

**Wednesday
13 March 2019**

**Volume 656
No. 268**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Wednesday 13 March 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE AND CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was asked—

Leaving the EU: No Deal

1. **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a deal. [909760]

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): If you will indulge me for 30 seconds, Mr Speaker, I would like to apologise on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office for his absence from the Chamber. As I think you know, he has a commitment that means that I am taking his place today.

I say to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) that we have published over 300 items of no-deal content and we have broadcast across some 200 commercial radio stations. The Cabinet Office is facilitating the redeployment of staff between Departments, and it is co-ordinating contingency planning through established structures.

Gill Furniss: It was announced overnight that the Government plan to slash tariffs on the majority of products imported from outside the EU in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Such a move would mean cheaper steel imports, with business saying that that could destroy our steel sector and our manufacturing sector more broadly. What consultation did the Government undertake with the steel sector before the announcement?

Brandon Lewis: The temporary tariff regime aims to minimise costs to business and mitigate price impacts on consumers while supporting UK producers. I stress again that that is a temporary scheme, and business will be consulted over the first 12 months.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): This morning, right hon. and hon. Members and I were serving on a statutory instrument Committee. Along the Committee corridor, there are SI Committees almost every day,

preparing not only for a deal-Brexit but for a no-deal Brexit. Can I tell my right hon. Friend that we are prepared, in my view?

Mr Speaker: Aren't we? I think that is where the question mark comes.

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. As the Government have said consistently over the past couple of years, we are working so that we are prepared, whatever the outcome. The legislative default for this Parliament is to leave without a deal, if we do not agree a deal.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): The country is hanging on to a no-deal cliff edge. Today, we read about the Government's latest brilliant idea: a ludicrous TV advert telling the public, from Friday onwards, "Don't panic", which is a bit like Corporal Jones in "Dad's Army". However, this is not the Home Guard in the 1940s, and the prospect of thousands of job losses and shortages of food, medicine and so on are no joke. We can prevent this. Today, the Commons will take control from the Government to prevent such a disastrous scenario. Will the Minister join us?

Brandon Lewis: I find it somewhat ironic that the hon. Gentleman, along with his colleagues, is talking about preparation—the previous question was about preparation too—but complains that we are preparing the public for what may happen on 29 March. The simple answer is that he and his colleagues should have voted with us last night to make sure that we left the EU with a deal.

Civil Service Pay

2. **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with trades unions on civil service pay. [909761]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I regularly engage with unions on a range of civil service workforce issues, including pay. I most recently met union representatives across the wider public sector last month, and I will meet civil service trade unions on pay for 2019 very shortly.

Bambos Charalambous: Since 2010, wages for workers in the civil service have fallen 10% to 13% behind workers in the NHS, local government and the education sector. Despite that, the Cabinet Office has confirmed that any pay rise above 1% will have to come from further cuts in jobs, and in terms and conditions. Is it not time that the Government backed up their claim to be ending austerity by ending it first for their own employees?

Oliver Dowden: As the hon. Gentleman acknowledges, we have removed the 1% pay cap, and it is up to each Department to find efficiency savings and better ways of working to pay for greater pay rises. That is exactly what we have seen. For example, the Foreign Office agreed a deal of 4.6% on average over the course of two years, giving a pay rise but funded properly by efficiency savings.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend say whether in the discussions he has been having he has reflected on how much the national living wage will increase from next month, and how many workers that will benefit?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. In fact, the effect of the national living wage this year is to hand workers a £700 pay rise.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Can the Minister confirm that permanent secretaries agreed a 1% pay offer across the board in Departments last year? Does that not make a mockery of the fact that the Government have 200 separate pay negotiations across the civil service?

Oliver Dowden: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, in respect of lower grades—those below the senior civil service—there is a delegated pay process. The overall framework is set by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, and it is for individual Departments to decide. We will go through the proper process, and no final decisions have been taken.

Election Candidates: Disabilities

3. **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What plans the Government have to encourage more candidates with disabilities to stand for election. [909762]

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): In December 2018, we launched the £250,000 EnAble fund, which provides grants to help cover disability-related expenses that people might face when seeking elected office ahead of the May local elections.

James Duddridge: I thank the Minister for that answer. In the past, I have been a trustee of SHIELDS—Supporting, Helping, Informing Everyone with Learning Disabilities in Southend. What plans do the Government have to engage people who have learning disabilities in the electoral process?

Brandon Lewis: I congratulate my hon. Friend, as I know he works hard in supporting what SHIELDS does. It is clearly doing positive work for people with learning disabilities in Southend. We are committed to supporting people with learning disabilities in participating in democracy. We are working, to that end, in partnership with the Royal Mencap Society, including, for example, through facilitating a meeting between Mencap and political parties on the provision of easy-read manifestos.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Perhaps I should declare an interest, in that my wife is disabled and I have been glad of her support in my elections in the past. At the recent snap election, we faced an issue with access to voting stations; sometimes a school would be declared unsuitable because repairs were being carried out and another place had to be found for a voting station. Sometimes disabled access was an issue. What are the Government doing to make sure that it is made as easy as possible for disabled people to get in there and cast their vote?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We are working with returning officers on this issue, and there is the wider issue of engaging with people with disabilities to address. All of us, in all political parties, can do more about that. We should be looking at what we can do to encourage people to get involved. That is why I am so proud of being part of the Conservative party whose Conservative Foundation does exactly that.

Leaving the EU: Civil Service Responsibilities

4. **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the capacity of the civil service to manage its additional responsibilities as a result of the UK leaving the EU. [909763]

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): The Government are equipping themselves with the right people and the right skills to deliver the UK's exit from the European Union. We now have more than 14,500 people working specifically on EU exit-related policy and programmes across government. Workforce plans will continue to be reviewed to ensure that the civil service can always respond to emerging capacity and capability requirements.

Ruth George: What assessment has the Department made of the impact on other Departments, many of which have seen civil servants transferred into working on our strategy for exiting the EU?

Brandon Lewis: We have more than 400,000 civil servants across Departments and across the country, many of whom have areas that cross over with the work they are doing on the EU. We work with Departments to ensure that we are using the right skills in the right places to make sure that we are prepared to leave the EU in a good and orderly fashion.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on what measures are being taken to return civil servants who work in the EU—in Brussels and other parts—to the UK to carry on their duties?

Brandon Lewis: Obviously, as we leave the European Union, the civil servants who have been focused on those issues will continue to do the work they need to do that relates to the EU. Where that work ceases, they will be moved back into the relevant civil service areas, as is required, across Departments.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): At a meeting of the Cabinet Office in December, it was reportedly agreed that all non-essential Government business is to be suspended so that civil servants can concentrate on no-deal planning. Can the Minister confirm whether the Government consider the housing crisis, resourcing the Home Office to process settled status applicants, the failure of universal credit and the delays to HS2 to be essential or non-essential business?

Brandon Lewis: The best advice I can give the hon. Lady is not to get tempted to believe rumours of Cabinet leaks that she reads about in the newspapers. If she looks at the Government's track record, she will see that

we are delivering record employment levels and record low unemployment, that we are improving wage levels for people who work for the Government, and that we are delivering for people, with good and outstanding education continuing. I am sure she will look forward to hearing more about that in the spring statement later today.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Compared with two years ago when we triggered article 50, how much more and better prepared is the civil service right across the UK for what needs to happen in the next few months?

Brandon Lewis: Work has continued over the past two years. As the hon. Gentleman may recall from answers I have given at the Dispatch Box over the past year or so, the number of civil servants focused on this policy area has changed and increased as required, so that we are ready to leave the European Union on 29 March.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is clear, is it not, that Brexit will mean a lot of change, upheaval and uncertainty for ordinary civil servants throughout the country. I was therefore genuinely astounded to learn last week from the general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union that not a single meeting had taken place with national officers of that union to discuss Brexit. When will the Government start to discuss these matters with representatives of the workforce they depend on to deliver services throughout the country?

Brandon Lewis: We are engaged not only across the devolved authorities but with union officials, at both ministerial and official level, on a regular basis.

Dark Money

5. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of dark money on (a) transparency and (b) influence in UK politics. [909764]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): We have a robust legal framework for money in elections, to ensure that elections are free and fair. Donations to political parties of more than £500 must be from permissible donors, which include individuals on a UK electoral register, UK-registered companies and trade unions, and UK political parties. Responsibility for regulating that sits with the independent Electoral Commission.

Helen Hayes: Even this week, hundreds of thousands of pounds of dark money is being spent on social media adverts by a pro-Brexit organisation warning MPs not to “steal Brexit”. There is no information in the public domain about who is funding these ads, which are being so heavily promoted at a critical time in the Brexit process and are clearly aimed at influencing it. There is no place for dark money in British politics. The Electoral Commission has been calling on the Government to take action for years; why have the Government failed to act?

Chloe Smith: A number of recommendations have been made in this and related policy areas—for example, by the Electoral Commission and the Digital, Culture,

Media and Sport Committee. As would be expected, we are considering them all together and will respond in due course.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): This matter really is first-order business for the Government. Our electoral system has always been something of which this country has been proud. I urge my hon. Friend to push ahead with the steps needed to control this activity, because it is clear that on these big issues it is very bad news if people believe that the electoral system has been corrupted.

Chloe Smith: My right hon. Friend makes a weighty and important point. He is absolutely right that we should not be complacent about the way our electoral system runs. We have already taken forward a series of measures to ensure that it is secure, and we will do more of that to ensure that our system is good for today and fit for tomorrow.

9. [909768] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The problem is that the Government spend an awful lot of time condemning the actions of the press or social media platforms, but right now there are social media posts describing Members of this House as traitors and asking for us to be targeted to make sure that we vote a particular way. It is no good our condemning that sort of language in this House if Ministers do not take real action now to make election laws fit for now, to ensure that Members of Parliament can do their jobs freely and not be intimidated to vote a particular way.

Chloe Smith: The hon. Gentleman will have noticed the written ministerial statement that I published only last week, which outlined the steps that the Government have already taken and will be taking to reduce intimidation in public life. It has to be a collective job, though, and the Committee on Standards in Public Life was right to ask various organisations, including the social media companies, on which I know the hon. Gentleman does some work with one of his all-party groups, to take action.

Government Departments: Living Wage

6. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): If he will make it his policy to introduce the real living wage in all Government Departments and to seek accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation.

[909765]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): We are addressing this issue through the application of the statutory national minimum wage and the national living wage, based on the advice of the Low Pay Commission. From April, the national living wage will rise again, from £7.83 to £8.21 per hour, handing a full-time worker a further £690 annual pay rise.

Carol Monaghan: The real living wage is £9 an hour, and, in terms of paying it, Scotland is already the best performing part of the UK. Over the next three years, the Scottish Government will be lifting more people—25,000 more people—out of poverty and on to the real

living wage. When will the UK Government follow Scotland's lead in paying the real living wage, not the bogus national living wage?

Oliver Dowden: I am sorry to hear the hon. Lady referring to the national living wage as bogus. It is a very proud achievement of this Government and it is actually rising faster this year than the real living wage. Over the past three years, since it was introduced, the national living wage has handed the lowest paid workers a pay rise of almost £3,000.

Cyber-security

7. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help improve the cyber-security of public and private sector organisations. [909766]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): Our world-leading national cyber-security strategy, supported by £1.9 billion of transformational investment, sets out the steps that we are taking to defend our people, deter our adversaries, and develop the skills and capabilities that we need. Our vision is that, by 2021, the UK is secure and resilient to cyber threats and prosperous and confident in the digital world.

Alex Burghart: I was concerned to read that three quarters of FTSE 350 companies are not aware of the risks associated with businesses in their supply chain, particularly with businesses with which they have no contact. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that their own suppliers understand these vulnerabilities?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this very important issue. Companies must do more to understand their supply-chain risks. Our cyber essentials scheme extends our influence to organisations that provide products and services to Government; it specifies standards that will improve their cyber-security. We use contractual arrangements to ensure that they help those in their supply chains, often small companies, to be more secure.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Technology can help deliver public services which are better, smarter, more tailored and put people in control, but that requires investment in people, processes and equipment. The 2017 WannaCry attack on the NHS was a consequence of a lack of investment in all three. What is the Minister doing specifically to give local authorities and other public service deliverers the resources and the skills that they need to ensure secure digital public services?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the challenge of cyber-security, but we have responded to that challenge. That is why we have created the National Cyber Security Centre, funded by £1.9 billion of additional money. On the WannaCry incident, we have learned the lessons since that attack and we are, for example, rolling out Windows 10 across the NHS.

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): We know that 43% of businesses experience cyber-security breaches each year and, as we have just heard from my hon. Friend the

Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), we know that half of all local authorities in England still rely on unsupported server software. We know from the Minister himself that the Government have no idea how many cyber-attacks hit Government. Does the Minister accept that we need a new approach? We need to look at how we foster cultural cyber-change and we need to look at how we put the public good rather than private interest back at the heart of Government cyber strategy.

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady says that we have no idea of the level of attacks. I am happy to set out the number for her. We have already managed more than 1,100 major incidents through the National Cyber Security Centre. The national cyber security strategy is delivering, for example, the removal of more than 4.5 million malicious emails every month, and the taking down of 140,000 fraudulent phishing sites. This strategy is bringing together the commercial side and the Government side and it is delivering.

Mr Speaker: We are out of time, but we must hear the question of the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan).

Intimidation in Public Life

8. **Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): What assessment he has made of trends in the level of intimidation of people in public life. [909767]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The increasing prevalence of intimidation in public life can seriously damage our democracy, as we have already just discussed. The Government are taking a range of actions to tackle this problem, including a consultation on a new electoral offence of intimidating candidates and campaigners.

Nicky Morgan: I thank the Minister very much for that reply. She may have seen the "Exposure" programme broadcast last week, which captured the abuse and threats of death that I have faced, that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) has faced, and that my former right hon. Friend—still a friend—the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), has faced. There was also an excellent response from the Speaker to a point of order that I raised on the matter. Does the Minister agree that the systematic intimidation of MPs in this place on the way they vote should be a real concern to anybody interested in our democracy?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I do agree. The Government have therefore been working closely with the parliamentary security team, the police, administrators and others, because tackling this issue requires action from everyone. It also goes wider than just Members of Parliament. For example, we are helping candidates at the local elections this year to be safer with their home addresses.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: One sentence, Tom Brake.

10. [909769] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Minister commit to conducting a Mueller-style public inquiry into the alleged electoral fraud that has been committed in electronic campaigning by, for example, the leave campaign and potentially Arron Banks, who is being investigated by the National Crime Agency?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is of course concerned about the implications for intimidation, to which I am sure the question relates.

Chloe Smith: The right hon. Gentleman should know that the Government cannot have such an inquiry because the agencies investigating are independent, and rightly so. I can reassure the House that we have seen no evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes, and that is as we would wish it to be.

Topical Questions

T1. [909775] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): Last week, the Minister for the Constitution, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), updated the House on the actions we are taking to tackle the inexcusable intimidation of people in public life. We have legislated so that candidates in local elections have the choice to remove their home addresses from ballot papers. We have consulted on a new electoral offence of intimidatory behaviour. It is vital that everyone in the House works together to prevent such behaviour and address this worrying trend.

Henry Smith: My constituents rightly care about the security of their ballots. May I ask for Crawley to be considered for a future voter ID pilot?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We will be looking carefully at the evaluations from the 2018 pilots and—when they come forward in a few months—the 2019 pilots to help inform our next steps and to shape how the final policy will look when introduced. We can benefit from close collaboration with local authorities, and we would welcome the involvement of Crawley as we progress.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): There have been reports that the Conservative party is preparing to take part in the upcoming European elections. The Opposition have heard that on Monday, there was a telephone conference between the Cabinet Office and regional returning officers, who would run such an election, during which preparations for European elections were discussed. Are the Government saying one thing in public and another in private?

Brandon Lewis: As I said to the hon. Lady's colleague earlier, she should not believe every rumour she reads in a newspaper or on Twitter. It is simply not true.

T4. [909778] **Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the arbitrary 15-year rule that prevents Britons abroad from voting

in UK elections. Will she recommit the Government to supporting the private Member's Bill of our hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), when it comes back to the House next week?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that point. The Government continue to support that Bill and think it is the right thing to do.

T2. [909776] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): On Sunday, the BBC reported that Interserve is likely to go into administration on Friday. What steps is the Minister taking to protect jobs and pensions, should Interserve collapse?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): As the hon. Lady would expect, we keep under review the situation in relation to all our strategic suppliers. I assure her that we take appropriate contingency measures in respect of every strategic supplier.

T5. [909779] **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Can the Minister tell us what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on delivering more public services online?

Oliver Dowden: To date, we have already delivered almost 800 services online on gov.uk. In addition, I regularly engage with ministerial colleagues, principally through the digital implementation task force, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

T3. [909777] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): The Government claim that they have lifted the pay cap and declared austerity over, but it seems that this does not apply to their own employees. The lack of consultation on the civil service pay guide is just shameful. When will the Minister make it his policy to return to national pay bargaining?

Oliver Dowden: This Government do not support national pay bargaining. It has been a step forward that we tailor pay to the needs of each individual Department. But I engage with all trade unions as we set the overall delegated framework that applies to pay grades below the senior civil service.

T7. [909782] **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): I welcome the announcement from the Cabinet Office on reforming the way that Government contracts are awarded so that they consider social impacts. Has my hon. Friend made an assessment of the effect of these changes on social enterprises?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend rightly raises the issue of social enterprises. That is why, earlier this week, I made an announcement that we would be consulting on how to allow social enterprises to bid for a range of Government contracts and set out a clear framework for them to do so. I am confident that we will be able to unlock the opportunities of the over 100,000 social enterprises we have in this country.

T6. [909781] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Should private sector companies delivering public sector contracts be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000? [R]

Chloe Smith: We had a lengthy Westminster Hall debate on this last week. We are considering the Information Commissioner's report on it, but we think that we are already supplying a lot of transparency on information and that that is adequate.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [909745] **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 13 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure the whole House will want to join me in expressing our deepest shock and sadness at the news of the air crash in Ethiopia on Sunday. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of all 157 who were on board, including the British nationals who were among the casualties. I have sent a personal message of sympathy to Prime Minister Abiy and extended an offer of UK assistance.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues, including my right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary, who very helpfully offered to teach me sign language. In addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr Baron: I am sure all of us concur with the Prime Minister's remarks about the disaster in Ethiopia.

Many of us recognise the Prime Minister's efforts to secure a deal, but given that we profitably trade with the majority of the world's GDP outside the EU on largely World Trade Organisation, no-deal terms, has the time not come to look beyond this remain-dominated Westminster bubble and for all of us to recognise that the default position of our votes to trigger article 50 is that no deal is better than a bad deal, so that we can honour the referendum and leave the EU on 29 March?

The Prime Minister: It may be to the benefit of the House, Mr Speaker, and I am sure that people will recognise this, if I try to keep my answers shorter than usual today. Let me say to my hon. Friend that I want to leave the European Union with a good deal. I believe we have a good deal. Yes, no deal is better than a bad deal, but I have been working for us to leave on 29 March and leave with a good deal.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I absolutely concur with the Prime Minister's remarks about the disaster of the air crash in Ethiopia, and indeed the earlier crash in Asia that affected the same type of aircraft. I commend the Civil Aviation Authority and the European Union for taking prompt action about the safety of the aircraft concerned. We need to ensure that all air passengers are as safe as they possibly can be.

The Prime Minister has been stubbornly declaring that the only choice is between her deal and no deal. Last night's vote finished off her deal. Tonight she is not even showing the leadership to whip on no deal. Just a few weeks ago, she whipped her MPs against ruling out no deal. So how will she be voting tonight?

The Prime Minister: I will be voting for the motion standing in my name.

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, there may well be other votes, and the Prime Minister's Brexit strategy is clearly in tatters. Her deal has been twice rejected and is now dead, and she is not even asking her MPs to support her on it tonight.

A couple of months ago, the Chancellor, who is here today—we will hear from him later—reassured business leaders that the threat of a no-deal Brexit would be taken off the table, while the Business Secretary said that a no-deal Brexit would be “ruinous” to the UK economy. Indeed, the Government's own forecasts suggest that no deal would knock 10% off the economy, damaging jobs and industry. Why is the Prime Minister still ambivalent about the outcome?

The Prime Minister: I have been working for leaving the EU with a deal. Businesses and business organisations have been clear across the UK that they want MPs to back the deal. Yes, businesses worry about the uncertainty of Brexit, but there is one thing they worry about more, and that is a Corbyn Government.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister does not seem to understand. Her deal has been flatly rejected twice by this House by unprecedented majorities. Even this morning, the CBI said that no deal would be a “sledgehammer” to the economy and went on to say that there has been “no consultation with business”, adding:

“This is no way to run a country.”

