to cover their supplier charge liabilities.

Following the end of the standstill period the Electricity Settlements Company will:

- invoice suppliers at the earliest opportunity for the full amount of outstanding supplier charges;

- work with Ofgem to use a range of tools, including enforcement under the regulations, to ensure prompt payment of this invoice;

- levy, in line with the existing regulations, interest on late payments;

- pay capacity agreement holders their outstanding capacity payments in full.

We will shortly consult on regulatory changes that will be required to hold a T-3 auction in early 2020.

[HCWS1372]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

EU Environment Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The next EU Environment Council will take place on 5 March, in Brussels. I will be attending to represent the UK, and the Scottish Minister for Rural Affairs and Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon MSP, will also attend.

On environment items, the main legislative focus will be a general approach on the drinking water directive. In addition, there will also be an exchange of views on greening the European semester, and a policy debate on the European Union framework on endocrine disruptors.

The primary focus for climate items will be a policy debate entitled a "Clean planet for all: Strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy".

Any other business (AOB) will include information from the Commission on three items:

- Better enforcement of the EU phasedown for hydrofluorocarbons;

- Proposal for a regulation in order to take appropriate account of the global data collection system for ship fuel oil consumption data;

- Intersessional Espoo meeting of the parties, Geneva, 5 to 7 February 2019.

There are currently three member state led AOBs:

- Environmental protection policies to combat depopulation in rural areas and to improve quality of life (tabled by Spain);

- Tackling greenhouse gas emissions by aviation pricing (tabled by Belgium);

- Preparation of the XXI conference of the parties to the Barcelona convention, for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal area of the Mediterranean, hosted by Italy in Naples from 2 to 5 December 2019 (tabled by Italy).

[HCWS1367]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU 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 19 February 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/2019/02/19/>.

Multiannual financial framework 2021-27

The presidency presented Ministers with an updated work programme on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-27. Ministers discussed the latest version of the negotiating box on the MFF. The negotiating box brings together the large number of decisions within the MFF negotiations, and facilitates discussion on options and solutions on individual issues. Ministers agreed that the negotiating box should be simplified at future GAC discussions, in preparation for leaders to discuss at the June European Council. The intention is to reach an agreement on the negotiations in autumn 2019.

Preparation of the European Council 21 and 22 March 2019: annotated draft agenda

The Council discussed an annotated draft agenda for the March European Council. Leaders are expected to discuss jobs, growth and competitiveness; climate change, external relations, tackling disinformation and protecting the democratic integrity of the European and national elections across the EU. The Commission confirmed that industrial policy, single market, capital markets union, and European digital policy should be discussed under the first agenda item. Ministers welcomed the EU-China summit on the agenda, and highlighted the importance of a strong relationship with China for future economic and trade opportunities.

I intervened to welcome the inclusion of the tackling of disinformation and restated the Prime Minister's comments at the December European Council that disinformation remained a threat to our democratic processes. I welcomed the Commission's recent action plan on disinformation and called for clearly defined and measurable objectives for its follow up. I stated that to tackle disinformation effectively we needed to take a comprehensive approach that included addressing the actors behind disinformation.

Towards a sustainable Europe 2030

Ministers discussed the Commission's reflection paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030, on the follow-up to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change". The reflection paper was published in January and served as a basis for the Council's discussion on what needed to be done to ensure a sustainable Europe by 2030. Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring sustainable development is supported through domestic, regional and global action, in order to achieve the implementation of the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development at EU level. This discussion will contribute to the preparation of the March Council conclusions on the Commission's reflection paper, and sessions of the high-level policy forum on sustainable development in July and September 2019.

Values of the Union—Hungary / article 7(1) TEU reasoned proposal

The presidency updated Ministers on its meeting with the European Parliament regarding the article 7(1) procedure in relation to Hungary. The Commission set out its ongoing infraction proceedings against Hungary's treatment of asylum seekers, attacks on media plurality and academic freedom.

Rule of law in Poland / article 7 (1) TEU reasoned proposal

The Commission provided Ministers with an update on the rule of law proceedings in Poland. Ministers considered that recent legislative changes concerning the Supreme Court law were a positive development, and encouraged the Polish authorities to address the remaining issues raised by the Commission.

[HCWS1368]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

EU Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, attended the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 18 February. It was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Brussels.

Current Affairs

Foreign Ministers welcomed the entry into force of the Prespa agreement which allows for the change of name of North Macedonia. They briefly discussed the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Horn of Africa

The High Representative informed Ministers about her visit to the region the previous week. Foreign Ministers welcomed the historic Ethiopia-Eritrea peace agreement. They discussed how the EU can support this unprecedented opportunity to accelerate reconciliation and economic integration in the horn of Africa. They reaffirmed the EU's engagement in the region, which still faces important challenges, not least the security situation in Somalia. They also highlighted the need to keep a strong focus on the respect for human rights, as well as on the situation of migrants who embark on perilous journeys, sometimes at a very young age.