The reason the Prime Minister's deal is now dead is that at every step of the way, she has refused to listen—refused to listen to manufacturers and refused to listen to trade unions about the best way to protect jobs in this country, which is to agree a customs union. Manufacturing is now in recession. Many companies have laid off many workers. Her own deal has been decisively rejected. When will she listen to workers who are concerned about their jobs and to businesses that are concerned about their future and accept that there has to be a negotiated customs union with the EU?

The Prime Minister: The CBI said that the Labour party's policies would lead to a drop in living standards. That is not very good for the people who the right hon. Gentleman claims to stand up and represent. He talks about a customs union, which of course was part of proposals that he put forward. That is yet another position he has taken. He has moved to being in favour of a second referendum, but I note that last night, he did not actually refer to a second referendum. He has just spoken about a deal involving a customs union—that has already been rejected, and in the past, very often rejected by him.

Jeremy Corbyn: It would be rather reckless for the Prime Minister to rule out any option at the present time, I would have thought. I do not think her answer

will help workers at Honda in Swindon, those at Nissan in Sunderland or many others who are very concerned about their future because of the danger to the manufacturing industry.

Britain's food producers are also in despair. A coalition of UK producers asked the Prime Minister to call for tariff-free access to the single market. With her red lines now in tatters, will she back the view of UK food producers and back close alignment to the single market, to secure their industry? After all, she promised at Chequers that there would be frictionless trade.

The Prime Minister: The deal that we have negotiated includes access to the European Union on the basis of no tariffs. It might help if he had actually read it.

Jeremy Corbyn: Former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), said while campaigning to leave in the referendum—this is not the kind of language I would use—that

“Only a madman would actually leave”

the single market.

The Prime Minister has previously said that we cannot just reject no deal; we need to be for something. With her own deal now so decisively rejected, can the Prime Minister inform us what she is now for? Does she recognise that the Labour alternative—the five pillars we put forward—is the credible show in town, available and ready to be negotiated? Is it not time she moved on from her red lines and faced the reality of the situation she has got herself, her party, this Parliament and this country into?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about not wanting no deal yet repeatedly votes in a way that brings no deal closer. The deal that he is proposing has been rejected several times by this House. I may not have my own voice, but I do understand the voice of the country. They want—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. I want to hear what the Prime Minister has to say and what everybody has to say, and it should not be necessary for voices to be raised for a Member to be heard.

The Prime Minister: And that is that people want to leave the EU, they want to end free movement, they want us to have our own trade policy, and they want to ensure laws are made in this country and judged in our courts. That is what the deal delivers, and that is what I continue to work to deliver. The right hon. Gentleman used to believe that too. Why is he just trying to frustrate it?

Jeremy Corbyn: I do have sympathy for the Prime Minister with her voice, and I hope it soon recovers. I understand how painful this is.

The Prime Minister's deal has failed, and she no longer has the ability to lead. This is a rudderless Government in the face of a huge national crisis. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) recognises it, saying that the Government

“is not fit for purpose. We are not doing what we need to do, which is govern the country properly and effectively.”

Where the Prime Minister has so obviously failed, this House needs to listen to the country—listen to unions, people in work fearful for their future, manufacturers and businesses, workers, European Union citizens who have made such a fantastic contribution to our society and British citizens across Europe who are all facing uncertainty. With jobs and industry at risk and the country in crisis, she needs now to show leadership, so can the Prime Minister tell us exactly what her plan is now?

The Prime Minister: I continue to believe that the House today will have an opportunity to vote on no deal, and it will then have an opportunity tomorrow, depending on how it has voted tonight, to vote on the question of the extension of article 50. As I said last night, there will be hard choices for this House, but this House will need to determine what its view is on the way forward. As far as the Government are concerned, we want to continue to work to leave the European Union. That is what we will deliver for the people on the vote in the referendum. We will continue to work to deliver leaving the European Union, but to deliver leaving the European Union with a good deal.

As for the right hon. Gentleman, he does not agree with Government policy; he does not even agree with Labour party policy. He has nothing to offer this country.

Q6. [909750] Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): The whole House will want to send its condolences to the families of the recent victims of knife crime, including 17-year-old Jodie Chesney, who was tragically murdered in my borough of Havering. When two thirds of those carrying a knife escape a custodial sentence and one in five repeat offenders avoids prison, what assurances will the Prime Minister give that we are serious about getting tough on knife crime, and does she understand why so many people are fed up with soft sentencing?

The Prime Minister: First, I am sure that Members from across the whole House will want to join me in sending our deepest sympathies and condolences to the family and friends of Jodie. I know there is nothing that we can do or say that is going to ease the pain the family are going through at her loss.

We are very clear that judges must have the powers they need to impose tough sentences on those involved in serious violence and knife crime. The law already provides for a mandatory prison sentence for a second offence of carrying a knife, and conviction of a knife or offensive weapon offence is now more likely to result in some form of custodial sentence—and for longer—than at any point in the last 10 years. Obviously, individual sentencing decisions are a matter for the courts, but we are catching and prosecuting more people who carry a knife, and those who are convicted are now more likely to go to prison and for longer. As I set out in Prime Minister's questions last week, both I and the Home Secretary are working to see what more we can do to deal with the serious violence and knife crime that has beset so many of our communities.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister on the tragedy in Ethiopia and the tragic loss of life?

On this day, we of course commemorate the sad loss of the 16 young children and their schoolteacher in Dunblane who were cruelly cut down by Thomas Hamilton. The sanctity of young life is something we remember today when we hear the news from the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) that his wife Krystle has given birth to their young son, and I am sure the whole House will want to congratulate him.

A no deal will result in unprecedented harm. Does the Prime Minister really want to be the first Prime Minister in history to deliberately plunge the United Kingdom economy into recession?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I am pleased to add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray and his wife on the birth of their son. I am also sure that the thoughts of the whole House are with the right hon. Gentleman in remembering the terrible loss of young life we saw in Dunblane.

The right hon. Gentleman will of course hear the spring statement from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a short time, and I am pleased to say that it will show the strength of the United Kingdom's economy, in which Scotland is able to participate as a member of the UK.

Ian Blackford: In 16 days the United Kingdom runs the risk of crashing out of the European Union with no deal, which we know from the Government's own analysis will crash the economy. Why does the Prime Minister not show some leadership today, do the right thing and whip all her MPs to take no deal off the table on 29 March and forever?

The Prime Minister: You can only take no deal off the table by doing one of two things: either revoke article 50, which means betraying the vote of the referendum; or agree a deal. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to take no deal off the table, he should have voted for the deal.

Q8. [909752] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): As our hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) said, nearly a fifth of people convicted on a second or subsequent time for possessing an illegal knife are spared a prison sentence. We would not accept that for firearm offences. Will the Prime Minister look again at sentencing guidelines and practice to ensure that anyone carrying an offensive weapon gets the sentence they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I fully appreciate the concern that my hon. Friend, our hon. Friend the Member for Romford and others across the House have shown on this issue. The most recent statistics show that 82% of offenders received a custodial sentence for repeat possession offences. Obviously, as I have said, sentencing decisions are a matter for the courts, but the Government regularly look at ensuring that the powers are there to allow tough sentences to be imposed on those involved in knife crime.

Q2. [909746] **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): On Friday, some of the excellent headteachers in my constituency sent their pupils home with letters detailing to parents how their budgets have been slashed by 8% and how they are struggling to make ends meet. On three separate occasions since September 2018 they

have asked for a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education to discuss school funding shortages in Kent, but they have been refused. Will the Prime Minister please ask the Secretary of State to meet Ms Spinks, Ms Hines, Mr Wright, Mr Cooper, Ms Butcher, Ms Knoupe, Mr Pywell and others as a matter of urgency?

The Prime Minister: I will ensure that Ministers in the Department for Education have heard the hon. Lady's request, but let me just remind her and Members of the House that the schools budget this year is £42 billion, which is the highest it has ever been—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) usually advocates good and respectful behaviour, which she must now herself exemplify, notwithstanding her passion or insistence upon her point of view, in which she is not exceptional.

The Prime Minister: The schools budget is the highest ever this year, and we have given every local authority more money for every pupil in every school this year.

Q10. [909754] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I think that the whole House could unite in agreeing that the Prime Minister has put an enormous amount of hard work and energy into trying to resolve the European Union issue, and we certainly wish her well and hope that she gets better soon.

Has the Prime Minister had an opportunity to look at amendment (f) on today's Order Paper, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), the former Deputy Prime Minister, and signed by many Conservative remainder MPs and Conservative leaver MPs, and by the parliamentary leader of the Democratic Unionist party and Labour Members? I believe that the amendment could unite those on the Conservative Benches and attract support from the Opposition. Has the Prime Minister had an opportunity to consider whether she would be able to support the amendment?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. and hon. Friends for the spirit in which they have sought to broker a compromise in this House. The amendment has four propositions. The first is that we should publish our day-one tariff schedules; we have done so this morning. The second is that we should seek to extend the article 50 process; we remain committed to giving the House the opportunity to debate and vote on that tomorrow. The third is that we should unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU citizens resident in the UK; I am pleased to reconfirm that we have done that. The fourth is to seek to negotiate an implementation period in return for a financial payment but without the withdrawal agreement that we have agreed. The EU has made it clear that there will be no agreement without a withdrawal agreement, and that includes what we have already negotiated on citizens' rights, a financial settlement and a Northern Ireland protocol. The plan that exists and has been agreed is, obviously, the deal that was put to the House and rejected by it last night. As I have said, the EU has made clear that it would not accept elements of what is in the current withdrawal agreement without them being in a withdrawal agreement.

Q3. [909747] **Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): Monday will mark 40 years since the Golborne mining disaster in the constituency of Leigh. The disaster resulted in the tragic death of 10 miners, which still reverberates throughout our community and affects the families of those involved. Will the Prime Minister send her support for the commemoration service on Sunday and recommit, in their honour, to increasing work safety standards and providing all the necessary support to our ex-mining communities?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in sending our deepest sympathies and condolences to the families and friends of those affected by that terrible tragedy. I am pleased to say that our health and safety record for mines has improved greatly since 1979. That improvement has resulted from learning from previous incidents such as the Golborne tragedy and preventing as far as possible disasters like it. As the hon. Lady may know, in 2015, following an extensive review, the Mines Regulations 2014 replaced all previous legislation relating to health and safety in underground mines. They provide a comprehensive and simple goal-setting legal framework to ensure that mine operators provide the necessary protection for mine workers and others from what we all accept are inherent hazards in mines. I assure the hon. Lady that we will continue to review safety regulations so that we can make sure that a tragedy like this never happens again.

Q11. [909755] **Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Given that no-deal Brexit is the Government's default position, will the Prime Minister kindly inform the House that she will instruct the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make available whatever funds are required to ensure that the country is as best prepared as possible in the event that we do leave on a no-deal basis?

The Prime Minister: Obviously we continue to work to leave in an orderly fashion with a deal, but we have made funding available and it is being used to make sure that we have preparations for a no deal.

Q4. [909748] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The Prime Minister routinely deflects questions on child poverty, insisting on absolute rather than relative measures. Can she assure the House that if the figures published later this month on her own preferred measure of absolute poverty show that child poverty is rising, she will at last join those of us calling for a pause to universal credit?

The Prime Minister: I continue to believe, as I have said in this House before, that the best route out of poverty is through work. The hon. Lady refers to figures that I quote. I also quote figures, which I have to say are very important for this House, regarding the reduction in the number of children living in workless households. There is very clear evidence of the advantages of children being brought up in a house in which there is work. Universal credit is encouraging work. It is delivering on ensuring that we see more people in work and able to provide for their families.

Q13. [909757] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): As a former technology entrepreneur, I have seen the barriers that face aspiring women seeking to start up new businesses, yet we know that £250 billion could be added to the UK economy if women can start and scale up businesses at the same rate as men. Therefore, does the Prime Minister welcome Alison Rose's review into female entrepreneurship, and will she call for the banks to adopt those recommendations without delay?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue and for bringing her successful experience as an entrepreneur to the House. I am happy to join her in welcoming Alison Rose's review. We are setting out our ambition to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by half by 2030 in various ways. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), will sponsor an industry-led taskforce alongside Treasury Ministers that will drive forward work to encourage greater investment in female entrepreneurs by all types of finance providers, including the banks.

Q5. [909749] **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Last year, 690 children were attacked or threatened with a knife in the west midlands. Parents are terrified. Police officers across the country agree that there is a link between the knife crime epidemic and the Prime Minister's decision as Home Secretary to cut 20,000 police officers from our streets. Is she the last person standing to deny that link?

The Prime Minister: I set out last week steps the Government are taking to increase our work on knife crime. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary met the west midlands chief constable at the end of last week to discuss policing there. The hon. Lady refers to decisions taken by the Government in 2010. Yes, those were tough decisions in terms of public sector funding, but they were taken because of the appalling circumstances of the economy left by Labour.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) is about to namecheck his mother, an admirable woman—a former teacher and, in my view very importantly, my constituent.

Q14. [909758] **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think she loves you more than me these days, because she is also a Labour supporter—albeit that you are of course independent.

On behalf of me and my lovely mum, I point out that there are parts of the country, from Sheffield to Staffordshire and Sussex, where pupils receive less money per head than pupils in other parts of the country. I know the Prime Minister values a good education—she went to the same school as my mother, who became a teacher. Therefore, for me and my lovely mum, we want three things: first, more funding for our schools; secondly, on special educational needs, we need more focus and priority on stopping academies excluding pupils unnecessarily because of their targets; and thirdly, the lowest-funded areas should be funded first when we get this right.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I was tempted to start by saying that I suspect his mother and I were at the school at a different time—[*Interruption.*] Oh, he says it is true. Good.

I recognise that we have asked schools to do more. We have responded with £1.3 billion extra investment in our schools this year and next, so the core schools budget will rise by around £2.6 billion in total, and the Government are protecting overall per-pupil funding in real terms. Every school is attracting at least 1% more per pupil by next year, and thousands of schools will attract significantly larger gains of up to 3% per pupil per year.

That investment will mean more children having the chance of a better future, but the quality of education also matters. I commend my hon. Friend's mother, who I understand was a teacher, for the work she has done in education. I say thanks from the whole House to all our teachers up and down the country for the work they are doing in education.

Q7. [909751] **Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): As I told the Prime Minister a month ago, my constituent Maryam was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy 1—SMA1—in November last year when she was just four months old. She needs Spinraza now and is likely to live only a few months without it. NICE met last week but, cruelly, to date has not even announced a decision. Last time, the Prime Minister told me to see a Minister—I did, and nothing changed. All I am asking is that baby Maryam has the same chance of getting Spinraza as she would have if she lived in Scotland, Germany, Italy, Romania or 20 other European countries. Let me be clear: I am asking the Prime Minister to intervene. Will she?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that everybody across the House sends their sympathies and concerns to the family of Maryam. We recognise that this must be an incredibly difficult time. Decisions on such matters are rightly taken not by politicians but by clinicians. I understand that the hon. Lady recently met my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary, and as she says, NICE considered the relevant information and recommendations at its appraisal committee meeting on 6 March. It is right, however, that the benefits and evidence in relation to new medicines be properly considered by the experts and clinicians in the field. The Department of Health and Social Care is working with NICE on this issue.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): My constituent Nicola Morgan-Dingley is a wife and mum. She was just 36 when she was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer, the most virulent form, and, sadly, at 38, she has a terminal diagnosis. Nicola has asked me to ask three things today. First, will the Prime Minister consider publicising the fact that women should never miss a mammogram and the importance of attending? Secondly, will she consider lowering the age at which women can seek a mammogram so that more women are not missed out? Thirdly, there are some immunotherapy trials taking place across the country that could offer a lifeline to Nicola. Will she consider expanding those trials so that Nicola can get the help that could save her life?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the whole House shares my hon. Friend's concern for his constituent Nicola. Our sympathies are with her and her family and

friends. She asked about three things. On the age at which a screening becomes available or is required, that matter has been considered previously and I am sure will be considered again as part of the long-term plan, but I understand that the decision is based on the evidence of the benefits of screenings at certain ages.

My hon. Friend referenced immunotherapy. To date, the National Institute for Health Research has delivered 64 studies of immunotherapy for women with breast cancer, 28 studies are being opened up to recruitment and 14 studies are currently in set-up, but I will ask the Department to respond to him on the specific case of his constituent. On the third point, Nicola is absolutely right. I would urge all women to attend their mammogram appointments—they are vital: they could save your life.

Q9. [909753] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister not feel guilty that parents and teachers are being forced to buy books and pens for schools and that heads are cleaning classrooms?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman heard my response earlier. We are putting more money into our schools and ensuring that overall per-pupil funding is protected. Yes, we have asked schools to do more, and I recognise the pressures on them, but the Government have responded with more funding.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr David Duguid. No? He previously signalled an interest, and I was trying to accommodate him, but never mind.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): If my right hon. Friend had been elected leader of the Labour party, would she be allowing a free vote this evening?

The Prime Minister: There are passionately held views and differences of opinion on this issue, and I think it would be of benefit to the House if there were a free vote across the House.

Q12. [909756] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On Sunday, the community of Fair Isle in Shetland suffered a devastating blow when its world-renowned bird observatory was destroyed in a fire. The impact of such a thing on a community of 60 people is devastating, and they are still coming to terms with it. Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking those who have already supported Fair Isle, including the firefighters who tackled the blaze and those who transported them, and will she commit her Government today to supporting the community in Fair Isle as it looks towards rebuilding what is a globally important research resource so that it can get back into action as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I send my deepest sympathies to all those who work in, and indeed who visit, the observatory. As the right hon. Gentleman says, the fire will have been devastating for the local community. I also offer my praise to the local fire and coastguard services for all their efforts in bringing the blaze under control. I understand that investigations to establish the cause are ongoing. The right hon. Gentleman's question gives me an opportunity also to thank the firefighters who dealt with a fire in my own constituency of Maidenhead yesterday, in the town centre.

I understand that the building to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred was comprehensively insured and the owners are not seeking additional funding at this time, but I will ask a Minister from the Scotland Office to meet the right hon. Gentleman to see whether any further support could be provided.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): On 29 January, the House—including virtually the entire Conservative party, Brexiteers and remainers alike—voted for the Brady amendment, with the strong encouragement of the Government. The amendment was designed to facilitate the so-called Malthouse compromise. We do not yet have the Speaker's selection of amendments for the debate, Prime Minister, but if he is minded to select amendment (f)—which is the Malthouse compromise—one, will there be a free vote, and two, how will you personally vote on it?

The Prime Minister: I referred to the elements of that amendment, which refers to one part of what became known as the Malthouse compromise, in response to an earlier question from one of my hon. Friends. As I said, the Government have already addressed some of those issues. However, my right hon. Friend referred to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady). That was about alternative arrangements replacing the backstop, and my hon. Friend also indicated other ways in which concern about the backstop could be dealt with. What we have agreed with the European Union, in a legally binding character, is that commitment to ensuring that alternative arrangements are indeed available by the end of December 2020, so that they can do what that amendment required and replace the backstop.

Q15. [909759] **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): Jodey Whiting was a mother of nine from Thornaby who died by suicide in 2017. Just before her death she missed a work capability assessment because of health problems, and was sanctioned. The independent case examiner has found multiple and significant failings on the part of the Department for Work and Pensions, including five missed opportunities to identify her mental health problems and safeguard her properly. Her family are asking for an apology, and for the Department to ensure that this can never happen again to anyone else. Can the Prime Minister offer that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this appalling case, and our thoughts and sympathies are with Ms Whiting's family at this time. As he said, it has been identified that there were mistakes in the handling of her case. The Department has apologised for its failings, and is providing compensation for the family. That, of course, can never bring Ms Whiting back.

The point that the hon. Gentleman made is that we need to learn from this case, and that is why the Department is looking at it to ensure that we never see such failings happening again and leading to such a tragic consequence.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Prime Minister has rightly made it a priority to deliver more homes, so will she welcome the great work of pro-growth Rugby

Borough Council? It is currently providing new homes at more than three times the UK average rate: 739 were built last year and 860 are now under way, with four house builders at Houlton.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to commend the work of my hon. Friend's local council in providing more homes, which is very important. I am also pleased that last year, under this Government, more homes were built than in any of the last 30 years bar one. That is a record of which we should be proud, and obviously the hon. Gentleman's council is very helpfully contributing to it. I am sure that it will continue to help to meet the real need to ensure that we have sufficient homes for families up and down the country.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): You will know, Mr Speaker, that West Dunbartonshire has two notable anniversaries this week. First, today is the 78th anniversary of proportionally the worst aerial bombardment in the history of the United Kingdom, the Clydebank blitz, and I am sure the Prime Minister will wish to be the first ever British Prime Minister to note it. Secondly, on Monday my constituent Jagtar Singh Johal will have been incarcerated for 500 days without trial and has suffered trial by media—sanctioned, some would say, by the Indian state. I appreciate that Ministers are working very hard, but can the Prime Minister now say this to their own Foreign Secretary: no guilt has yet been established and there has been no trial, so why will Ministers not meet with myself as the constituency MP and the family to hear what impact this incarceration is having on them?