Ukraine

The Council had a comprehensive discussion on Ukraine, covering the reform process as well as the security and humanitarian situation, in particular in eastern Ukraine and the sea of Azov. The Council reiterated its full support for Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty and continued condemnation of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia. Foreign Ministers acknowledged the important progress Ukraine has accomplished in key areas over the past five years and highlighted the need to maintain reform momentum.

The Council also expressed the importance of ensuring that the elections in Ukraine are well conducted. They highlighted the importance of ensuring that the OSCE election observation mission can conduct its work and can observe the elections in full accordance with its usual practice. Ministers exchanged views on how the EU can help, following the developments in the Azov sea and Kerch strait region, particularly through strengthened support in the affected areas, including in sectors such as railway and road connections, training, and support for SMEs. They reiterated the EU's call for all detained Ukrainian seamen to be released immediately.

as well as for the return of the seized vessels and free passage of all ships through the Kerch straits.

Syria

The Council discussed the situation in Syria. Foreign Ministers reiterated the EU's full and continued support for UN special envoy Geir Pedersen's efforts and the Geneva UN-led peace process for Syria, which remains key to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, citing a credible political transition in Syria as the only sustainable long-term solution to the conflict. Ministers reiterated that the EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way.

Ministers discussed preparations for the "Brussels III" conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region", which will take place on 12 to 14 March, and remains key to continue mobilising the international community behind humanitarian and resilience efforts for the Syrian people and host communities. The High Representative highlighted that the conference would have an even greater focus on the role of civil society and women, and that the issues of accountability and the fight against immunity will feature prominently.

Venezuela

Over lunch, Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in Venezuela, following the first meeting of the international contact group in Montevideo on 7 February and ahead of the technical mission to Caracas led by the EU and Uruguay. The mission will work on assessing the support that can be provided to facilitate a democratic and peaceful outcome to the crisis, and, in particular, the holding of early presidential elections. Foreign ministers also stressed that humanitarian aid should be delivered to the people in need.

Council conclusions

The Council agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted conclusions on Yemen.

The Council adopted conclusions on climate diplomacy.

The Council adopted conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2019.

The Council renewed for one year the restrictive measures against Zimbabwe. The sanctions consist of an arms embargo as well as a travel ban and an asset freeze to listed individuals and entities.

The Council added one person to the list of persons and entities targeted by the EU restrictive measures against ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda and persons, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them, bringing the total number of persons currently on the list to three.

The Council transposed UN-adopted law amendments, related to two individuals subject to restrictive measures, into EU law, in view of the situation in Afghanistan.

The Council approved and authorised the signing of an agreement on a framework for the participation of Jordan in EU crisis management operations.

The Council adopted the updated the EU's common military list in line with the provisions of common position 2008/944/CFSP on arms exports.

The Council approved a joint civil-military concept of operations on regionalisation of CSDP action in the Sahel. The process of regionalisation will now enter its second phase.

The Council authorised the Commission to intervene on behalf of the EU before US courts regarding the recognition and enforcement of intra-EU investment arbitration awards.

The Council endorsed a framework for a comprehensive dialogue between the EU and Iran on migration and refugee issues (5983/19).

The Council adopted a decision on the UK opt-out from the recast of the regulation on the creation of an immigration liaison officers network (5979/19).

The Council approved an information note containing recommended EU positions for the ICAO Council meeting on 18 February to 15 March 2019, so that the information note can be used as the basis for the interventions of the representatives of the ICAO Council EU members.

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the EU in the ICAO Council, in respect of the adoption of amendment 17 to annex 13.

[HCWS1366]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Equipment

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The Government are committed to giving the police the tools they need to do their job effectively and ensuring that officers' access to specialist equipment such as conducted energy devices (CEDs), commonly known as Tasers, can remain aligned with police assessments of threat and risk. CEDs are an important tactical option for specially trained officers, particularly in potentially violent situations where other tactics have been considered or failed.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today given his approval for chief officers of police forces in England and Wales to train selected student officers to carry CEDs where they have identified an operational need to do so. It is for chief officers to determine the number of CED devices and specially trained officers they require, based on their force's strategic threat and risk assessment. This change allows chief officers to consider student officers for CED training and deployment, provided they have met certain selection criteria, to help ensure frontline officers can protect themselves and the public.

I would like to assure the House that the existing high standards around CED training and operational deployment, for which the UK is renowned, will be maintained. It will remain voluntary whether an individual student officer applies for special CED training, and the CED training itself will remain the same—with the same standards needing to be met for a student officer to pass the assessment.