The Prime Minister: First, I recognise the point the hon. Gentleman made about the aerial bombardment all those many years ago and the impact that had on the local community.

On the specific case, Ministers are dealing with this; they have been actively involved in it. Obviously the Foreign Secretary has heard the hon. Gentleman's request for a specific meeting; I believe one of the Ministers is dealing with this case and will, I am sure, be pleased to meet with him.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): The media have started calling this place a failing Parliament; there was nothing failing about this place three weeks ago when we unanimously voted to protect the rights of citizens—British and EU nationals here. Aside from the letter the Secretary of State has written to Michel Barnier, can the Prime Minister update this House on what she has personally done? For example, has she phoned Merkel or Macron or President Tusk to help protect British citizens in the EU and EU nationals here?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that I have spoken to a number of EU leaders about the desire that we have for UK citizens in their countries to be fully protected were there a no deal, and to be protected on a reciprocal basis. Some countries have already published legislation; we want to make sure that the basis on which they are providing guarantees for UK citizens is the same as the basis on which we are providing guarantees for EU citizens here.

Spring Statement

12.42 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

I am acutely conscious of the fact that the House has other pressing matters on its mind today, and to avoid making this statement any longer than necessary, I am tabling a written ministerial statement that contains additional announcements and provides further details of those that I will make.

Last night's vote leaves a cloud of uncertainty hanging over our economy, and our most urgent task in this House is to lift that uncertainty. But the economy itself is remarkably robust: it has grown for nine consecutive years, with the longest unbroken quarterly growth run of any G7 economy, and is forecast to continue growing in each of the next five years. It is an economy that has created over 3.5 million net new jobs under Conservative-led government, that has almost halved Labour's shocking legacy of youth unemployment, that has seen female participation in the workforce increase to record levels and that is now delivering the fastest rate of wage growth in over a decade.

It is an economy that has defied expectations and will provide the solid foundation that Britain needs to seize the opportunities that the future offers—a far cry from the eight recessions and mass unemployment predicted by the House's very own Nostradamus over there, the shadow Chancellor. Perhaps he is not so much an astronomer as a man living in a parallel universe.

And thanks to the difficult decisions that we have taken in the past nine years and the hard work of the British people, I can also report today on public finances that continue to improve, so that, provided we do reach a deal to leave the European Union with an orderly transition and provided we avoid the disaster of a Government led by those now on the Opposition Front Bench, this country for the first time in a decade will have genuine and sustainable choices about its future.

Today's Office for Budget Responsibility report marks another step on Britain's journey out of austerity, and I should like to thank Robert Chote and his team for their work. Despite the slowing world economy, the OBR expects Britain to continue to grow in every year of the forecast: at 1.2% this year, with both the International Monetary Fund and the OECD forecasting the UK to grow faster than Germany; then 1.4% in 2020, as forecast at the Budget; and 1.6% in each of the final three years. This represents cumulative growth over the five years now slightly higher than the Budget forecast.

Meanwhile, Britain's remarkable jobs story is set to continue. By 2023, the OBR expects to see 600,000 more new jobs in our economy. Despite the constant attempts from those on the Opposition Front Bench to talk down our remarkable achievement on jobs, the fact is that last year 96% of new jobs were full time. There is positive news on pay too, with the OBR revising up wage growth to 3% or higher in every year. With inflation now around the target throughout the forecast period, that means real wage growth in every year of the forecast. A growing economy, a thriving labour market and inflation on target—a solid foundation on which to build Britain's future.

There is good news on the public finances as well. Borrowing this year will be just 1.1% of GDP—£3 billion lower than forecast at the autumn Budget—and a staggering

£130 billion lower than in the last year of the Labour Government. But what is really staggering is that the shadow Chancellor's critique of that Government was that they did not spend enough. Looking forward, borrowing will fall from £29.3 billion in 2019-20, then £21.2 billion, £17.6 billion, £14.4 billion and finally £13.5 billion in 2023-24—its lowest level in 22 years.

We remain on track to meet both our fiscal targets early, with the cyclically adjusted deficit at 1.3% next year, falling to just 0.5% by 2023-24, and with headroom against our fiscal mandate in 2020-21 increasing from £15.4 billion at the autumn Budget to £26.6 billion today. Less borrowing means less debt—now lower in every year than forecast at the Budget, falling to 82.2% of GDP next year, then 79%, 74.9%, 74%, and finally 73% in 2023-24. Our national debt is falling sustainably for the first time in a generation. This is a major milestone on the road out of the crisis we inherited from Labour, and a key dividing line today between a shadow Chancellor whose plans would send debt soaring above 100% of GDP and a Conservative Government committed to delivering world-class public services and keeping our national debt falling.

Since 2010, we have been steering the country on a journey of recovery from Labour's recession. Back then, the most important task was to get borrowing down to manageable levels. But when I became Chancellor in 2016 I recognised that, with the progress we had already made, as well as getting Britain's debt down, our continued success as a nation would depend on investing in our future, supporting our vital public services and keeping taxes low to attract talent and investment. I called it a "balanced approach", and it is delivering, with the highest sustained levels of public capital investment in 40 years, cuts in income tax for more than 30 million people in three weeks' time—cuts that Labour voted against—and debt on a sustained downward path for the first time in a generation.

I have made over £150 billion of new spending commitments since 2016, and I announced at the Budget that the long, but necessary, squeeze on current public spending would come to an end at the upcoming spending review, setting out an indicative five-year path of 1.2% per annum real-terms increases in day-to-day spending on public services compared with real-terms cuts of 3% per annum announced at SR 2010 and 1.3% at SR 2015. We have made our biggest choice on public spending to put the NHS first in line, as the British public would expect, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's announcement of £34 billion of additional funding per year by the end of the period—the single largest cash commitment ever made by a peacetime British Government—to support our long-term plan for the NHS. It will deliver improved cancer and mental healthcare, a transformation of GP services, more doctors, more nurses and better outcomes for patients.

Now we need to address wider departmental spending for the next review period. I can confirm today that, assuming a Brexit deal is agreed over the next few weeks and that the uncertainty that is hanging over our economy is lifted, I intend to launch a full three-year spending review before the summer recess, to be concluded alongside an autumn Budget. It will set departmental budgets beyond the NHS to reflect the public's priorities between areas such as social care, local government, schools,

police, defence and the environment, and it will maximise value for taxpayers' money through a renewed focus on high-quality outcomes.

If we leave the EU with a deal and an orderly transition to a future economic partnership, we will see a deal dividend: an economic boost from recovery in business confidence and investment, and a fiscal boost from a reduction in the minimum necessary level of fiscal headroom once the risk of a no-deal exit is removed. That will give the nation real choices as we use the spending review to decide how much of the deal dividend we can prudently release, and how we would share it between increased spending on public services, capital investment in Britain's future prosperity and keeping taxes low, while always continuing to keep debt falling. Real-terms increases in public spending, record investment in Britain's future, more jobs than ever before, higher wages and lower taxes, meaning increased take-home pay, and, for the first time in a generation, our debt going down—that is what I mean by an end to austerity delivered by a Conservative Government.

The progress that we have made will be at risk if we cannot secure a smooth and orderly exit from the EU and a transition to a new partnership that protects the complex trading relationships that businesses have built up over 45 years and on which so many British jobs depend. I had hoped that we would do that last night, but I am confident that we, as a House, will do it over the coming weeks. Leaving with no deal would mean significant disruption in the short and medium term and a smaller, less prosperous economy in the long term than if we leave with a deal. Higher unemployment, lower wages and higher prices in the shops are not what the British people voted for in June 2016. That is why we all have a solemn duty in the days and weeks ahead to put aside our differences and seek a compromise on which this House can agree in the national interest.

The Government also have a duty to plan for every reasonably foreseeable contingency, and we have done so. First, we have plans in place to minimise disruption to our financial system, and the Bank of England judges that it is resilient to any likely no-deal shock. Secondly, we have worked across Whitehall to put in place mitigations at our border, although we cannot regulate how the EU will operate its border following a no-deal exit. Thirdly, we have published today our temporary UK no-deal tariff schedule, carefully balancing the needs of producers and consumers in the context of the pressures that the no-deal economy would face. Fourthly, the Treasury and the Bank of England together have all the tools of fiscal and monetary policy available to us, including the fiscal headroom I have held in reserve.

I need to be straight with the House: a no-deal Brexit would deliver a significant short to medium-term reduction in the productive capacity of the British economy. Our economy is operating at near full capacity, so any fiscal and monetary response would have to be carefully calibrated not to simply cause inflation, compounding the effect of any movement in the exchange rate on the price of goods in our shops. While fiscal and monetary intervention might help to smooth our path to a post-Brexit economy, both could only be temporary and neither would allow us to avoid the effects of a relatively smaller economy nor the pain of restructuring. The idea that there is some simple, readily available fix that can be deployed to avoid the consequences of a no-deal Brexit is, I am afraid, just wrong.

I am confident that we are going to do a deal, and when we do, the British people will fully expect us to fire up our economic plan to seize the opportunities as confidence in our economy returns, but it is not just the spectre of uncertainty that we need to overcome to restore confidence and unlock a brighter future, because while we Conservatives will always be the party of business, and small business especially, the shadow Chancellor identifies business as “the enemy”. A Government led by the Leader of the Opposition would “chill the very marrow of our economy, destroying jobs and stifling innovation”.

Those are not my words, but those of the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), a former member of the Labour party, and she is right.

Our task is to demonstrate to the British people that, working with business through the mechanism of a well-regulated market economy, our plan will deliver a brighter future for them, so that they are never ever tempted by the empty promises and dangerous rhetoric of Opposition Front Benchers. The plan will make the most of the opportunities ahead as we make our own way independent from, but in continuing partnership with, the European Union. It will embrace the technologies of the future and equip British workers to use them, back the enterprise and ambition of British business, support our world-leading entrepreneurs, creators, innovators, inventors and discoverers, and build on the UK's fundamental strengths and competitive advantages so that we can slay, once and for, all the twin demons of low productivity and low wages and build an economy that works for everyone.

The only sustainable path to higher wages and rising living standards is to boost productivity. To do that, we are investing in infrastructure, skills, technology and housing under our plan for Britain's future, with £37 billion in the national productivity investment fund, the largest ever investment in England's strategic roads, the biggest rail investment programme since Victorian times and a strategy for delivering a nationwide full-fibre network by 2033. At SR 2019, we will set multi-year capital budgets following a zero-based review, protecting our record levels of capital spending, while ensuring that investment is focused to deliver the greatest impact on productivity.

Our investment strategy is benefiting the whole the UK. I can announce today up to £260 million for the innovative borderlands growth deal, covering the border regions of England and Scotland, which comes on top of the £100 million housing infrastructure funding already announced for Carlisle. Negotiations are progressing on future deals for mid-Wales and Derry/Londonderry, and I reiterate our commitment to the Northern Powerhouse Rail project and look forward to considering Transport for the North's business case ahead of the spending review. We will publish the updated national infrastructure strategy alongside the spending review, and I am publishing today a consultation on our approach to supporting private infrastructure investment once we leave the European Investment Bank and now that we have retired Labour's discredited private finance initiative.

Raising our productivity is not just about investing in physical capital—it is also about investing in people. The Augar review will be published shortly and will

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represent an important contribution to our overall plan for post-18 education. The Government will respond later in the year. We are committed to returning technical and vocational skills to the heart of our education system, with the new T-level system on track to deliver the first three routes in 2020; the first phase of the national retraining scheme starting this summer; and the apprenticeship programme rolling out 3 million new high-quality apprenticeships. To help small businesses take on more apprentices, I can announce that I am bringing forward the £700 million package of reforms that I announced at the Budget to the start of the new financial year in April.

The productivity agenda is above all about increasing the wages of the lowest paid, and the pay of a full-timer on the national minimum wage has risen by £2,750 a year since 2016. We have confirmed the Low Pay Commission's remit for the national living wage to reach 60% of median earnings by 2020, but later this year we will need to set a new remit beyond 2020. We want to be ambitious, driving productivity across the income distribution, with the ultimate objective of ending low pay in the UK.

We also want to take care to protect employment opportunities for lower-paid workers, so we have asked Professor Arin Dube, a world-leading expert in the field, to undertake a review of the international evidence on the employment and productivity effects of minimum wage rates. This study will support the extensive discussions that we will have with employer organisations, trade unions and the LPC itself over the coming months, starting with a roundtable that I will chair next month. While the Opposition Front Bench grandstands, this Conservative Government are delivering sustainable pay rises for millions of British workers.

Alongside our commitment to giving British workers the skills that they need is a commitment to maintaining the openness of our economy to talent from around the world. As we leave the EU, free movement of people will end, and we will take back control of our borders. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set out a framework for a future immigration system in the immigration White Paper, focused on attracting those with the skills we need in the UK economy, no matter where they come from. We have committed to consulting business to ensure that the new system supports the needs of our economy, and as we do so, I can announce that from June we will begin to abolish the need for paper landing cards at UK points of entry and we will allow citizens of the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Singapore and South Korea to start using e-gates at our airports and Eurostar terminals, alongside the EEA nationals who can already use them. Our ambition is to be able to go further in due course—a signal to the world of our commitment to global Britain.

Another key pillar of our plan is backing Britain to remain at the forefront of the technology revolution that is transforming our economy, and to support that ambition from this autumn we will completely exempt PhD-level roles from the visa caps. Since 2016, we have launched our modern industrial strategy and committed an additional £7 billion to science and innovation—clear progress towards our target of total research and development spending reaching 2.4% of the economy.

But technology does not stand still, and neither can we. To maintain the UK's technological edge, we will invest £79 million in ARCHER 2, a new supercomputer to be hosted at Edinburgh University. I am told that it is up to five times faster than the current generation of supercomputers, capable of a staggering 10,000 trillion calculations per second. I am told that with the right algorithms it might even be able to come up with a solution to the backstop.

I am allocating £45 million of the northern powerhouse investment fund to the European Bioinformatics Institute, ensuring Britain's continued lead in genomics research. I will guarantee our commitment to the UK's funding for the JET—Joint European Torus—nuclear fusion reactor, whatever happens with Brexit, and invest £81 million in a new extreme photonics centre in Oxfordshire to develop new types of laser—literally the cutting edge of technology. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Sorry about that.

The digital economy presents enormous opportunities, but enormous challenges as well. I have already responded to concerns about unfairness in the tax system with a new digital services tax so that digital platform companies pay their fair share, but we also need to adapt our regulatory environment to ensure that competition works for consumers in the digital marketplace, as it does in the real marketplace. I asked Professor Jason Furman, Barack Obama's former chief economist, to review competition in the digital market. I welcome his report, published today, in which he sets out far-reaching recommendations, including new powers for consumers and an overhaul of competition regulation, updating our regulatory model for the digital age. As a first step towards implementing reforms, I am asking the Competition and Markets Authority to undertake a market study of the digital advertising market as soon as possible.

The UK will remain a great place to do digital business, but it will be a place where successful global tech giants pay their fair share, where competition policy works in consumers' interests, and where the public are protected from online harms. Under this Government, Britain will lead the world in delivering a digital economy that works for everyone.

We on this side of the House, and many on the Opposition Back Benches, understand that a well-regulated market economy is the best—indeed, the only—way to deliver a brighter future for our country. Our challenge is to demonstrate to the next generation that our market economy can fulfil their aspirations and speak to their values, so before I finish I want to talk about two subjects dear to them: housing and the environment. Last year, housing delivery exceeded 220,000 additional homes—the highest level in all but one of the past 31 years. Our ambitious plan to restore the dream of home ownership to millions of younger people is already delivering: planning reform to release land in areas where the pressure is greatest; a five-year, £44 billion housing programme to help raise annual housing supply to 300,000 by the mid-2020s; the Help to Buy equity loan scheme; and the abolition of stamp duty for first-time buyers, which has so far helped 240,000 people on to the property ladder and restored the proportion of first-time buyers to above 50% for the first time in a generation.

Today I can announce a new £3 billion affordable homes guarantee scheme, to support the delivery of around 30,000 affordable homes; the launch next month of the £1 billion Enable Build SME guarantee fund that

I announced at Budget; and £717 million from the housing infrastructure fund to unlock up to 37,000 new homes on sites in west London, Cheshire, Didcot, and Cambridge, the last two being at opposite ends of the Oxford-Cambridge arc, for which I am publishing a new vision statement today.

As with the challenge of adapting to the digital age, so with the challenge of shaping the carbon-neutral economy of the future. We must apply the creativity of the marketplace to deliver solutions to one of the most complex problems of our time—climate change—and build sustainability into the heart of our economic model.

The UK is already leading the world, reducing the carbon intensity of our economy faster than any other G20 country, with ambitious and legally binding targets for the future. Today I can announce our next steps: first, we will publish a call for evidence on whether all passenger carriers should be required to offer genuinely additional carbon offsets, so that customers who want “zero-carbon travel” have that option and can be confident about additionality; secondly, we will help small businesses cut their carbon emissions and their energy bills, publishing today a call for evidence on the business energy efficiency scheme that I announced at the Budget; thirdly, we will publish proposals to require an increased proportion of green gas in the grid, advancing the decarbonisation of our mains gas supply; and, finally, we will introduce a future homes standard, mandating the end of fossil-fuel heating systems in all new houses from 2025, delivering lower carbon and lower fuel bills, too.

Climate change is not our only environmental challenge. We are already consulting on new tax and regulatory measures to tackle the scourge of plastic waste defacing our countryside and choking our oceans. Now, for the first time in 60 million years, the number of species worldwide is in sustained mass decline. The UK’s 1,500 species of pollinators deliver an estimated £680 million of annual value to the economy, so there is an economic, as well as environmental, case for protecting the diversity of the natural world. So, following consultation, the Government will use the forthcoming environment Bill to mandate biodiversity net gain for development in England, ensuring that the delivery of much needed infrastructure and housing is not at the expense of vital biodiversity.

But this is a global problem, so later this year, the UK Government will launch a comprehensive global review of the link between biodiversity and economic growth. This is to be led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Cambridge. We in this House should be proud that the UK, with its overseas territories, has already declared more than 3 million sq km of marine protected area. Today, I can announce our intention to designate a further 445,000 sq km of ocean around Ascension Island as a marine protected area. This Conservative Government are taking action today on our pledge to be the first in history to leave our environment in a better condition than we found it.

Before I conclude, I have three further short announcements to make. First, in response to a rising concern among headteachers that some girls are missing school attendance due to an inability to afford sanitary products, I have decided to fund the provision of free sanitary products in secondary schools and colleges in

England from the next school year. I congratulate those hon. Members, in all parts of the House, who have campaigned on this issue, and my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary will announce further details in due course.

Secondly, I announced a year ago that we would take definitive action to tackle the scourge of late payments for our small businesses. A full response to last year’s call for evidence will be published shortly, but I can announce today that as a first step we will require company audit committees to review payment practices and report on them in their annual accounts. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary will announce further details in due course, and I congratulate the Federation of Small Businesses, in particular, on its tireless campaign on this issue.

Thirdly, the recent surge in knife crime represents a personal tragedy for the scores of families of victims, and I know I speak for the whole House when I offer my deepest sympathies to them. We must, and we will, stamp out this menace. Police funding is due to rise by up to £970 million from April. Many police and crime commissioners have already committed to using this extra funding to recruit and train extra police officers, but that takes time and action is needed now. So the Prime Minister and I have decided, exceptionally, to make available immediately to police forces in England an additional £100 million over the course of the next year, ring-fenced to pay for additional overtime targeted specifically on knife crime, and for new violent crime reduction units, to deliver a wider cross-agency response to this epidemic. Ahead of the spending review, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will work with the police to consider how best to prioritise resources going forward, including newly funded manpower, to ensure a lasting solution to this problem.

To be frank, last night’s events mean we are not where I hoped we would be today. Our economy is fundamentally robust, but the uncertainty that I hoped we would lift last night still hangs over it. We cannot allow that to continue. It is damaging our economy, and it is damaging our standing and reputation in the world. Tonight, we have a choice: we can remove the threat of an imminent no-deal exit hanging over our economy. Tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to start to map out a way forward, towards building a consensus across this House for a deal we can, collectively, support, to exit the EU in an orderly way and to a future relationship that will allow Britain to flourish, protecting jobs and businesses. We have huge opportunities ahead of us: our capital is the world’s financial centre; our universities are global powerhouses of discovery and invention; our businesses are at the cutting edge of the tech revolution; and we have shown that we are not shy, as a nation, of the tasks that lie ahead.

We are addressing the environmental challenges that threaten our planet; we are building the homes that the next generation desperately need; and we are investing in our future, tackling the productivity gap and embracing technological change—rising to its challenges and seizing its opportunities. Our potential is clear. Our advantages are manifest. We are the fifth largest economy in the world. We are a proud, successful, outward-looking nation, with no limit to our ambition and no boundaries to what we can achieve. A brighter future is within our grasp. Tonight, let’s take a decisive step towards seizing

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it and building a Britain fit for the future—a Britain the next generation will be proud to call their home. I commend this statement to the House.

1.17 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Let me thank the Chancellor for providing me with an early sight of his statement, no matter how heavily redacted. We have just witnessed a display by the Chancellor of this Government's toxic mix of callous complacency over austerity and their grotesque incompetence over the handling of Brexit. While teachers are having to pay for the materials their pupils need, and working parents are struggling to manage as schools close early and their children are sent home, and as 5,000 of our fellow citizens will be sleeping in the cold and wet on our streets tonight, and young people are being stabbed to death in rising numbers, the Chancellor turns up today with no real end to or reversal of austerity. He threatens us—because this is what he means—saying that austerity can end only if we accept this Government's bad deal over Brexit.

Let us look at some of the claims this Chancellor has made. He has boasted about the OBR forecast of 1.2% growth this year, but what he has not mentioned is that this has been downgraded from 1.6%. Downgrading forecasts is a pattern under this Chancellor. In November 2016, forecasts for the following year were downgraded from 2.2% to 1.4%. In autumn 2017, forecasts for the following year were downgraded from 1.6% to 1.4%. Economists are warning that what little growth there is in the economy is largely being sustained by consumption, based on high levels of household debt.

On the public finances, the Chancellor boasts about bringing down debt. Let me remind him that when Labour left office—having had to bail out his friends in the City, many of them Tory donors—the nation's debt stood at £1 trillion. The Government have borrowed for failure and added another three quarters of a trillion to the debt since then. That is more than any Labour Government ever.

The Chancellor boasts about the deficit; he has not eliminated the deficit, as we were promised by 2015. He has simply shifted it on to the shoulders of headteachers, NHS managers, local councillors and police commissioners, and worst of all on to the backs of many of the poorest in our society. The consequences are stark: infant mortality has increased, life expectancy has reduced and yes, our communities are less safe. Police budgets have faced a £2.7 billion cut since 2010. Nothing that the Chancellor said today will make up for the human and economic consequences of those cuts.

The Chancellor talks about a balanced approach; there is nothing balanced about a Government giving over £110 billion of tax cuts to the rich and corporations while 87 people a day die before they receive the care they need. The number of children coming into care has increased every year for nine years. Benefit freezes and the roll-out of universal credit are forcing people into food banks in order to survive. Let me give the Chancellor a quote:

“Sending a message to the poorest and most vulnerable in our society that we do not care”.—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 876.]

That was the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) referring to the cuts to tax credits in 2015.

The number of pensioners now officially living in severe poverty, in the fifth largest economy in the world, has reached 1 million. We have a Government condemned by the UN for inflicting destitution on its own citizens. There is nothing balanced about the Government's investment across the country. There is nothing balanced about a Government investing more than £4,000 per head for transport in London and only £1,600 per head in the north. There is nothing balanced about the fact that a male child born in Kensington in Liverpool can expect to live 18 years less than a child born in Kensington and Chelsea.

On employment and wages, this is the Government who have broken the historic link between securing a job and lifting yourself out of poverty. The Chancellor has referred to a “remarkable jobs story”; what is remarkable is that this Government have created a large-scale jobs market of low pay, long hours and precarious work. More than 2.5 million people out there are working below 15 hours a week. Some 3.8 million people are in insecure work. The Chancellor talks about pay; average wages are still below the level of 10 years ago. So it is hardly surprising that 4.5 million children are living in poverty, with nearly two thirds of them in households where someone is in work.

The Chancellor has bragged about his record on youth unemployment. Let us be clear: youth unemployment is 7% higher than the national average, it is higher than the OECD average, and it is at appalling levels for some communities. Some 26% of young black people are unemployed and 23% of young people from a Bangladeshi or Pakistani background are unemployed.

The Chancellor has claimed an advance with regard to women's unemployment. What he does not say is that women make up 73% of those in part-time employment and are disproportionately affected by precarious work. Let me give one example: by 2020, the income of single mothers will have fallen by 18% since 2010. According to the much-respected Women's Budget Group, women are facing the highest pay gap for full-time employees since 1999. All that on his watch.

On infrastructure and housing, the Chancellor has been claiming that he is on the way to delivering record sustained levels of investment. Let us be clear: he is talking about wish lists; he is not talking about what the Conservatives have actually done. The UK ranks close to the bottom of OECD countries for public investment. We are 24th out of 32 countries, according to analysis done by the Trades Union Congress.

The Chancellor describes

“the biggest rail investment programme since Victorian times.”—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 667.]

Well, tell that to the people who faced the timetabling chaos of last year. Tell that to the rail passengers who have to deal with the incomparable incompetence of the Secretary of State for Transport.

The Chancellor has been hailing his announcement of a national infrastructure strategy. Let me remind the House that the Government announced a national infrastructure delivery plan for 2016 to 2021, and then announced a national infrastructure and construction pipeline. So, there are plans, pipelines and strategies, yet today he announced another review of the financing

mechanisms, but no real action to deliver for our businesses and communities. The Institute for Government described this Government's decisions on infrastructure as

"inconsistent and subject to constant change."

The Chancellor made announcements on housing, again. Let us hope he has learned the lessons of the Government's recent initiatives, which have driven profits of companies such as Persimmon to over £1 billion, with bosses' bonuses at more than £100 million.

The Chancellor has some cheek to speak about technical and vocational skills: almost a quarter of all funding to further and adult education has been cut since 2010. The number of people starting apprenticeships has fallen by 26%.

On research and development, this Government have slashed capital funding for science across all departments by 50%.

Unlike at the Budget, the Chancellor has at last actually referred to climate change. The review of biodiversity he mentioned might, hopefully, show that the budget of Natural England, the body responsible for biodiversity in England, has more than halved over a decade. A review of carbon offsets might reveal that they do not reduce emissions, and that offsetting schemes such as the clean development mechanism have been beset by gaming and fraud. This from a Government who removed the climate change levy exemption for renewables; scrapped the feed-in tariffs for new small-scale renewable generation; and cancelled the zero-carbon homes policy. Gordon Brown pledged a zero-carbon homes policy standard. We endorsed it and celebrated it; the Tories scrapped it in 2015, just one year before it fully came into force.

Of course, Brexit looms large over everything we discuss. Even today, the Chancellor has tried to use the bribe of a double-deal dividend or the threat of postponing the spending review to cajole MPs into voting for the Government's deal. What we are seeing is not a double dividend; we are seeing Brexit bankruptcies as a result of the delay in the negotiations. The publication of the tariffs this morning was clearly part of this threatening strategy. It is a calamitous strategy. It is forcing people into intransigent corners rather than bringing them together.

What we need now is for the Chancellor to stand with us today and vote to take no deal off the table; to stand up in Cabinet against those who are trying to force us into a no-deal situation; and then, yes, to come and join us to discuss the options available, including Labour's deal proposal and yes, if required, taking any deal back to the public.

Outside this Westminster bubble, outside the narrow wealthy circles in which the Chancellor moves, nine years of hard austerity have created nine years of hardship for our constituents. Today, and in recent times, the Chancellor has had the nerve to try to argue to those who have suffered the most at the hands of this Government that their suffering was necessary. If austerity was not ideological, why has money been found for tax cuts for big corporations while vital public services have been starved of funding? Austerity was never a necessity; it was always a political choice. So when the Chancellor stands there and talks about the end of austerity and about a plan for a brighter future, how can anyone who has lived through the past nine years believe him?

This Government have demonstrated a chilling ability to disregard completely the suffering that they have caused. To talk of changing direction after nine years in office is not only impossible to believe, but much too late. It is too late for the thousands who have died while waiting for a decision on their personal independence payments; too late for the families who have lost their homes due to cuts in housing benefit; too late, yes, for the young people who have lost their lives as a result of criminal attack; and too late for those youngsters whose clubs and youth services have been savaged. This is the Chancellor's legacy; it is this that he will be remembered for. He was the shadow Chief Secretary to George Osborne and designed the austerity programme. History will hold him responsible for that. There are no alibis. He is implicated in every cut, every closure, and every preventable death of someone waiting for hospital treatment or social care. It is time for change. People have had enough, but increasingly they know that they will not get the change that they so desperately need from this tainted Chancellor or from his Government. It is time for change, and it is time for a Labour Government.

Mr Hammond: We have just heard the same old recycled lines. I must be going a little bit deaf, because I did not hear any mention of record employment. Perhaps the shadow Chancellor is so ashamed of Labour's record: no Labour Government have ever left office with unemployment below that which they inherited. I did not hear anything about rising wages; they are rising the fastest in a decade. He did not mention the extra £1.3 billion for local government, or the extra £1 billion of police funding, both of which he voted against. He did not mention the fact that we have had nine years of unbroken growth. He did not mention the fact that this economy is out-performing that of Germany this year. He witters on about manufacturing without any recognition of the global economic context in which this sits—perhaps he does not inhabit the global economy. If he did, he would know very well that the downturn in manufacturing is happening across Europe and is affecting everyone. He did not mention the remarkable turnaround in our public finances and the real choices that we have as a consequence. He just relentlessly talked Britain and its economy down.

Once again, we hear this absurd proposition that the decisions that we took in 2010 were some kind of political choice—as if we could have gone on borrowing £1 for every £1 spent indefinitely, racking up interest bills and burdening future generations with debt. No responsible politician could credibly believe that these were choices in 2010.

The shadow Chancellor talks about homelessness. We have committed £1.2 billion to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping—I did not hear any mention of that. He talks about the downgrade of the 2019 economic forecast without mentioning the global context. He confuses the debt and the deficit. The reason that the debt has risen—*[Interruption.]* He is not listening, but it is very, very simple. It is not even economics; it is just maths. It is very, very simple. If you have a £150 billion deficit in your last year in office, your successor will find that debt is rising, and that is what we found. I have announced, since 2016, £150 billion of additional public spending as well as getting the forecast deficit down to

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0.5% of GDP. That means that we have real and genuine sustainable choices in this country for the first time in a decade.

The shadow Chancellor delivers repeated misinformation which we have heard countless times from those on the Labour Benches. Let us take transport funding for example. He knows that central Government transport funding is higher per capita in the north than it is in London and the south—that is a fact. He knows that there are 665,000 fewer children in workless households now than there were in 2010—that is a fact. He knows that public investment set out in the OBR report today represents Britain's biggest public capital investment programme for 40 years—that is a fact. He accuses me of talking about housing again. Well, I will talk about housing again, and again, and again, because we have announced £44 billion investment in housing, and that is an awful lot of announcements that I will have to make.

The ultimate audacity is the moral lecturing tone in the shadow Chancellor's closing remarks. I really do take exception to being lectured to by a man who has stood idly by, turning a blind eye, while his leader has allowed antisemitism to all but destroy a once great political party from the inside out. Attlee and Bevan must be rotating in their graves. People should look at what this pair have done to the Labour party and just think what they would do to our country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. It might be helpful to the House if I indicate that, given the pressure of time and the importance of subsequent business—to which reference was made earlier—it will almost certainly not be possible on this occasion for me to take everybody on this statement, which, as the House knows, is ordinarily my practice. I am looking to move on at approximately 2.45 pm. It may be possible to move on before then, but I certainly do not want it to be significantly later than then.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): May I sincerely congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on keeping his head while all around are losing theirs? I am sure that he would have liked to have delivered a rather different statement if the vote had gone the other way last night. Does he agree that economic forecasting is difficult at all times, particularly at a time of slowing global growth, trade war, Chinese debt problems, and, above all, the uncertainty of Brexit? Does he agree that the optimistic forecasts by the OBR are based on a smooth progression to Brexit, with no new barriers to trade and investment with our most important market on the basis that we currently enjoy under the customs union of the single market?

Finally, will the Chancellor guarantee to me that he will keep his fiscal powder dry—keep his reserves, as he may need them to avoid a recession or a financial crisis; that he will resist the irresponsible approach of the Opposition, who have the idea of spending and borrowing money only as a policy platform on every issue; and that he will resist all the other understandable demands from all parts just to spend money in response to

lobbies, because he has the duty of keeping the British economy intact at a time of almost unprecedented crisis and unforeseeable problems?

Mr Hammond: I can confirm to my right hon. and learned Friend that the OBR's central forecast is based, as before, on an assumption of a deal done with the European Union so that we exit via a transition mechanism and have a future close trading relationship with it. I can assure him—I am sure he needs no reassurance—that I will not be remotely tempted by the policies or the profligacy of the shadow Chancellor. My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right that until such time as we are sure that we will not exit via a disorderly no deal, I have to keep that fiscal powder dry, but no one will be happier than me when I can release some of that headroom to support public services, capital investment and lower taxes in this economy.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): There is no certainty about the future health of the economy. Whatever happens regarding the Prime Minister's deal—whether this House eventually accepts or continues to resoundingly reject it—we are still not clear about what the UK's future trading relationship with the EU will look like. What is clear is that Brexit is bad for the economy. So far, the picture is bleak. Key economic indicators show that the UK economy grew by a meagre 0.2% in the fourth quarter of 2018. The OBR previously forecast growth of 1.6% for 2019. Even with the assumption of a smooth Brexit, it has downgraded that to 1.2%. Whatever the Chancellor's spin, is that not the cost of Brexit?

Of course, the Chancellor predicted that himself. He told Radio 4:

"The economy will be slightly smaller in the Prime Minister's preferred version of the future partnership."

We now face the prospect of a no-deal Brexit, which would have a severe impact on the economy, people and businesses across Scotland. It could push the Scottish economy into a deep recession, similar in scale to the financial crash of 2008. The British Retail Consortium estimates that no deal could hike food prices by some 29%. My constituents cannot afford that. Will the Chancellor commit to voting against no deal tonight?

Given such massive uncertainty, we needed a bit more than this damp squib of a statement. It is a laudable aim to have only one Budget a year, but in these circumstances, the Chancellor should have brought forward an emergency Budget, and I call on him to do so.

We need the Chancellor to explain how he will fix the fiscal gap created by discouraging immigration. We know that the average EU citizen who chooses to live and work in our country contributes £34,400 annually to the Scottish economy. How will he plug that gap? Will he exempt those coming for PhD-level roles from the salary cap, as well as from the visa numbers cap? We need the Chancellor to provide funding to small businesses that are not prepared to cope with Brexit. Only 8% of Scottish firms feel fully ready.

We need concrete action to tackle the lack of productivity growth. It was woeful anyway, compared with our European neighbours, but over the past two years business has been so focused on Brexit damage limitation that it has lacked the resources to increase growth and productivity.

This week the New Financial think-tank said:

“Our conservative estimates show that banks and investment banks are moving around £800bn in assets; asset managers have so far transferred more than £65bn in funds; and insurance companies have so far moved £35bn in assets.”

That appears to have entirely passed the Chancellor by.

People who live in these islands have suffered through a decade of austerity. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the current benefits freeze has made life harder for more than 27 million people across the UK. It is the biggest policy behind rising poverty, costing families an average of £340 a year. If the freeze continues, by 2020 it will have driven 400,000 people into poverty. It must end now.

While the poor get poorer, the rich get richer under this Government. FTSE 100 CEO pay has gone up by 66% while the Tories have been in government, while wages for the rest have failed to reach 2008 levels. The Chancellor has had many opportunities to press his colleagues to halt the roll-out of universal credit. The system is broken and it must be fixed before more misery is inflicted. His emergency Budget should end the benefits freeze and halt the roll-out of universal credit. He has managed to find money for plenty of other things—he has allocated billions of pounds to the Democratic Unionist party to buy its support, but he has failed to allocate the £3.4 billion to Scotland that should have been our share of that largesse. Will the Chancellor ensure that the Barnett formula is properly applied to the new funding he has announced today, unlike his actions regarding the DUP deal?

Scotland's resource block grant for 2019-20 is almost £2 billion lower in real terms than in 2010-11. That is a direct consequence of the Chancellor's continued obsession with austerity. He has created the stronger towns fund, pumping money into leave-voting areas as yet another bribe. How well did that work this week? The Chancellor has not yet announced details of the shared prosperity fund. Especially important is whether it will replace the £2.4 billion a year that communities across the UK currently receive as a result of EU structural funds. Will he provide us with full details now? Will he give a cast-iron guarantee that the Scottish Government will be treated as equals and will continue to distribute the funding in Scotland, as has been the case under the EU programmes?

Yesterday, a majority of Scottish MPs put their names to an amendment saying that the best future for Scotland would be as an independent country within the EU. With independence, we will be able to encourage immigration, recognising the benefits brought by those who come to live, love and work in our country. We will be able to reject austerity, supporting our citizens when they need it most. We will be able to increase productivity, improve participation in our workforce and encourage and support companies to grow. We will be able to trade frictionlessly with Europe, a market eight times the size of the UK. Scotland has been badly served by consecutive Westminster Governments. We need to take our lifeboat and get off this sinking Brexit ship.

Mr Hammond: I am sure it was a momentary oversight by the hon. Lady that she did not say anything about the decommissioning measures that will be so important to her local industry in Aberdeen and that are listed in the written ministerial statement. She says that no deal will be bad for the economy, and I absolutely agree, but

if she understands that, why did she not vote for the deal? I have a great deal of respect for her, but I am afraid she is creeping towards the practices of those on the Labour Front Bench when she quotes the fourth quarter growth figure of 0.2% without mentioning the more recently published growth figure of 0.5% for the first quarter of this year. *[Interruption.]* If she does the maths, she will find that is okay.

The hon. Lady talked about the downgrade that the OBR has applied to the 2019 growth figure. We would of course like it to be higher, but she has to see the figure in the global context. I know she understands this. Germany's economy has slowed down and France's economy has slowed down. Across the G7, we are exactly in the middle of the pack. We will grow faster than Germany, Japan and Italy this year. We will grow exactly the same as France and slower than Canada and the US. That is a perfectly creditable performance. Would I like to do better? Of course I would. If she is going to be honest with the House, she needs to put what she says in the context of what is happening across the global economy.

The hon. Lady asked about PhD-level roles. They will be completely exempt from the visa cap. She asked about assets being moved abroad. Of course I am concerned about that, and £35 billion of insurance company assets moved abroad is £35 billion more than I would like, but she needs to understand that that is in the context of the many trillions of pounds of assets that the companies are managing in London and, increasingly, in Edinburgh. Edinburgh's ranking in the global asset management league table has once again risen, which we are extremely pleased about.

The hon. Lady talked about pay for the lowest paid. Those on the national minimum wage and the national living wage have seen their incomes increase by an average of £2,750 a year since 2016. She asked about universal credit. Universal credit delivers. People on universal credit are more likely to be in work than those trapped on legacy benefits. I have put billions of pounds into the system over successive fiscal events to smooth the transition to ensure that the movement of people from legacy benefits on to universal credit operates smoothly.

Finally, Scotland gets its share of the increased spending on capital and resource, but precious little thanks do we ever hear from those on the SNP Benches in exchange for it.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Building on the question asked by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the OBR has made it clear today that it has not been able to update its forecast to reflect the current Brexit situation, saying that

“we still have no meaningful basis for predicting the post-Brexit trading relationship beyond the near term.”

I sense the Chancellor's frustration with the House's inability to approve the withdrawal agreement, but does he agree that this means that many of the forecasts are obviously going to have to be revisited as the Brexit scenario plays itself out over the next few months?

The Chancellor mentioned the forthcoming CSR and education spending. May I urge him also to think very clearly and closely about spending on further education colleges, which is another critical part of improving productivity in our country?