Additional safeguards have been put into place for the extension of CED use to student officers. Only student officers who have been assessed by supervisors to be sufficiently competent and experienced in dealing with incidents involving conflict will be able to apply for CED training. The College of Policing has developed a robust application framework for student constables which sets this out, including a post-use process to support continued officer development. Details of this proposal were submitted for independent medical review by the scientific advisory committee on the medical implications of less-lethal weapons (SACMILL).

The Home Secretary's decision to approve this measure follows stringent consideration of a number of factors including: the request for approval from the National

Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the College of Policing's application and post-use development framework and the views of SACMILL.

We are also clear that any use of force by police officers must be lawful, proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances. The Government are committed to improving transparency and accountability around use of force. This is why we initiated reforms to the way in which use of force data is recorded and published. On 13 December 2018, the Home Office published national "police use of force" statistics on gov.uk for the first time—providing unprecedented transparency and accountability. In addition, I expect any police forces who decide to extend CED use to student officers to monitor the impact of this change, including local consideration of injury data.

[HCWS1369]

Children in Custodial Institutions

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Today the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has published its latest strand report, which can be found at www.iicsa.org.uk.

This report relates to its investigation into the extent of any institutional failures to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation while in custodial institutions. I am grateful for the strength and courage of the victims and survivors who have shared their experiences to ensure the inquiry can deliver its vital work.

The Government will review this report and consider how to respond to its content in due course.

I would like to thank Professor Jay and her panel for their continued work to uncover the truth, expose what went wrong in the past and to learn the lessons for the future.

[HCWS1371]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

EU Exit: Free Trade Agreements

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): Today, I am laying a Command Paper—"Processes for making free trade agreements after the United Kingdom has left the European Union" (CM 63) before Parliament.

The Government are committed to ensuring that Parliament can conduct the right level of scrutiny of our future trade agreements. We have considered carefully the views expressed by parliamentarians in reaching the proposals set out in the Command Paper. This includes the recommendations made by the International Trade Committee in their report "UK trade policy, transparency and public scrutiny", which was published on 28 December 2018.

The Government's response to that report will be published shortly.

I will be laying this report in both Houses today and it will be available on DIT's website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/processes-for-making-free-trade-agreements-once-the-uk-has-left-the-eu>.

[HCWS1364]

Government Procurement Agreement

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): I wish to update the House on the progress made in securing the UK's continued participation in the WTO agreement on Government procurement (GPA) as we leave the EU. Yesterday in Geneva, the 19 parties to the GPA formally adopted the decision relating to the UK's accession to the agreement as a party in its own right. The GPA committee decision on the UK's accession refers to both the scenario where the UK and EU reach a deal on the terms of the UK's withdrawal, and one in which the UK is to leave the EU with no deal. If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, the UK will ratify the agreement as soon as possible, once the process set out in section 20 of the Constitutional Reform and Governance (CRAg) Act 2010 completes. This will ensure that our membership of the GPA—an agreement worth £1.3 trillion annually—continues, as now, in a no deal scenario. Should the withdrawal agreement be agreed between the EU and UK, a further decision of the GPA committee would be required to allow for UK accession at the end of the implementation period, but the GPA would continue to apply to the UK as if it were a member state of the EU during that implementation period. Leaving the EU with a deal remains the Government's top priority. This has not changed.

Yesterday's decision is a significant milestone for the UK, and it will ensure UK suppliers can continue to bid for Government contracts overseas on substantially the same terms as currently provided to the UK as an EU member state. It will also ensure that the UK continues to benefit from increased choice and value for money in areas where the UK's procurement opportunities are open to international competition, whilst importantly continuing to protect vital public services such as our NHS.

The Government have already begun the process set out in section 20 of the CRAg Act 2010 for Parliamentary scrutiny of the agreement. The agreement was laid before both Houses of Parliament on 18 February. This includes text of the agreement, the UK's market access schedules—consistent with our current offer as an EU member state—and the market access schedules of all parties, alongside accompanying explanatory memoranda. In a no deal Brexit scenario, the Government are anticipating a short gap between the UK leaving the EU and its accession to the GPA becoming effective. This is to allow for the completion of the necessary processes that allow for a new GPA accession to become legally effective. The gap is expected to be very short and, as a result, the Government are expecting the impact on UK businesses to be minimal.

[HCWS1365]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Finances

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): During the course of the past two years the UK Government have continued to work towards the restoration of a devolved Government. I remain fully committed to seeing this happen as my belief in the

Belfast agreement and devolution is resolute as is my commitment to protecting the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

A fundamental part of this is to protect the delivery of public services and ensure good governance in the absence of an Executive. I am, therefore, providing clarity and certainty on Northern Ireland finances for the 2019-20 financial year. This would enable Northern Ireland Departments to plan and prepare for the year ahead.