[Nicky Morgan]

The Budget report recently produced by the Treasury Committee said that the Chancellor was effectively disregarding the fiscal objective to run a balanced budget in the mid-2020s, and the OBR has said today that the target will not be met again. So does he intend, by the next Budget, to ensure that the existing fiscal charter will be updated for this Parliament?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right, of course, about the OBR's Brexit assumption—I said so earlier and the OBR has said so clearly. It has to make an assumption, and until there is a new policy, that is unfortunately the way it is mandated to work. On the forecast, I have addressed this in this House many times before. The forecast is based on those assumptions. We are either going to have a no-deal exit, in which case I would expect a significantly worse outturn, or we are going to lift this cloud from above our economy, in which case I would expect a significantly better outcome. A number of important commentators, including the Governor of the Bank of England, have suggested over the past couple of weeks that there is more juice in the economy if we can just lift this cloud.

I have noted my right hon. Friend's early bid for further education in the spending review. There will be lots to discuss as we go into the spending review, and we will ensure that there are proper, structured arrangements for Members of this House to make their views known. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary will be happy to engage across the House.

My right hon. Friend asked about the target for the mid-2020s. I simply do not accept that the figures published today show that it is impossible to reach a balanced budget in the mid-2020s. In 2023-24, the deficit will be 0.5% of GDP, but whether we choose to get the deficit down to zero or choose to do other things is a choice, and we are lucky to have it.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who is ordinarily known for her buoyant and enthusiastic smile, was gesticulating at the Chancellor to speed up. I think she was auditioning for the role of Speaker, and presumably seeking to give the right hon. Gentleman a masterclass in brevity, notwithstanding her desire often to make her own point with enormous eloquence but at not inconsiderable length—but we will see.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): In today's forecast from the OBR, GDP growth this year is being revised down by 0.4%. The largest downward revision is to business investment—a downward revision of 3.2%. Business investment is now expected to shrink by 1% this year after shrinking by 1% last year. The Federation of Small Businesses says today that confidence is at “rock bottom”. The CBI says on tariffs that there has been “no consultation with business and no time to prepare”, and that this is

“a sledgehammer for our economy.”

Does the Chancellor recognise that businesses are losing patience with this Government and that unless businesses invest and help to grow our economy, productivity and wages are going to stay at rock bottom? What is he going to do to reverse this incredibly worrying and dangerous reduction in business investment?

Mr Hammond: What the hon. Lady has not mentioned is that business investment recovers to 2.3% next year, and, over the forecast, recovers entirely, so this is a cyclical change, not a structural change. There are two drivers. Of course Brexit uncertainty is having a damping effect on investment—I have said that before and I will say it again. The sooner we can lift it, the sooner investment will come into our economy, with welcome effect. But we cannot ignore what is happening in the car industry across Europe. A large part of this effect has been in our car industry. That is very worrying, but it is not a UK phenomenon; it is a much broader phenomenon.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Given the fall in new car sales that followed the big increase in vehicle excise duty, other regulatory changes and the car loan squeeze, will the Chancellor now review policy towards the car industry to make it cheaper and easier to buy a new car made in a British factory?

Mr Hammond: As my right hon. Friend knows, we are not able, under the current regime, to discriminate between cars made in British factories and cars made elsewhere, but we do keep all fiscal policy under review, and I am acutely conscious of the pressures that the car industry is facing at the moment.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I am trying to find something positive to say about a rather less than earth-shattering event, but I do welcome the support for industrial strategy and innovation. I also welcome the Furman report. However, does it not rather give the game away that global monopoly abuse is being referred to the British competition authorities at a time when we are walking away from the much more powerful European Commission, which could really deal with the problem?

On growth, is it not the case that while we are escaping recession, which is very welcome, that is primarily due to continued extraordinary monetary policy and low or negative real interest rates, which cannot continue? It may have been useful after the financial crisis, but it is an addictive drug.

Finally, how on earth does the Chancellor expect this proposed surge of business investment to occur when, even under the Government's Brexit plans, there is going to be a cliff edge in two years' time that any business will naturally seek to avoid?

Mr Hammond: I do not know why the right hon. Gentleman would want to break the habit of a lifetime in finding something positive to say in response to a statement, but I will take him at face value. On the Furman report, I do think it is quite important that we ensure that the UK's regulatory environment is at the cutting edge of the changes that are going on in the 21st-century economy. Regulation is one of our competitive advantages. We have excellent regulators, and there are plenty of examples of the UK being ahead of the global curve in setting regulations that can both protect the public and encourage investment.

I cannot comment on monetary policy, as the right hon. Gentleman knows—that is a matter entirely for the Bank of England—but as for a future cliff edge, it will be my fervent intention to give business the maximum confidence and clarity that we can about our future relationship with the European Union, as soon as I can.

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Can the Chancellor reassure me that the very welcome consultation on future infrastructure financing will not become any reason to delay a start on some of the essential major projects such as the lower Thames crossing, which will not only relieve pressure on the Dartford crossing but will be a fundamental link between two great wealth-creating regions of our country?

Mr Hammond: I can give my right hon. Friend that assurance. I am acutely conscious of the fact that we are committed to building a tunnel under the Thames but we have not yet committed to the link roads that will link that tunnel to the rest of the road network, and of course we absolutely will do so. This is a broader-based review to look at how we replace PFI and EIB funding over the medium term.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome this statement and the news that despite the best and concerted efforts of those who think that by talking the UK economy down they can somehow stop us leaving the EU, it is pleasing that employment is up, job creation is up, and the Government finances are in a better shape. That shows that we do not need the EU as some kind of economic crutch in order to enable us to stand on our own two feet. I also welcome the Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland.

For the future, what progress has been made on the review of air passenger duty and VAT on the hospitality industry in Northern Ireland? If the Chancellor is going to help subcontractors deal with late payments, will he consider the use of project bank accounts, which have been very successful in Northern Ireland in ensuring that public sector spend on infrastructure projects actually reaches the companies that spend the money?

Mr Hammond: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments. I draw the House's attention to the fact that one of the features of the jobs growth we have delivered is the regional distribution of it. This is not London-centric jobs growth; it is across the country. Productivity, wages and employment have grown in every region of the UK, which is very welcome.

The APD working group has been established, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, but we are not in a position to take any action in that area until there is a devolved Administration in Stormont. On VAT, as he knows, we are not able to take any action while we are members of or subject to the rules of the European Union, but we will continue to look at these issues.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Mr Speaker, you should see what the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) is like in my Education Committee.

I strongly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Given that there is a 10-year plan for the NHS—and rightly so—can we have a 10-year plan and a 10-year funding settlement for our schools and colleges in his statement before the summer?

Mr Hammond: Let me make this clear, for the avoidance of doubt. The NHS 10-year plan has been published, but the funding plan that we have announced is a five-year plan, and there will be a mid-point at which we fund the NHS for the latter part of the plan. We have no

plans, I am afraid, to set out a 10-year funding plan for any area of our public services. That would not be prudent or sensible, given the cyclical nature of the economy.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Manchester Central is much talked about. I think it is time we heard from her.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am reclaiming "bossy".

Is it not the case that cuts to police, local services and schools are a false economy? We pay for the cost of failure, the cost of rising knife crime, the cost of school exclusions, the cost of rising poverty and the cost of failing families and children. Will the Chancellor prioritise in his forthcoming spending review early intervention, to support families and help children get the best start in life?

Mr Hammond: There will be many demands on the available funding at the spending review, and we intend to look at the public's priorities in the round. Our challenge, as always, is to ensure that we direct funding in the way that most effectively delivers the end result that the public need. If I look at the knife crime debate that we have been having over the last couple of weeks, it is clear that it is not a simple question about putting more money into policing. *[Interruption.]* No, it is not. If the hon. Lady talks to police chiefs or school heads, they will tell her that it is a multifaceted challenge, and we need to address it as such. That is the point of having a cross-departmental spending review—we can look at our priorities in the round and decide how to allocate funding in a coherent way, to get the outcomes that the public want at the best value for money for the taxpayer.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I warmly welcome the big improvements in the public finances, particularly those as a result of the last spending review in 2015, but the Chancellor has a problem with stamp duty. Today's report says that the forecast has "deteriorated significantly" since October, when it was already £4 billion short. Receipts fell 9.8% in 2018, which is a new £2.7 billion shortfall in the scorecard. Transactions in my constituency are down 31% since the reforms. That is something he will need to look at and propose reforms for in due course, perhaps in November. Would he like to comment on the latest deteriorating numbers?

Mr Hammond: Yes. My right hon. Friend—perhaps unsurprisingly, given his constituency—is very interested in these issues, and I would be happy to meet him to go through the numbers. There are a number of moving parts underneath the headline number. Stamp duty in Wales has been devolved, which takes a significant chunk out of the total number. There is an overall slowdown in the market, which has an effect. We have also exempted first-time buyer purchases from stamp duty, which is a considerable chunk of the reduction he refers to, but I would be happy to talk him through the details.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Ind): It is a fundamental mistake for the Chancellor to underestimate the impact of Brexit on his future forecasts. To dismiss

[Mr Chris Leslie]

the 3.2% collapse in the forecast for business investment is a strategic error that he is making for the future. We hear the Chancellor talk about a “deal dividend” and the shadow Chancellor talk about a “jobs-first Brexit”, but that is a mythology. Brexit in all forms will hit our business investment and our tax revenues and create austerity for a decade. Can the Chancellor and the shadow Chancellor stop treating this as business as usual?

Mr Hammond: While the hon. Gentleman is entitled to his point of view and often makes a valuable contribution to the debate, he has to be careful that he does not accidentally veer off-piste into “talking Britain down” syndrome. He talks about a collapse in business investment, but I hope he would agree that this is likely to be a cyclical reduction in business investment. If he talks to businesses, they will tell him that they are postponing investment decisions until they have greater clarity about the future. I agree; we cannot keep them hanging there forever. We need to give them clarity and certainty as quickly as possible. I believe we will do that in this House over the next few weeks, and when we do, I believe that the great majority of that investment—postponed, not cancelled—will flow back into our economy later this year.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I am delighted at the Chancellor’s announcement about the borderlands growth deal, which is welcome news for the area. Will he confirm that Departments will move to an early discussion about details of the various projects with the local authority, so that it can get on with implementation as soon as possible? Would he like to visit Carlisle and the borderlands, to see those initiatives in action?

Mr Hammond: I can confirm that we want to move ahead as quickly as possible with agreeing the individual projects and getting disbursement under way. I would be delighted to visit Carlisle, to see not only the effects of the borderlands growth deal but the £100 million housing infrastructure fund investment that we are making to facilitate a major expansion of new build housing in the area.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Many Members on both sides of the House have expressed worry about the slowdown in growth forecast, but all of us see that there is some growth. Given that the economy is growing, albeit too modestly, will the Chancellor look at the £1.4 billion of cuts that will be made to benefits through the benefit freeze in three weeks’ time, which means that he is taking money away from those who are least able to afford it? All economic theory shows that those who are on very low or modest incomes spend money that is given to them, which will stimulate our economy some more. Will he get up at the Dispatch Box and tell us that he is going to end the benefit freeze, which is due to hit all those people in three weeks’ time?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady talks about reductions in economic forecasts. It is actually one year—*[Interruption.]* I will answer the question in my own way, if the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) does not mind. It is only one

year for which the OBR has downgraded the forecast. In two further years, it remains unchanged, and in the fourth year, it increases.

The hon. Lady asked about the benefit freeze. That has been one of the many difficult decisions we have had to take. Under the last Labour Government and Gordon Brown’s stewardship, the welfare budget increased by 65% in real terms, getting it completely out of kilter with wages and making it unsustainable. That, combined with the fiscal pressure we faced in 2010, made it inevitable that we had to take action, but we have made it clear that we have no intention of repeating the current freeze. When it is over, increases in benefits will resume in line with CPI in the normal way.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I welcome the Chancellor’s announcements, particularly on investments in science and infrastructure and, seeing as the workers’ party has not welcomed them, the rise in the national living wage, the £700 pay rise for the lowest-paid and the tax reductions, with 32 million of our lowest-paid receiving a tax cut. You would think the Labour party would cheer that. I also welcome the fact that the Chancellor has reminded British business that if Brexit is a threat, the shadow Chancellor, who is still a Marxist, is an even bigger threat.

On growth, 1.2% is too low a figure. May I urge the Chancellor to use the comprehensive spending review to make sure that, as well as increasing spending on services, we incentivise really bold public sector leadership for innovation and enterprise, and make sure we get this economy growing at 3% again?

Mr Hammond: Nobody shares my hon. Friend’s ambition to see faster growth more than I do. There are many ways we can deliver that, but it has to involve raising productivity in both the public sector and the private sector. We are taking initiatives, with the National Leadership Centre, on public sector leadership to enhance productivity in the public sector, and we are taking action to reinforce leadership among smaller and medium-sized enterprises in the private sector to ensure that productivity is driven, technology is taken up effectively and we are all better off as a consequence.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I have more respect than many in this House for the work of economic forecasters, but let us be honest: what we have today is a big long sum predicated on the idea that Brexit will be fine. However, surely the events of the past 24 hours demonstrate to us that Brexit is not going very well, is it? Things are not going well in the country either. Last year, the Trussell Trust gave out nearly 1.5 million three-day food parcels, which is a massive increase on last year. When will the Chancellor admit that Brexit is a massive distraction for our country, and that it is about time we got back to tackling what the public really care about—rough sleeping, poverty and the position of the worst-off in our society?

Mr Hammond: I have never been afraid to acknowledge that, as far as the economy is concerned, Brexit uncertainty is a distraction, and it is something we need to get lifted as soon as possible. I think I said that at the beginning of my statement. The sooner we can do that, the better.

It will help us to grow faster, and it will help us to raise productivity more quickly, and that means higher wages across the economy.

On the issues that the hon. Lady mentions, we are putting £1.2 billion into addressing homelessness and rough sleeping. We are consulting on an additional 1% stamp duty levy on properties bought by non-UK resident owners, with the whole of that money ring-fenced to address the rough-sleeping challenge in our cities. In relation to poverty, she knows the figures. We have over 3.5 million more people in work, with 665,000 fewer children living in workless households. However much Opposition Members may not like it, it remains the case that work is the best sustainable route out of poverty.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I congratulate the Chancellor on his statement. If we do get the orderly Brexit that I know he and I want, may I urge him to consider schools funding in the spending review? Schools in my constituency are doing enormously important work, but they are facing increased challenges, particularly with pupil volatility, pupil complexity and rising demands. They are having to do more, and I invite him to ensure that they have the resources to match.

Mr Hammond: As my hon. Friend knows, we put £1.3 billion into the schools budget in 2017, and we have protected per pupil real funding since then. He will also know that there is a significant variation in the level of funding between schools and authorities across the country, which is now being addressed through the fair funding formula. I understand that there are pressures in the system until we have that rolled out and operational, having delivered the result throughout the system. However, I can confirm to him that schools funding will be considered in the spending review, along with all other areas of departmental spending in the round.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): To follow up on that question, I am sure the Chancellor has noticed that there are children all over the country, including in the Prime Minister's constituency—and among those children are my children—who will no longer be able to go to school all day on a Friday. My son's school is going to shut at 1 o'clock, like 15 other schools in Birmingham and hundreds of schools across the country. They have been getting in touch with me, including those in the Prime Minister's constituency, and I am sure they will be writing to her, because they are certainly writing to me. What has he offered today for the Government to do the most basic thing, and keep my children in school? What is being given today and what will be given in the CSR? I hope he is looking forward to seeing my children, because I am bringing them to be looked after by him every Friday at 1 o'clock.

Mr Hammond: I shall look forward to it.

Today is not a fiscal event, and the opportunity to look at spending priorities in the round will happen at the spending review. What I have described today is a world where improving public finances mean that, if we can lift the Brexit cloud from our economy and get that certainty restored, we will have choices. Frankly, that is something we have not enjoyed in this country for a decade now, because of the consequences of the crisis under the previous Labour Government.

If the hon. Lady wants to talk to me about schools, I am happy to talk about our record on schools, with the attainment gap narrowing, record rates of disadvantaged 18-year-olds going to university, and 84% of children being taught in good or outstanding schools compared with 66% in 2010. Those are outcomes of which we are proud.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): May I ask the Chancellor's view on the question of poverty? Under the previous Labour Government, we saw 1 million men and women thrown on the dole. Under this Government, unemployment is down to its lowest rate for 40 years. Yet we hear the argument from the Opposition that work is not the way out of poverty; only spending ever more on benefits is the answer. Am I correct in noting that, in reality, when a workless couple move from being out of work into full-time work, their chances of being in poverty drop from 38% to a negligible less than 1%, so work is the way out of poverty? What assessment has the Chancellor made of the combined effects of cutting taxes for the lowest-paid, reducing unemployment to the lowest level for 40 years and the new national living wage, and what assessment has he made of his intention to go further today in boosting the proud achievement of the national living wage of reducing poverty further?

Mr Hammond: We have seen the proportion of people on low pay falling to its lowest level in 20 years. I have already mentioned the statistics on the number of people in work, and I agree with him that being in work is the only sustainable way out of poverty. He is right: the previous Labour Government left 1.4 million people languishing on out-of-work benefits, and anyone who thinks that that is a good outcome—[*Interruption.*] Absolutely true: they should be ashamed of themselves. I can assure my hon. Friends that this issue is high on our agenda, and that we are looking at ways of maintaining the record we have built up, which is exactly the one I want to deliver.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Chancellor confirm that many millions of pounds more are being cut from the police budget than the £100 million he has put in for overtime to support our hard-pressed police officers? Will he confirm something in particular? In his statement, he said that the £100 million is for England. When I was a Home Office Minister with responsibility for the police, Home Office funding was for England and Wales. Has Wales been left out again?

Mr Hammond: I believe—[*Interruption.*] I am aware of what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. My understanding is that the funding figure is for England. [*Interruption.*] Sorry; my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) is telling me it is for England and Wales. I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman if the statement misled him, but I am told that the funding is for England and Wales.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the continued improvement in the public finances, which is due in no small part to the continued resilience and innovation of our businesses, some of which the Chancellor met when he recently opened the University of Gloucestershire's new business school. What a symbol

[Richard Graham]

of change that is, because only nine years ago we lost 6,000 business jobs in Gloucester, thanks to the disastrous policies of the Labour party, and youth unemployment was four times higher than it is today. My right hon. Friend knows the extraordinary enthusiasm on both sides of the House for continued funding for schools and, from my letter with 165 colleagues from four different parties, for improved funding for further education colleges. Will he therefore look at those priorities very closely in the spending review?

Mr Hammond: I very much enjoyed my visit to the University of Gloucestershire and was interested to see the innovative work going on there. The improvement in the public finances, to which my hon. Friend referred, is being driven by increased business tax receipts, partly as a result of the Government's relentless clampdown on opportunities for tax avoidance and evasion and partly as a result of the very significant increase in employment. Some 3.5 million more people in work is very good news not just for 3.5 million households, but for the Exchequer, the public finances and, ultimately, our public services.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Is it not true that poverty in this country increasingly wears a working face, that we now have the highest ever proportion of families in poverty who are in work, that a family of four with two people working full time on the national minimum wage will be £600 a year worse off by 2020, thanks to the Chancellor's benefit freeze, and that, because he will not tackle the benefit freeze, including on in-work benefits, families in that condition will see absolutely nothing as a consequence of today's statement?

Mr Hammond: I have already made the point about the unsustainable rise in welfare payments under the previous Labour Government. A 65% real-terms increase in the welfare budget was not sustainable. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) can chunter from the Opposition Front Bench as much as she likes, but it will not make it sustainable. I will tell the hon. Lady what will help her constituents: the £6,500 tax cuts per family for people earning low wages and buying fuel, which Opposition Front Benchers voted against, and the £2,500 increase in the national living wage since 2016 for people working full time on low wages.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I was delighted to hear that the Chancellor is ploughing £260 million into the borderlands growth deal, which shows this Government's commitment to cross-border infrastructure investment. It will allow the borders railway extension—from Tweedbank to Hawick, Newcastleton and on to Carlisle—to move forward. I was also pleased to hear his response to the invitation from my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) to visit his constituency, so when he visits will he also come across the border and visit my constituency in the Scottish borders, which will see significant benefits from this investment?

Mr Hammond: The whole point of the borderlands growth deal is to celebrate the economic geography of the borders region on both sides of that non-line between

Scotland and England, so my hon. Friend makes a very good point. If I am coming to Carlisle, I shall certainly cross the border and visit his constituency.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Ind): Growth is now forecast to be 1.2% in 2019 and 1.4% in 2020. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, before the EU referendum, it was forecast to be 2.1% in each of those years. Growth of under 2% over the forecast period is sluggish and unimpressive, and the problem will be exacerbated if we fall off a cliff and leave the EU without a deal. Can the Chancellor therefore tell the House—I think we need the benefit of knowing this before we vote—whether, when we vote on the motion this evening, he will be voting against us leaving without a deal?

Mr Hammond: Yes, I will be voting against us leaving without a deal. I have always believed that leaving without a deal would be bad for the UK economy, and that continues to be my view. May I just take the hon. Gentleman up on his point about the relatively higher growth forecasts we saw until a year or so ago? We need to remember that this is a structural downgrade. The OBR revised its estimate of the growth rate of productivity in the economy. Until we get that productivity growth rate back, we will not see sustainable higher growth in the economy. That is why it is my No. 1 priority, and it drives every announcement I make.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), I am pleased to hear that the Chancellor recognises the urgency of schools funding in the spending review, but will he not ignore children's social care? Spending on early intervention by local authorities has fallen from £3.7 billion to £1.9 billion, but at the same time their spending on late intervention has risen from £5.9 billion to £6.7 billion. It does not take rocket science to work out the link, so will he acknowledge that not investing early is a false economy, both socially and financially?

Mr Hammond: I am all in favour of early-intervention approaches where they can be shown to be effective. My hon. Friend will know that at the Budget I announced an extra £410 million next year for social care, including for children, and we also announced £84 million specifically over five years to pilot schemes to try to keep more children safely at home. However, his representations are noted, and he will have an opportunity to make more formal representations ahead of the spending review to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We need to speed up, because I want to accommodate colleagues. Can we have a one-sentence question?

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I, too, want clarity from the Chancellor. When he talked about environmental spending in England, did he mean only England, or England and Wales? Will a certain amount of money be given to Wales? When I was first elected, 35 years ago, my constituency had one of the worst industrial polluters in the whole UK. It has left us with 27 acres of derelict

land at the bottom of a valley, and a lot of wasted investment. Will he please help us to get that toxic waste cleared up and taken away so that the land can be made suitable for people to use?

Mr Hammond: The environmental reviews that I have announced today do not involve the distribution of further money. Of course, under the devolution settlement, where matters are devolved, any money announced will be for England only; where they are reserved, money will be made available more widely.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I very much welcome the focus on the environment and climate change in today's announcement. I thank the Chancellor for listening to so many representations, not just from the people of Taunton Deane but from people everywhere, on the marine conservation belt and, in particular, on linking the decline of biodiversity with the economy. Will he please give some indication of when we might hear the results of the new review, which could do for biodiversity what the Stern review did for climate change?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right that the review could have far-reaching consequences, but it has not yet started and we are only just scoping the terms of reference with the reviewer, so I am afraid that I cannot give her a definitive answer on how long it will take, but I will let her know as soon as I can.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Although any extra money for the police is welcome, officers will be looking on in horror to find that it is due only on overtime as they are so overstretched already. We know that the Chancellor has said that they should be reprioritising, but does he agree with the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) that they should be deprioritising spending on historical child sexual exploitation?

Mr Hammond: The money that we have announced today—exceptionally, because this is not a fiscal event—is targeted at overtime, because police chiefs are telling us that is the tool immediately at their disposal. There is £970 million in additional spending capacity going into police forces in 2019-20, from April, but many police forces have already committed that to fund recruitment and training. That will not come on line for some time, so overtime mutual aid is the preferred immediate response that police officers are signalling to us.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Recognising that women and girls face different challenges in life from men and boys, I want to thank the Chancellor for listening to MPs from across the House and making his announcement on free sanitary products today. Can he advise us on when he expects the initiative to start?

Mr Hammond: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her part in this campaign. We are ready to fund the distribution of free sanitary products from the start of the new school year in September, but I cannot commit my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary to a September start until the procurement process—which unfortunately has to be gone through because we have to comply with rules—has been properly scoped. However, it will be as early as possible in the new school year.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Now, this is the challenge: can people ask their question in fewer than 30 seconds?

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It seems that the Chancellor is hoping to buy off the rising tide of youth campaigning with a sprinkling of announcements on the environment, but the science is clear and he is doing nothing like enough. We have 11 years to avoid climate breakdown, and protected species are in freefall. I have one test for him to prove whether he is remotely serious about the agenda: will he reverse the savage funding cuts that his Government have made to Natural England—yes or no?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady is nothing if not cynical. Funding for any bodies will be considered in the spending review, and I would be very happy to have a representation from her.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Chancellor made a welcome but passing comment in respect of Northern Powerhouse Rail, but when will he bring forward investment in the east coast main line to make it fit for purpose and HS2-ready? Without that investment north of York, the communities on the HS2 east coast main line risk being further away from, rather than closer to, the required connections.

Mr Hammond: We are allocating capital funding to our railway at the fastest rate than at any time since the Victorians. The way it works, as I think the hon. Lady knows, is that we allocate the funding for the so-called control periods of investment in the railway and the Transport Secretary then works with Network Rail to prioritise that investment. I will pass on to him the hon. Lady's concerns.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the Chancellor for his announcement on the package of reforms to take on apprentices. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability, I ask him to support in particular those businesses that take on apprentices with disabilities. It is extremely important that they achieve their full potential. They currently face so many challenges and barriers to the workplace. Mr Speaker, you have championed internships in this House for people with disabilities. That has been working miraculously, but we need to roll this out right across the United Kingdom, so will the Chancellor please ensure that people with disabilities get that equality of choice?

Mr Hammond: We do of course support people with disabilities going into work, with financial support for employers where necessary. We have an extremely good record in this country, over many years, on employment of disabled people—well ahead of many of our competitors. We also have an extremely good record over the past nine years of this Government of increasing the number of disabled people in work. It is a simple fact that as employment rises, as we have seen, the barriers for disabled people getting into work are lowered automatically by virtue of the operation of the labour market.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): By 2021, this Government will have cut £1 billion from the Metropolitan police budget. That is why I wrote the Chancellor a letter, signed by every single London Labour MP, asking for more funding to tackle the rise in violent crime. Can the Chancellor confirm how much additional funding has been allocated to the London Met?

Mr Hammond: I cannot. The £100 million that we have announced today will be for the police as a whole, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will engage with police chiefs. If the hon. Lady is concerned, as she obviously is, about policing in London, may I suggest that she gets in touch with the Labour Mayor of London and asks him to get off his backside and do something about it?

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I listened carefully to the Chancellor's statement and very little was said about freelancers and the self-employed. In Prime Minister's questions this afternoon, the Prime Minister said that the Government want to increase female entrepreneurship, but excluding the self-employed from sharing parental leave is causing women's businesses to fail. Research by the Campaign for Parental Pay Equality showed that only 20% of mums were back to their pre-baby earnings by the time their child was two. Will the Chancellor and his colleagues please work with Members across the House and support my Bill so that all parents can share parental leave and women can fulfil their full potential?

Mr Hammond: I am happy to look at the issue raised by the hon. Lady. We have been looking at access to employment rights and benefits by the self-employed. As she knows, however, there is an issue: the self-employed pay significantly lower contributions than the employed into the Exchequer. The pressure is always to raise entitlements and access for the self-employed, but it is very clear—I learned the hard way in 2017—that the self-employed do not want their contributions to the Exchequer to rise, and that creates a tension.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The Select Committee on Education has received evidence that children with special educational needs and disabilities are getting support based not on their needs but on the rationed resources available. SEND funding is in crisis and parents are feeling desperate. Will the Chancellor take this opportunity to act immediately and make ring-fenced funding available to give all our children the support they need?

Mr Hammond: No, I cannot do that but I can assure the hon. Lady that special educational needs funding will be considered as part of the spending review. I am sure that her Committee will want to make representations. We have to make choices. I can confidently predict that the spending review will receive far more bids for funding from across the Government and agencies in all Departments than there is funding available, so we have to look at what our priorities are as a nation.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Government have slashed millions of pounds from policing, with 21,000 police officers taken out of the system. Violent crime has gone up; the knife crime

epidemic is terrorising our communities; and the police are at breaking point. Will the Chancellor, ahead of the next spending review, prioritise investing in the police service so that we can genuinely tackle knife crime and violent crime in our country?

Mr Hammond: Well, I have just done it with £100 million today. As the hon. Lady knows, we have put £460 million into the police this year, £970 million will go in next year and an extra £100 million has been announced today. Of course the police will be considered very carefully in the spending review.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: May I very gently exhort caring and sharing comrades to care for and share with each other, and not to speak in such a way as to stop others speaking? I am sure they would not want to do that—it would be uncomradely.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I and my colleagues, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and, I presume, the Work and Pensions Secretary have encouraged the Chancellor to scrap the final year of the benefit freeze. Given that he knows that, alongside the two-child policy, it is one of the worst policies for driving up child poverty, why has he maintained it? Why has he not scrapped it in the spring statement?

Mr Hammond: I repeat once again that the spring statement is not a fiscal event, so I am not making fiscal announcements. I have already explained why the benefit freeze was necessary—difficult but necessary—and that we have no intention of extending it. When it comes to an end, benefits will resume their increase in line with CPI inflation.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): While I welcome the period provision announcement and thank the Chancellor for listening to campaigners, will he extend it to primary schools, universities and homeless shelters, and will he also commit to scrapping the tampon tax as soon as we come out of the EU? Does he recognise that the girls he talks about missing days of school are the same girls who go to school hungry and that we will not end period poverty until we have ended poverty?

Mr Hammond: I suppose that is a manifestation of the universal truth that you can never satisfy. A good case has been made for providing free sanitary products in secondary schools and colleges where there is a controlled environment for their distribution and where the bulk of the need clearly lies. Of course, I understand that there is an issue regarding primary schools. I am open to sensible suggestions for how we might address that, but the core of the problem is in secondary schools and colleges. We have addressed that today, and I hope the hon. Lady recognises that.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The DEFRA budget has been cut by 35% over the past eight years, so while I welcome what the Chancellor has said on the future homes standard, which is genuinely new and innovative, he cannot expect the people in Natural England and the Environment Agency to keep doing more with less while enduring a pay freeze—a 15% real-terms pay cut over the past 10 years.

Our Prime Minister has signed up to the sustainable development goals. In July, she will go to New York and say what she is doing to end poverty, violence and hunger. With infant mortality and child hunger rising, what has the Chancellor announced today to tackle that?

Mr Hammond: As I have said, this is not a fiscal statement today. I take on board the various points the hon. Lady has made, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is of course going to the conference in New York. Sometimes I do not recognise this country from the descriptions I hear from Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* I get out plenty, but I do not recognise this country from their descriptions. Of course we have problems and challenges, but could we stop talking Britain down relentlessly?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Who's up for a single sentence?

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Will the Chancellor clarify the extent to which reduced business investment and fewer tax reliefs have contributed to higher corporation tax receipts?

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

Mr Hammond: I am not sure I entirely understand the question, but clearly corporation tax receipts have gone up as a result of reducing corporation tax rates, making the UK one of the most attractive places for businesses to establish and invest. As I have acknowledged, business investment is depressed by Brexit uncertainty. The sooner we can end it, the sooner we can get back to business.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The Chancellor will be aware that the budget for the Welsh Government has been reduced by some £4 billion since 2010 because of his austerity. There is a massive impact on local councils and public services. Jobs and frontline services are all that is left to cut, so will the Chancellor end that austerity and apologise for the pain he has caused public services?

Mr Hammond: I have announced a trajectory for the growth of public spending in the next spending review period—there will be at least a 1.2% per annum real-terms growth, which will have positive consequences for Welsh Government spending.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The fragmentation of money and control in further education, the apprenticeship levy, T-levels and the adult education budget is a barrier to productivity in Bristol and the wider economic region. What support will he give to Bristol and the wider west of England region to bring those things together so that we can improve our productivity?

Mr Hammond: I am interested in the hon. Lady's suggestion that fragmentation is a barrier to productivity. If she is working with her local enterprise partnership, I would be happy to engage with them and talk about the challenge. We want to drive improved productivity throughout our public services, including our further education sector.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Has the Chancellor ever heard of the WASPI campaign? If he has, is he deliberately choosing to ignore WASPI women?

Mr Hammond: I have heard of the campaign. We settled the issue a number of years ago. *[HON. MEMBERS: "What?"]* Yes, we have. We were dealing with a very difficult set of challenges but did what we had to do. I know the campaign continues, but I have no further announcements to make.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The Government will know that, since they walked away from local councils, frontline services such as adult social care and children's safeguarding have been massively underfunded, adding more and more pressure on low-income families and council tax. When will he eventually give proper funding for children's services and adult social care?

Mr Hammond: At the risk of being repetitive: we will have a spending review later this year. The question of local government funding and how business rates retention interacts with other funding structures will be looked at, but in the meantime we have increased funding for local government by £1.3 billion, meaning that local government has a real-terms spending increase available this year. Labour Front Benchers voted against it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: One sentence each.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): When will the Government end state-sanctioned age discrimination and ensure that everybody, including those under 25, are entitled to a real living wage?

Mr Hammond: As I have said many times, the most important thing for under-25s is to ensure that they get into the workforce and establish a pattern of work.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Almost half the children living in my constituency are living in poverty as a direct result of the Chancellor's ideological austerity agenda. Why is the stain of rising child poverty not enough for him to act today?

Mr Hammond: There is nothing ideological about getting a deficit down from £150 billion a year to enable us to fund our public services sustainably in future.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Will the Chancellor confirm that the new £3 billion affordable homes scheme he announced is a re-announcement from 2017? Will he also confirm that £20 billion has been cut from the social housing grant since 2010, and that 30,000 fewer social homes are being built each year than were built under the last Labour Government?

Mr Hammond: No, that is not correct. The £3 billion is part of the £44 billion total package for housing that we have announced. I announced an overall framework, and in a series of announcements will say how we will spend that money.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The Chancellor's statement ignores the position of Shelter, which claims that we need to build 155,000 social homes a year. Why the lack of ambition?

Mr Hammond: In total, more than 220,000 new homes were built last year. That is the highest total in all but one of the past 31 years. This is not about money. This is about the capacity of the industry to deliver. We are taking steps not just to build houses, but to support the industry to expand by funding directly smaller and medium-sized enterprises so that they can expand the capacity of the house building industry.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): To end Brexit uncertainty, business wants a commitment to the customs union; frictionless access to the EU market; and the skilled and unskilled labour that comes from it. Will the Chancellor commit to supporting a deal that delivers just that?

Mr Hammond: I am committed, as I have been since 2016, to delivering a deal that allows us to continue our complex and long-established trading relationships with the European Union—our closest neighbours and most important economic partners. I will continue to advocate such a deal.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given that a single Scottish police force was a Scottish Tory manifesto commitment, and given that the economy is so good that the Chancellor has found extra money for policing in England and Wales, why is he not moving towards refunding the £175 million VAT to Scottish police and fire services?

Mr Hammond: Scotland will benefit from the £100 million that I announced today through the Barnett formula. At the request of a group of my hon. Friends, we looked at the question of VAT and changed the rules, but the Scottish Government did what they did—they reorganised Police Scotland—in the full knowledge that it would have those VAT consequences.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): Does the Chancellor understand that ending the benefits freeze is not just about people in work? It is about our welfare safety net. People who cannot work because they are too ill cannot afford to live on the basic amount. The benefits freeze must end. The core amount of universal credit and employment and support allowance have not risen for three years.

Mr Hammond: As I have said, the benefits freeze will end at the end of the forthcoming year. We have no intention of renewing or prolonging it. Those were difficult decisions, but ones that we had to take.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Four babies in 1,000 will not reach their first birthday as a result of this Government's austerity policies. If the Government are so keen on tackling burning injustices, why will they not end the freeze and end it now?

Mr Hammond: I am sorry—I did not hear which freeze the hon. Lady asked about.

Debbie Abrahams: The benefits freeze.

Mr Hammond: I have answered the question. The benefits freeze will end at the end of the forthcoming year.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York schools are the worst-funded in the country, we have the highest attainment gap, and the schools in the most deprived areas have had the largest per pupil funding cut. When will the Chancellor address this huge inequality?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady has a legitimate point. The funding as between schools and authorities is very unevenly distributed. That is why, when we put an extra £1.3 billion into the school system in 2017, we committed to a fair funding formula that would redistribute over time. That is happening. I understand that schools that are underfunded relative to the mean would like it to happen more quickly, but that has to be the answer. We have to move towards a fair distribution of funding between schools.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does the Chancellor accept that his changes to vehicle excise duty penalise the cleanest diesels on the market while offering no incentive whatsoever to motorists to get rid of older, dirtier diesels, which has led to an increase in CO₂ emissions from new cars for the first time in a decade? When will he sort this out?

Mr Hammond: No, I do not accept that, but I accept that, because of the scandal of manipulated emissions test, we have a very difficult situation in the vehicle excise duty tables, whereby vehicles have turned out to have much higher emissions than was originally thought. We do have to address this issue, as I acknowledged in the last Budget, and we will address it.

Point of Order

2.51 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are soon to start a debate on the subject of a no-deal Brexit. It may be that some Members have business interests that might benefit from a no-deal Brexit, such as companies involved in shorting the pound or the value of shares, or that might have secured payments from companies that are enthusiastic backers of a no-deal Brexit. How would you advise that those Members declare their interests?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The short answer is that the registration of interests is a matter for the judgment of each individual Member; no precise advice can be given to cover every eventuality. Whenever I am asked by Members for my advice, I say: if in doubt—if there is uncertainty, if they think someone might subsequently criticise—it is better to err on the side of over-declaration than of under-declaration. That has been my own philosophy, and I would commend it to colleagues. I hope that that is helpful.

Tenancy (Deposits and Arbitration)

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

2.52 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a single custodial tenancy deposit scheme; to provide for that scheme to invest deposits; to require interest on such investments to be used for the provision of tenant advocacy, tenant support and arbitration services; to establish a mandatory arbitration service for the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants; and for connected purposes.

I declare an interest in that I use the current tenancy deposit system as a landlord. It neither works for landlords nor provides the safeguards the last Labour Government intended in the original legalisation.

I am introducing my Bill partly because of the treatment of my constituent Andy Smith. He was living in an apartment owned by Baron Homes and had a tenancy agreement to December 2018. In January of that year, he was offered council accommodation, which he gratefully accepted, and, as his tenancy required, he got a mutual agreement in writing to break his lease. Given that he had fulfilled all aspects of his contract, one might have thought him entitled to his £650 back. Sadly, that was not the case. Baron Homes alleged that there was damage to the property and said it would keep the entire deposit. I have seen photos of before and after, showing that the damage it alleged was pre-existing, except for some wear and tear, but, in any event, withholding the deposit was an act of bad faith because the property was to be gutted and turned into two luxury studio flats.

Brighton has a history of rogue landlords, from Nicholas van Hoogstraten, when I was growing up, to Baron Homes today, which has a woeful record of exploiting tenants in our city. It was no surprise, therefore, when Baron Homes forced Andy to challenge its decision through MyDeposits, the tenancy deposit scheme that Baron Homes uses. Judgment day came and MyDeposits ruled there was no damage to the property, but it claimed that Andy had broken his lease early, meaning that Baron Homes could keep the deposit as punishment.

I thought there had been an error. Andy had proof of an agreement to leave early, but, because both the challenge and the withholding of the deposit were not on this point, he had not provided the letter as evidence. I wrote to MyDeposits with the further information, and after chasing them for months, I finally got a very simple letter stating: “We don’t do appeals. There is no right to a review”. When I went back to Baron Homes, its response was to threaten that if Andy continued to complain, it would take him to the cleaners, charge him for council tax covering a period when he was not in the property and require him to settle the rent due. This required further appeals, including to Brighton Council, which, I am pleased to say, ruled in Andy’s favour.

All this is commonplace in Brighton and many other places up and down the country. Just as the law had to change to prevent the practices of people such as Peter Rachman, whose name in the 1960s became a synonym for exploitation and intimidation, so the law again needs to change to prevent the names of, in this case, Ms Blencowe, the director of Baron Homes, and many other landlords and agents from becoming synonyms for today’s unethical practices.

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

As a result of legal aid cuts, Andy has no access to legal advice and the only route left is an expensive challenge through the courts. Baron Homes and its partner in crime, MyDeposits, and landlords and agents across the country have in effect stolen my constituent's money and that of many other constituents.

That is why I am introducing my Bill. Michael Ball, professor of urban and property economics at the University of Reading, concludes:

"Tenancy deposit schemes are poor value for money in the UK - costing the sector more than £275 million a year in fees and administration".

He also points out that last year they released only £7 million pounds in disputed rents. A recent Nationwide survey found that the average waiting time for a deposit return was nearly two months. Most people do not realise it, but about half of deposits are not even held in a custodial scheme; instead, they are held directly by landlords and underwritten by their insurance, meaning that tenants have to complain to the insurance underwriter, which many do not do. Even when they do, as we have seen with my constituent, there is no right of appeal and no ability to set a precedent when a case is won, and of course, because the landlords are their clients, the companies have an incentive to keep them happy.