2019-20 Budget allocations

I set out below the resource and capital allocations which I consider to be the most balanced and appropriate settlement for Northern Ireland Departments. It would be open to a restored Executive, of course, to consider and revise the position I have set out.

In deciding on these allocations I have engaged intensively with the Northern Ireland civil service (NICS) to understand the needs of Departments as they continue to manage public services in the absence of an Executive. I have reflected too on the various views on budget priorities submitted to me over the course of the past year and discussed the budget situation with the main political parties in Northern Ireland.

As we work towards restoring devolved government, this Government will respect the devolution settlement and only intervene in Northern Ireland when it is absolutely necessary to do so. In the absence of local Ministers, and given the proximity of the next financial year, it would not be appropriate for the UK Government to seek to take fundamental decisions about service delivery and transformation. Those are strategic decisions that should be taken by locally elected and accountable Ministers in a new devolved Government. Yet we must act to secure public services and enable Northern Ireland Departments to meet urgent pressures in health and education and protect spending for other Departments with core frontline public services. That is what this budget settlement will do, by protecting and preserving public services within challenging fiscal constraints.

On the resource side, it delivers real-terms increases for health, education, infrastructure and justice. It also delivers cash increases to the Departments for the Economy and of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Elsewhere Departments would either be cash-flat, with notable reductions only for the two central Departments (Finance and the Executive Office). For capital, it provides a strong basis for investment and enables the York Street interchange to progress as well as key flagship projects including the Mother and Children's Hospital and the A6 road scheme.

UK Government support

The budget position is based on the assumption that the 2019-20 funding allocation set out in the financial annex to the confidence and supply agreement will be released, subject to Parliament's approval at main estimates.

Furthermore, in recognition of the lack of opportunity for more fundamental service reconfiguration over the last 12 months, this budget includes £140 million of new funding and some financial flexibilities to deliver this

draft budget. These flexibilities include using £130 million of existing 2019-20 capital funding to address public services resource pressures and additional carry forward of up to £85 million resource and £8 million capital from 2018-19 into 2019-20.

Transformation

As I set out last year, transformation is needed in a number of areas to make services sustainable in the long term. Northern Ireland Departments are limited in what strategic decisions can be taken without Northern Ireland Ministers but work to prepare for this must proceed. To that end, the budget includes a £4 million fund to prepare the ground for transformation.

Regional rate

As part of setting a budget, it is essential that the UK Government provide clarity on the regional rate. This budget position has been constructed on the basis of a 3% (plus inflation) increase on the domestic regional rate, and 0% plus inflation on business rates. I consider that this is a necessary and important step to continue to support public services, particularly in health and education. I can also confirm that this budget settlement would provide the basis for the small business rate relief to continue.

Brexit preparedness

Securing a deal with the EU which Parliament can support remains this Government's focus and priority. As a responsible Government, we are preparing for EU exit in all scenarios and so have allocated £2 billion in 2019-20 to support Departments and devolved Administrations in either a deal or no-deal scenario. For Northern Ireland Departments this includes £20.4 million of general EU exit funding that is allocated in this budget and a further £16.5 million for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (included in the Department of Justice's allocation) to reflect the specific and unique circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Implementing decisions within the overall allocations

This statement outlines overall allocations, based on my assessment of the options currently available to the Northern Ireland Departments and the funding available. To the extent possible, the consequent prioritisation of resources within Northern Ireland Departments will need to be undertaken by permanent secretaries, as has been the case during the past two years. It is anticipated that further funding will become available through the usual in-year monitoring process and this should enable Departments to address any remaining pressures. Permanent secretaries cannot, of course, take the full range of decisions that would be available to Ministers. In that context, the UK Government shall continue to support the Northern Ireland Administration, and to do whatever is necessary to meet our responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-02-28/HCWS1370/>.

[HCWS1370]

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 28 February 2019

EDUCATION

Instrumental Music Tuition

The following is an extract from the Adjournment debate on 25 February 2019.

Nick Gibb: We are also providing £2 million for national youth music organisations such as the National Youth Orchestra and £2 million for In Harmony.

[Official Report, 25 February 2019, Vol. 655, c. 140.]

Letter from the Minister for School Standards:

An error has been identified in my contribution.

The correct information should have been:

Nick Gibb: We are also providing **nearly** £2 million for national youth music organisations such as the National Youth Orchestra and £2 million for In Harmony.

ORAL ANSWERS

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Thursday 28 February 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
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Instrumental Music Tuition	3MC

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**not later than
Thursday 7 March 2019**

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