Some £4 billion is held in deposits in this country, almost all of it providing interest to the landlords or schemes, not the tenants. Generation Rent suggested I look at a deposit scheme in New South Wales, Australia. Set up in 1977, this scheme is wholly administered by the Government with no third parties involved. The landlord must deposit the bond in the scheme within 10 working days—no insurance, no underwriting—and every year the scheme earns interest of 56 million Australian dollars. Half covers the cost of running the scheme and the remaining 26 million dollars is used to fund services for tenants, including tribunal, advice, including legal advice, and advocacy programmes. Further, low-income tenants can receive what is called a "rentstart" loan, which is an interest-free loan from the Government to cover the cost of the deposit. Renters can also transfer deposits between tenancies. I propose that we introduce a similar scheme here.

Turning back to this country, £4 billion of private renters' money is currently being held, as I mentioned, serving no productive value. If I was to put that in an ISA, it would produce £40 million to £80 million a year in interest. My Bill would create a single custodial tenancy deposit scheme that would eventually hold that £4 billion. I would propose to use the money to fund two areas.

First, the Bill would create an independent arbitration tribunal service that could hear disputes from landlords, agents and tenants, not only over deposit deductions at the end of a lease, but over whether a landlord had fulfilled its obligations in respect of tenant evictions and requirements for property repairs. It would be a

way of abolishing no-fault evictions, and would provide tenants with a way of seeking redress without costly court proceedings. Until recently, MyDeposits even allowed landlords to withhold deposits without giving any reason whatsoever. That, along with their track record on due process and appeals, shows that we need to cut them out of the system altogether. It should be noted that £8 million would restore the early legal aid for housing that was removed by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

Also, the money could be spent on renters unions. I am a trade unionist and a co-operator, and I know that unions and co-operatives turn power relations on their heads. After decades of privatisation in the housing market, landlords now have almost unprecedented power in the lives of the renting public. In Brighton we have a growing renters union called Acorn, a democratic member-led organisation that empowers its members with knowledge of their rights in the rental sector and takes direct action when it is required. If we funded such organisations they would be able to provide legal support and advocacy, and to fight for their members just as trade unions and co-operatives do. I have seen them achieve incredible successes—preventing evictions, winning repairs in dangerous properties, and stopping banks requiring landlords to discriminate against tenants on housing benefit. We could do that for all tenants throughout the country.

We can change the law all we like in this place, but unless we empower people out there with the tools and skills that they require to support their rights, our words and our laws are hollow. That is why my Bill is intended to establish a fund for renters unions to fundamentally rebalance the power relationship between landlords and tenants. It would cost the Exchequer no money, and it would provide justice in an area in which we desperately need it.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Marsha De Cordova, Matt Western, Faisal Rashid, Yasmin Qureshi, Stella Creasy, Stephen Doughty, Gareth Snell, Mr Paul Sweeney, Catherine West, Ruth George and Helen Hayes present the Bill.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March and to be printed (Bill 358).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the UK's withdrawal from the EU not later than 7.00 pm; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the questions may be put after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—
(Mike Freer.)

UK's Withdrawal from the European Union

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected amendment (a), in the name of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), and amendment (f), in the name of the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green).

3.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): I beg to move,

That this House declines to approve leaving the European Union without a Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework for the Future Relationship on 29 March 2019; and notes that leaving without a deal remains the default in UK and EU law unless this House and the EU ratify an agreement.

Let me begin by paying tribute to our Prime Minister. She may have temporarily lost her voice, but what she has never lost, and will never lose, is a focus on the national interest and a full-hearted desire to do what is right for our country.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: No.

Since the withdrawal agreement was concluded, the Prime Minister has stood at the Dispatch Box for more than 19 hours. She has answered many questions, and made compelling arguments. Throughout this process she has shown fortitude, tenacity, thoughtfulness, diligence and, above all, an unselfish and unstinting patriotism. I think it only appropriate that in all parts of the House, whatever political differences we have, we recognise that the Prime Minister always, always puts country first, and that we are fortunate to have her in that position.

Toby Perkins: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: Not at this stage.

The House voted to give the people of this country a choice as to whether we were to remain in the European Union or leave it, and 17.4 million people—a clear majority—voted to leave. That is a mandate that we must respect, and an instruction that we must deliver. It is also the case that at the last general election, both principal parties stood on manifestos that pledged them to deliver our departure from the European Union. It is vital that we honour that manifesto promise, those instructions, and our democracy. Those outside the House who sent us here to act on their will and deliver that mandate will take a very, very dim view of those who seek to frustrate, deny or dilute the mandate that we were given.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the successful Vote Leave campaign of which he was part made clear that one of its primary objectives would be to deliver an exit from the EU with a deal, in an orderly fashion?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to his consistent championing of the rights of EU citizens in this country: we admire his commitment to principle. The Vote Leave campaign did indeed make clear that it

was seeking a mandate to leave the European Union, and to conclude a free trade deal with the EU. That was the explicit aim of the campaign, and it is the policy of this Government.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Might I suggest that if we do want an orderly Brexit involving the Prime Minister's deal, one way of securing it would be to invite the Secretary of State and his colleagues to vote for the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman)? It would take crashing out of the European Union off the table, which might convince some of the Secretary of State's friends that that is no longer an option, and that if we are to deliver on our promise, the only way in which we can do so is the Prime Minister's deal. Might the Secretary of State also consider when we can have an opportunity—when we are not going to crash out—to vote on the Prime Minister's deal again?

Michael Gove: Like me, the right hon. Gentleman argued that we should leave the European Union, and I take seriously the case that he makes. I shall go on to say a little about the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), but we should all be clear about one thing: the only way in which to ensure that we take no deal off the table is either to revoke article 50, which would dishonour the mandate, or to deliver a deal. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the deal that the Prime Minister put before the House last night, which sadly did not command a majority, allows us to leave the European Union in an orderly fashion, and in a way that honours our democratic mandate while also preserving our economic advantages. It is much to the regret of people outside the House that we were not able to command a consensus for it then.

Toby Perkins: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Toby Perkins: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. He seems to be making a speech about last night's debate rather than today's. The debate that we are having today is about no deal. Can the Secretary of State imagine being the Prime Minister—I am sure he spends a lot of time imagining that—and coming to the House for a vote of this importance, and the Government's not having an opinion on whether their own members should vote for or against it?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman has a wonderful cheek in saying I was speaking about the events of last night when he sought to intervene on me in the very first second of my speech. Perhaps he has pretensions to clairvoyance.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I have none, so I do not know what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) will ask me.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Sadly, in his undoubted wisdom the Speaker did not select amendment (g) in my name, which instructs the Government to keep no deal on the table during negotiations with the EU. Will my right hon. Friend

[Sir Edward Leigh]

confirm that it is still the policy of Her Majesty's Government to keep no deal on the table, as otherwise how will we get a better deal?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. The motion which stands in the name of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and which I will vote for this evening makes it clear that we do not believe we should leave on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement, but it does not take the option of no deal off the table because, as I underlined earlier, the only way in which that can be done comprehensively is either through revocation or agreement to a deal.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I voted leave in the referendum, and my right hon. Friend led the campaign. There is going to be a choice in the end for this House between the Prime Minister's vision for Brexit, which I support, and the Leader of the Opposition's vision. The Leader of the Opposition's vision is to stay in the customs union, remain in the single market and continue to have free movement of people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that in no sense honours the spirit of the referendum vote to leave the European Union?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an admirable point, and I note that the Leader of the Opposition is not in his place today. I note also that in the point of order he made last night he did not refer to the newly adopted policy of embracing a second referendum, which is now Labour's position. To add to the incoherence of the Labour party's position in saying that it wants to be in a customs union and a single market and indeed to accept free movement, it wants to overturn the promise it has made to honour the referendum mandate, and not to bring forward a second referendum. In their naked pursuit of political advantage I am afraid that the Labour Front Bench are letting this country down, and more importantly letting their voters down.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I want to make a little progress but will accept more interventions in due course.

As a result of the House's failure to agree to the deal the Prime Minister presented last night we now face a number of unattractive choices, and it is important that the House realises that all of these choices are less attractive than support for the deal the Prime Minister negotiated. We can choose as a House to leave without a deal, but there are significant economic, political and constitutional challenges if we embark on that course which I will go into in just a second. We could accept a deal less attractive than that which the Prime Minister secured, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) has pointed out, there are many in this House who would have us leave the EU in a way that does not honour the referendum mandate and does not honour the manifesto promises at the last general election. Doing that would not only circumscribe this country's sovereign right to make decisions in its own interests, but undermine and further erode faith in democracy. But if we are talking about faith in democracy, either frustrating the vote altogether by revoking article 50 or seeking to overturn it with a second referendum would be choices of far greater magnitude, and to my mind be far more damaging.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I am very happy to give way to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. The cat is out of the bag: on his own admission this motion does not take no deal off the table. I will be guided by you, Mr Speaker, but my understanding was that at the Dispatch Box this House was given a guarantee that today we would have the opportunity to take no deal off the table. Will the right hon. Gentleman not only confirm that, Mr Speaker, but also inform us of the following? Is it the case that the Government are offering a free vote on amendment (f) in the name of the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), which Mr Speaker has selected, yet they are whipping against amendment (a) in the name of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman)? [Interruption.] Conservative Members do not want to hear it, but it is a shameful carry-on when a former chairman of the Conservative party is whipped against to the extent that she will not press that amendment to the vote. This House will be denied the chance to take no deal off the table; that is the truth of it, isn't it?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Lady is a distinguished criminal barrister; now I know what it is like to be cross-examined by her, but I also understand why lawyers are paid by the hour.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Whether I was ever a distinguished member of the Bar is debatable, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman as a member of the criminal Bar that we were never paid by the hour when I was at the Bar; in fact repeatedly I worked pro bono, as many criminal barristers have to do under his cuts.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Lady has put the facts on the record. I do not think we should get into the subject of who has been remunerated by how much, whether for legal work or penning articles in newspapers or whatever. Instead let us focus on the terms of the debate. I say to the Secretary of State that, in his own interests, the less said about that matter the better.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker; I believe as a former Lord Chancellor that that is what is known as a refresher, but thank you.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: Not at this stage.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: Yes, to the Father of the House, of course.

Mr Clarke: On the point that was concerning the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), can the Secretary of State confirm that it is the Government's position that we are ruling out leaving on 29 March with absolutely no arrangements at all—that we are

ruling out the complete collapse of all our legal and trading arrangements with the continent that we have built up over the last 50 years?

Michael Gove: Yes, I would not use exactly the same language as the Father of the House, but his point is correct. The motion commits the Government not to leave on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement; I hope that is clear and unambiguous. But the motion also makes clear that the default position in law is that we do leave the EU unless we can secure assent to a withdrawal agreement, which is why, as I mentioned earlier, it was so disappointing that we did not secure a mandate last night.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I will give way first to the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and then to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve).

Mr Bradshaw: Will the right hon. Gentleman now attempt to answer the question asked by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and explain the media reports? Given that the Prime Minister last night promised free votes—[*Interruption.*] Yes she did, at the Dispatch Box; the right hon. Gentleman should not shake his head. Can he therefore explain the reports that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe has pointed to that the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) will be a free vote on the Conservative Benches but the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) will be whipped against? That is an absolute disgrace and bad faith to this House.

Michael Gove: If only the Labour party would give its own Members a free vote, then we could find out what they really think.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It seems to me that the difficulty that might be arising across the House is as follows. If the House passes this motion this evening, and I have no reason not to support the motion in the terms of its ruling out no deal, in order to achieve that two things have to happen: first, we need to get an extension to article 50; and secondly, we are going to have to make a change to primary legislation in the withdrawal agreement Act. I assume the Government are undertaking, if this motion is passed in its own terms, to do exactly that?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his intervention, because it allows me to underline and further elucidate the point. It is absolutely correct that tomorrow the House will have an opportunity, if the motion passes tonight, to decide how to seek an extension. Obviously an extension is not something we can insist upon and automatically see delivered; it is in the gift of the EU and requires the assent of all 27 other EU members. But of course there will be an opportunity further to debate that tomorrow.

Mr Grieve: Just to remind the Secretary of State: there was a second part to the question, which is equally critical. It is that the Government will have to bring a statutory instrument to the House to alter the departure

date set out in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. In those circumstances, I assume that the Government are undertaking to do exactly that.

Michael Gove: The Prime Minister and others have said that previously, and I am happy to place on the record once again at this Dispatch Box exactly that commitment.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I want to make a bit of progress, but there will be time for others to intervene. I am also conscious that many Members want to speak—

Mr Speaker: Forty.

Michael Gove: Forty Members. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I stressed earlier that if we choose to leave without a deal on 29 March, this country will face economic, political and constitutional challenges. We are a great country, and we would get through it. We would in due course ensure that this country was more prosperous, freer and successful, and of course the Government have been working hard to ensure that we can be prepared for any eventuality and that we can mitigate the risks of leaving without a deal. At this stage, I should like to pay particular tribute to the civil servants across the Government who have been working exceptionally hard and with great skill to ensure that we are ready for any eventuality. We do not pay tribute to civil servants often enough, and I am sure that everyone across the House will recognise how important their work is. However, I stress that that work is work to mitigate the challenges.

If we were to leave on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement, we would be treated as a third country by the European Union. That would mean that we would face tariffs on many of our products. I am acutely aware that some of the highest and most severe tariffs would be imposed on food. Our sheep farmers and beef farmers would face the instant imposition of tariffs of at least 40% and in some cases more than 100%. Their livelihoods, and indeed the economic and social health of our countryside, would face very challenging circumstances. None of us can be blithe or blasé about those challenges.

We also know that there are at least 145,000 businesses in this country that trade with the EU—and of course do commerce in the UK—but do not trade outside the EU. As soon as we become a third country, they will need to register with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in order to ensure that their trade can continue. Those businesses will need to secure their economic operator registration and identification—EORI—numbers and the other documentation necessary to trade. At the time of speaking, only about 50,000 of those 145,000 businesses have made those preparations. That means that, just over a fortnight away from the prospect of leaving without a deal, a significant number of businesses in this country do not have the wherewithal, the means, or the appropriate documentation to carry on trading.

On top of that, products of animal origin being exported to the European Union will need to undergo sanitary and phytosanitary checks—in addition to customs and other checks—at a border inspection post. A significant amount of our food produce crosses the narrow strait

[Michael Gove]

from Dover to Calais or goes through Eurotunnel. At the time of speaking, there is no border inspection post at either of those ports. Of course, there are many things that this Government can do to mitigate the consequences of no deal, but we cannot dictate what the EU's tariffs will be, we cannot instruct the port authorities in France on how to order their affairs, and we cannot compel businesses to acquire the means necessary to continue to trade in the way that they have been doing. These all represent cumulative costs that businesses would face in the event of a no-deal exit on 29 March.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I am delighted to give way to my dear Friend.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. He is right to say that the European Union does not have border infrastructure in place to carry out the border inspection checks that he mentions. Is that perhaps why the EU has asked us to dynamically align our regulations for a period of nine months so that it would not have to carry out such checks during that period?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right, but dynamic alignment during those nine months would mean our being a rule-taker during that period. Dynamic alignment would allow us to be registered as a third country, but there would also be sanitary and phytosanitary—SPS—checks on a variety of products.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Secretary of State speaks as though there is some distance between him and the tragedy that he has just outlined, but is it not the case that he is a senior author of that tragedy? Does he feel no sense of shame or responsibility? Should he not apologise for the mess that we are facing?

Michael Gove: It is the responsibility of those who voted against the withdrawal agreement last night—[*Interruption.*] If Scottish National party Members had a care for Scotland's industry, Scotland's prosperity and Scotland's farmers, they would have voted for the withdrawal agreement last night, but I am afraid that when it comes to political positioning and separatist posturing, rather than serious politics, there is no equal to the ranks of the Scottish National party.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): My right hon. Friend might not be aware that the authorities in Calais have said to me that they will have a border inspection post open at the end of the month. I urge his Department to work with my port and with the community in Dover on this, because they want us to have a border inspection post just outside the port—just as they do in places like Rotterdam—but the unfortunately restrictive position of DEFRA means that it is trying to say that it has to be inside the port, which it does not. Can my right hon. Friend get his Department to be more flexible?

Michael Gove: My Department has been flexible, and will continue to be flexible. We will continue to do everything possible in order to facilitate trade, but as

my hon. Friend points out, although that border inspection post could be in place by the end of the month—and we hope it will be—it is not in place now.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows, as I do, just how important agriculture is to this country through the jobs that it creates and through all that it adds to biodiversity and the environment. Does he agree with my assessment that no right hon. or hon. Member who purports to understand and support farming in their constituency can support leaving the European Union without a deal?

Michael Gove: Obviously there is a diversity of views in this House, but I agree with my hon. Friend that it is in the interests of British farming, and indeed our broader environment, that we do not leave on 29 March without a deal. This is one of the reasons why I am making these arguments at the Dispatch Box now.

There are also political challenges in leaving on 29 March without a deal. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) pointed out, during the referendum campaign we argued that we should leave with a deal. I am also conscious that, while our mandate was clear, it is also the case that with a 52:48 result, we need to take into account the hopes and concerns of those people who did not vote to leave the European Union. The Prime Minister's deal does that; it does more than that. Many people who voted to remain—including Members of this House in my party and in others—have accepted the result and wish us to leave in order to honour that mandate. However, they do not want us to leave on 29 March without a deal. There would inevitably be political strains and pressures consequent on leaving without a deal on 29 March that no Minister can afford to ignore.

More than that, it is important to stress that there are also significant constitutional challenges. It is the case, as several hon. Members have pointed out, that a majority of voters in Scotland and in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, but we voted as one United Kingdom, and we voted to leave. It is striking that support for the Union in Scotland has risen since the vote—[HON. MEMBERS: "It's gone down!"] Well, we only need look at the ranks of Scottish Conservative MPs, who turfed out the partitionist part-timers of the SNP, to see which way the tide was flowing—[*Interruption.*] They don't like it up 'em.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Secretary of State will be well aware, as will other Members, that Northern Ireland has not had a functioning Assembly for over two years. We have had no Ministers in Northern Ireland for over two years. This House, including the Members of the Democratic Unionist party, must therefore give due weight to the serious warning issued last week by the head of the Northern Ireland civil service, David Stirling, about the grave consequences for Northern Ireland of a no-deal Brexit.

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady, for whom I have enormous respect, is absolutely, 100%, totally right. Of course, it is up to this House to take that decision, but it is the case, whatever the position in Scotland—there can be no doubt that leaving without a deal would impose additional pressures on our precious Union—that there would be particular pressures on Northern Ireland if we leave without a deal on 29 March. As the hon.

Lady points out, Northern Ireland has been without a devolved Government for two years and, in the absence of the Stormont institutions, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has introduced legislation and guidance to empower Northern Ireland's civil servants, including the wholly estimable David Stirling, to continue to take decisions that are in the public interest. That arrangement is sustainable at the moment, but it is the sincere hope of myself, my colleagues in Government and, I believe, almost everyone across the House that we can restore the Northern Ireland Executive.

However, it is also clear that the current situation, with no Executive, would be difficult to sustain in the uniquely challenging context of a no-deal exit. If the House voted for no deal, we would have to start formal engagement with the Irish Government about further arrangements for providing strengthened decision making in the event of that outcome. That would include the real possibility of imposing a form of direct rule. That is a grave step, and experience shows us that it is hard to return from that step, and it would be especially difficult in the context of no deal.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's written statement today, which affords frictionless trade to the Republic of Ireland in terms of tariffs and there being no checks. If that can be the basis of no deal, why can it not be the basis of a deal?

Michael Gove: It is the case that my right hon. Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary has issued a written statement, and it is the case that those provisions seek to minimise the consequences of no deal, but that is a temporary arrangement that could be open to legal challenge. To put it at its highest, it is a sub-optimal arrangement. It is a reflection of the hard work of the Northern Ireland civil service and my right hon. Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary that we will do everything we can to minimise frictions and checks at the border in order to underpin the importance of both commerce and peace on the island of Ireland. However, it is emphatically not an arrangement that any of us can regard as genuinely sustainable or ideal.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con) *rose*—

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Sam Gyimah (East Surrey) (Con) *rose*—

Michael Gove: I am happy to give way to all my hon. Friends, but I will give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford).

Vicky Ford: My right hon. Friend is making a clear case for why leaving without a deal at the end of this month would bring such uncertainty. Will he provide more clarity on how the time could be used during an extension?

Michael Gove: It would be for the House to decide tomorrow what type of extension it believes is appropriate. The most important thing that we could do is to rally behind a withdrawal agreement that ensures that we can preserve not just the strength of our economy, but the

gains from leaving the EU. It is also the case, as I indicated earlier, that civil servants are working incredibly hard to ensure that we can mitigate all consequences.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will give way to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) in a second, but I will not give way to the hon. Gentlemen from the SNP. First, however, I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison).

Dr Murrison: This morning's written statement's bearing on tariffs is welcome, particularly the zero tariffs on goods travelling north to south on the island of Ireland, but what discussion has he had with Dublin about tariffs on goods travelling south to north? Given the importance of agri-food in Northern Ireland, he will appreciate the potential grave disadvantages for agriculture in Northern Ireland in the event of no deal.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have spoken to Michael Creed, who is the responsible Minister, but there are additional challenges that agriculture and food processing in Northern Ireland would face in the event of a no-deal scenario on 29 March.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) and then to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford.

Mr Gyimah: My right hon. Friend is being incredibly generous with his time. The overwhelming view of business is that no deal should be taken off the table. Given that those of us on the Government Benches know that the success of our party and our country is based on backing the job creators and the wealth creators, how does he think the Conservative party of the 1980s would look at our response to business at the moment?

Michael Gove: I am fortunate to speak after the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave a spring statement in which he underlined the fact that this country has had the longest period of uninterrupted growth of any G20 economy and that we have a faster-growing economy—and are predicted to have a faster-growing economy—than Italy, Germany and Japan. It is also the case that we have a record number of people in work and real wages are rising. Under his leadership and that of the Prime Minister, anyone nostalgic for the '80s would say that, actually, what we have once more is economic success delivered by a Conservative Government putting the national interest first.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: I am happy to give way to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford, but then I will make progress.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Secretary of State is making a very strong argument against no deal and the damage that it would cause. The purpose of the votes today and tomorrow is to establish the default position. If we do not have a deal in place—and we do not have a deal in place with

[Yvette Cooper]

the majority behind it in the House—what will the default position be on 29 March? Will he clarify his position on this, as it is not clear in the motion? If there is no deal in place by 29 March, does he agree that the default position cannot be simply to leave without a deal?

Michael Gove: That is exactly what the motion today is designed to assert, and that is why I hope that people will support it.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) *rose*—

Michael Gove: No. I wanted to stress that in underlining all these challenges and by emphasising that we are doing everything that we can to mitigate them, it is not the case—I made this point earlier, and I want to underline it for the benefit of all—that we are taking no deal off the table. The only way that that can be done is either to revoke article 50 and decide to stay in the European Union, or to conclude an agreement. That is an inescapable fact, and that is why we face a series of unattractive choices. Many of the alternatives that have been put forward would undoubtedly be worse.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On that point—

Michael Gove: No. The Labour party is now committed to a second referendum, and indeed there has been no more impressive and articulate advocate of that position than the hon. Gentleman—

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Michael Gove: No, nay, never—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made the position clear. Let me conduct the very briefest tutorial for the benefit of the illustrious Chair of the International Trade Committee of the House of Commons. It is unseemly, to the point of being disorderly, to try to speak one's intervention by mouthing it before permission has been given to undertake it. It is a point that is so blindingly obvious that, as I often observe, only an extraordinarily sophisticated person, possibly from Na h-Eileanan an Iar, could fail to grasp it. Secretary of State.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On a point of order—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Once again, I am grateful that you are in the Chair.

The Labour party is now committed to a second referendum, but many of its leading spokespeople have made clear what they thought of a second referendum in the past. The shadow Education Secretary said that it would be a mistake and would show disdain for democracy. Indeed, the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), when asked about a second referendum, said, “No, we don't think that's right. If we went for a second referendum we would be saying to people, ‘We think you're stupid. We think you made the wrong decision. We're going to do something else.’” Now that

she embraces a second referendum, I am afraid that having once sneered at the flag of St George, she now confirms that she wants to tell the British people that they are, in her view, wrong and stupid. That may be a view popular in Islington South, but it is not the view of the Government, who are determined to honour the votes of the British people and who will not dismiss their sovereign decision as either wrong or stupid.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Michael Gove: No.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: This is worse than Jeremy Corbyn.

Michael Gove: I will tell you one thing that is worse than Jeremy Corbyn, and that is the prospect of an independent Scotland with the gaggle of, as I said earlier, part-time partitionists in favour.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab) *rose*—

Michael Gove: There is one thing that is better than Jeremy Corbyn, and that is the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle).

Peter Kyle: I take compliments wherever I can find them. The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have said at the Dispatch Box, previously and today, that the House is very good at striking down things that are on the table but very bad at putting forward alternatives. I have noticed in recent days that both of them have been doing exactly the same thing; they spend a lot of time striking down any other proposition that is mentioned from across the House, but the one they are sticking to has also been decisively struck down more than any other—twice, in historic proportions. If we carry on doing the same thing, we are going to get the same result. Is he suggesting that he will bring the deal back again and again and again, or will he show the leadership expected of somebody in his position and someone in the Prime Minister's position and change course, listen to other propositions and engage with people who are trying to compromise?

Michael Gove: I said before the hon. Gentleman was better than Jeremy Corbyn and he proved by his intervention that he is much, much better than Jeremy Corbyn. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on everything, but I do think it is right that we have dialogue across this House. We are in an uncomfortable position. I was an enthusiastic supporter of the Prime Minister's deal. It commanded more votes last night than it did at the first time of presentation, but it did not command a majority in this House. That is why it is the responsibility of us all not only to listen and reflect, but to recognise that none of us can dodge choices. The choices before this House as a result—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Gove: No. The choices before this House as a result of the decision not to endorse the Prime Minister's deal last night are unattractive, and I have laid out just how unattractive some of them are. Another proposition has been put forward—

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Secretary of State has just made it clear that the Government's intention is to keep

putting the same deal back to the House over and over again, even though it has been decisively defeated twice, possibly ad infinitum. Is that not out of order?

Mr Speaker: There are historical precedents for the way in which such matters are regarded. I do not need to treat of them now and no ruling is required now. There may be people who have an opinion about it. I am not really preoccupied with that, but a ruling would be made about that matter at the appropriate time, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for reminding me that such a ruling might at some point in the future be required.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. For the benefit of the hon. Lady, let me say that I am simply making it clear that as a result of last night's vote we face a series of unpalatable choices. The Government have put forward a motion tonight that I hope right hon. and hon. Members will support. It would ensure that we do not leave on 29 March without a deal, but this House has to decide—it has to decide what it wants—and that is why I agreed with the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle). This House has been very good at saying no and insufficiently statesmanlike in supporting the Prime Minister in her efforts. It is now make your mind up time for this House. It is crucial that Members on all sides respond appropriately.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State explain to the House why it is democratic to keep bringing back to the House a proposition that has been overwhelmingly defeated on two occasions, but it is somehow undemocratic to suggest that the British people should be asked whether they want to change their minds?

Michael Gove: I point out two things on that. First, the proposition that was put before the House was significantly different from the one that was put before the House beforehand. *[Laughter.]*

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): You can't be that stupid!

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman taxes me about stupidity. I will return to his comments in just a second. The key thing is that the proposition was different, but of course we did not secure support for it and the House now has to decide. I respect the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) very much, as he knows, but it was the official position of his Front-Bench team not to endorse a second referendum and they have done what might inelegantly be called a flip-flop or U-turn. I was merely pointing out to the House the nature of that flip-flop and U-turn.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend keeps saying that when we reach 29 March, we will not leave unless we have a deal, and he has been considering the alternatives, because currently doing nothing means that, by law, we will leave with no deal. He keeps suggesting revoking article 50. Is that because we could seek an extension, if by then the House has some idea of what it is seeking an extension for, but the EU might then refuse it? Is he prepared to contemplate and is it the Government's position that if the EU refuses an extension, we will revoke article 50, no doubt with the intention of invoking it later, once Parliament and the Government have decided what it is we are seeking for our future?

Michael Gove: The Father of the House makes an important point, but we cannot revoke article 50 and then invoke it again later. The European Court of Justice has made that absolutely clear, which is why—

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Michael Gove: No. This is why we need to come to a decision.

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Michael Gove: No.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): If the Government are serious about engaging with alternatives to the deal that we voted on last night and serious about listening, why will they not grant a series of indicative votes, as recommended by the Exiting the European Union Committee, on which I serve and which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), to determine the will of the House?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Depending on how the House votes today, we may have an opportunity to vote on that proposition tomorrow. It is important is that we find consensus as quickly as we possibly can.

Joanna Cherry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think the Secretary of State has got confused between the ruling of the Court of Justice and the preliminary opinion of the advocate-general. It was the preliminary opinion of the advocate-general that suggested that once article 50 was revoked, it could not be implemented again, whereas the opinion of the Court of Justice does not say that. Given that it is a judgment of the highest court in Europe, how can I put the record straight? The Secretary of State seems to have misunderstood the judgment.

Mr Speaker: That attempted point of order suffered from the material disadvantage of not being a point of order. The hon. and learned Lady has made her point. Legal exegesis as between a court and an advocate-general is not a matter for the Chair. I would go so far as to say that it is well beyond my limited capabilities. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for elevating me to a level of prowess that I cannot profess.

Michael Gove: That was revealing of the Scottish National party's position: it wants to be in and then out, in the same way as it wants to be in the European Union but out of the common fisheries policy. We now know that the SNP is the hokey-cokey party—in, out, shake it all about.

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Neil Gray: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Michael Gove: No. I think we have had more than enough from the collection of circus acts of the Scottish National party.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished member of the House of Commons Commission, and I therefore hope that his point of order is authentic and genuine.

Stewart Hosie: It is as authentic as almost every else's. Mr Speaker, the Secretary of State just said that we know what the SNP is, what it believes and what its positions are; how can he know that if he refuses to engage in debate, and instead simply behaves like a little primary school bully, refusing to take proper engagement and hiding behind the big boys who are sitting behind him?

Mr Speaker: Perhaps the Secretary of State is invested with psychic powers—I have no way of knowing—but I am bound to say to the hon. Gentleman that in my dealings with the Secretary of State, I have never regarded him in any way as a bully. He is sometimes insistent upon his point of view, but I must say that I have never found him remotely pressurising. Dealing with him is not difficult at all.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much for that generous encomium, Mr Speaker. I am always happy to debate with the SNP.

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Neil Gray *rose*—

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP) *rose*—

Michael Gove: What I am not happy to do is to allow the time of this House, when there are so many other serious speakers who want to make their points, to be absorbed by repetitious and self-serving chicanery from the representatives on the SNP Benches.

I wish to turn to one other proposition that has been put forward as an alternative, and that is the position of the official Opposition, which, while not shaped by an amendment today, is their policy, which is that we should be members of a customs union. What is striking about the position that they put forward for the customs union is that they say that, in that customs union, we should be able to offer businesses state aid, which we are not able to offer in the EU. Well, that would be illegal. They also say that we should have a voice in that customs union in the EU's negotiation of trade deals. Well, no such voice for any member of the customs union who is not a member of the EU exists. They also say that we should have independent trade remedies separate from those that the EU provides.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take the point of order in a minute.

I was very generous to the Secretary of State. We all enjoy his rhetorical flourishes and I will not repeat the precise words, but he used a little formulation a moment ago that was very, very borderline as far as the procedures of this House are concerned. I very gently say to him that what passes muster at the Oxford Union might not be acceptable in the Chamber of the House.

Justine Greening: My point of order very much follows on from that. This debate is about whether this House believes that we should leave with no deal, yet the

Secretary of State has spent quite some time discussing anything apart from that. I just wondered whether we could get your advice, Mr Speaker, about when this debate is actually going to go back to the terms on the Order Paper.

Mr Speaker: Those addressing the House from the Treasury Bench get a degree of latitude, but I do note what the right hon. Lady says and I hope that contributions will focus on what the debate is supposed to be about, for if that were not to happen, there would have to be another debate on the matter in order to meet the terms of the commitment that has been given. That might be inconvenient for some people, but that debate on that matter will take place, and about that there need be no doubt on any Bench—Back or Front.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I hope that I was able to outline earlier some of the real difficulties in leaving without a deal on 29 March. It is perfectly open to Members to take different views on that matter.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Gove: No, no, no.

I hope that people recognise that I have tried to take as many interventions as possible, but we must now move on to hear from the principal Opposition spokesman and, of course, to make sure that as many Back Benchers as possible have their voices heard.

Heidi Allen *rose*—

Neil Gray *rose*—

Michael Gove: No!

It is important that all of us in this House recognise that, as a result of the vote last night, there are no easy options, no attractive choices, left. I hope in the debate today and, inevitably, in the debate that follows tomorrow, we all take the responsibilities of representing our constituents as seriously as possible. We all need to recognise that leaving on 29 March without a deal would impose economic, political and constitutional challenges and risks for this country that I do not believe that we should undertake. I therefore think that it is important that we all work across this House, and across old divisions, to try to seek a consensus—a consensus that could unite all four nations of the United Kingdom and could unite all our citizens in making sure that we honour the referendum mandate and we leave the European Union in a way that is economically sensible and democratically legitimate. That is why I commend this motion to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the shadow Secretary of State, I have now to announce the results of today's deferred Divisions. In respect of the question relating to environmental protection, the Ayes were 315 and the Noes were 235, so the Ayes have it. In respect of the question relating to immigration, the Ayes were 314 and the Noes were 276, so the Ayes have it.

[*The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.*]

3.54 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I welcome today's debate. The Prime Minister is leaving; I know she wanted to open this debate and we understand why she cannot; I send our best wishes for her speedy recovery. I am sure that goes for the whole House.

If the Prime Minister had opened the debate, I think she would have engaged seriously with the points being made by others, rather than hurling easy insults and not engaging with the points. This is a serious debate about a very serious matter, and it needs to be conducted in the right way. The debate is long overdue. On this side of the House, we have never accepted that there should be a binary choice between the Prime Minister's deal or no deal—"very bad" or "even worse" is not a meaningful choice and would be a very sorry end to the negotiations. Yesterday, the House overwhelmingly voted to reject the Prime Minister's deal, which is the first of those options. Today, we have the chance to reject the second, and we should do so with as big a majority as possible. The mantra of "My deal or no deal" needs to be dead and buried tonight.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will in just a moment. Labour has always opposed a no-deal outcome. We have repeatedly warned that it would be catastrophic for jobs, for the economy, for security, and for peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland, and I will come to those points later.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way, but I implore him to use the language of moderation when talking about no deal. He will remember the dire economic warnings during the referendum campaign of, for example, 500,000 extra people unemployed by Christmas 2016. Those things did not come about. So bad were the predictions that the Bank of England had to publicly apologise afterwards. He should not rest his case on predictions. Economic reality is dictated by comparative advantage, such as lower tax rates and more flexible labour markets. That is why the economy is doing so well, despite the prospect of no deal.

Keir Starmer: Lots of things were said by both sides in the referendum that should never have been said, some of them by Members who have already addressed the House.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): One of the things that was said time after time was that there would be no consequences for peace on the island of Ireland. We have heard today from the Dispatch Box—the Secretary of State may want to come back on this—that a consequence of the Government not ruling out no deal tonight is, potentially, direct rule. That is a major shift in the Government's position. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those are not fears, but the actualities we are dealing with?

Keir Starmer: I will come to the position in Ireland, because it was and has been treated casually, as if it is all a technical question of a line in the road. Anyone who has spent any time in Ireland in the past two years will realise the impact that Brexit is having on the politics of Ireland, which go well beyond the technicalities of the customs union and the single market.

Mr Baron: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I was going to complete my answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, because I accept that we have to deal with the facts as they are. One of my concerns is that because so many things were said in the referendum, there is now a licence to pretend that real risks and outcomes will not happen by simply saying that other things did not happen. That is a real cause for concern.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I did say I would give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am very grateful. Following on from the point that the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), made to the Secretary of State and the legal correction that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) made, we are in a situation where the European Union will not give any other deal. There are 16 days to go. There will be no extension beyond the end of May. The question that the Secretary of State and a lot of other MPs need to answer is whether they are going to go for no deal or for revoking article 50. That is what it will come down to in the end. I was in Brussels last week, and the European Union is fed up with the childish antics of the UK Government. The choice is between those two things. I am not sure whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman is there yet, but he and everyone else really need to choose between no deal and revocation. That is the game. Brexit is a busted flush.

Keir Starmer: I have spent a lot of time talking to officials in Brussels over the past two years, and I have been discussing the question of an extension for six months, because it occurred to me back then that we would be in this position. We will need to address that in tomorrow's debate, but, for my part, I have not received the message from Brussels that there is no prospect of an extension—quite the contrary.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I will just make some progress and give way again in a minute.

The Prime Minister used to tell us that no deal would not be the end of the world. Past Brexit Secretaries even talked up the merits of leaving on WTO terms or told us how crucial threatening no deal was to the negotiations. But Labour Members have been steadfast in insisting that no deal is not a viable option. Why? It is hard to know where to begin. First, there is the economy. On this, the vast majority of businesses and the trade union movement speak with one voice—and that does not happen very often. I have been to meetings with businesses all over the country, and I have spoken to trade unions in those businesses, and I have taken notes of what they tell me. At the end of those meetings, one could almost rub out the identity of who was in the meeting and have the same read-out of their level of concerns. That persuades me that they have a very good point and a very strong case.

Only today, Carolyn Fairbairn from the CBI said that no deal would be "a sledgehammer to the economy."

[*Keir Starmer*]

Frances O'Grady from the TUC said that a no-deal Brexit

"would be a hammer blow to our manufacturing industries and the communities they support."

A no-deal Brexit could be terminal for Britain's manufacturing and the thousands of skilled jobs it provides. As the son of a toolmaker, I remember when manufacturing was in the doldrums, but now there has been a revival. Manufacturers operate a just-in-time regime that relies on open borders, and they do so successfully. No deal poses a huge risk to them.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The shadow Secretary of State has been talking about what may happen. It is very obvious to me, following his hon. Friends' exchanges with the Secretary of State, that the Government are intent on bringing the withdrawal agreement back for yet another go. May I make a small prediction? They will go to the European Council on 20/21 March and plead for some additional concession, however small. They will come back to the UK; rerun Maastricht; declare game, set and match; and then try to persuade the House to vote for it. For 50 quid for Help for Heroes, I bet that the third meaningful vote will be on Tuesday 26 March. Will he take my bet?

Keir Starmer: I don't gamble.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier the Secretary of State referred to the 140,000 or so companies that trade exclusively with Europe, only about 40,000 of which have registered and got their EORI numbers, which is necessary in order to do so. The business community has pointed out that there is no reason why HMRC could not give companies an automatic EORI number if they are VAT-registered, as most of them are. It is very worried that the Government are trying to shift the blame for a chaotic no-deal Brexit from their own lack of support and on to business.

Keir Starmer: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. That is a real cause for concern. In all my discussions with businesses in the past two years, but particularly in the past three to six months, I have detected that while some of the bigger businesses have had the resource to do some planning for no deal, most of the small and medium-sized businesses have not. They have said to me, "We simply do not have the resource to do it, and therefore we haven't done it." That is among the reasons why I have always said that a no-deal Brexit is not a viable option.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): My right hon. and learned Friend has said that he is not a gambling man, but it seems that the Secretary of State for Wales might be, because he is refusing to rule out supporting no deal. If one considers Wales's agriculture, manufacturing industry and so much more, that is absolute madness, in my view. Does the Secretary of State—not quite the Secretary of State yet, but the shadow Secretary of State—agree?

Keir Starmer: I do, and it is a real cause for concern.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): My constituency voted to leave. I am a democrat, and I respect the result of the referendum, but does my right

hon. and learned Friend agree that a no-deal Brexit would not be in the interests of my constituents or this country?

Keir Starmer: I do not think that a no-deal Brexit would be in the interests of constituents anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Several hon. Members rose—

Keir Starmer: I will give way in a moment, but I have given way a lot, and I need to make progress. I am aware that others want to contribute to the debate.

I was dealing with the impact on manufacturing. Some of the large manufacturers have told us what the impact of no deal will be on them. Ford was clear that it "would be catastrophic for the UK auto industry and Ford's manufacturing operations in the country".

Airbus used similar language, saying that it would be "absolutely catastrophic for us". More recently, Honda said:

"If we end up with WTO tariffs, we'd have something like 10% of costs in addition on products shipped back into Europe", which would impact its "productivity" and "competitiveness". This is not exaggeration. These are companies speaking about their businesses. This will impact on their businesses, and real people's livelihoods will be at stake.

We do not have to only take the word of businesses and the trade unions, though it is a powerful voice. We can also look at the Government Benches. The hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), who I believe is still a Business Minister in the Government, said that no deal

"would be completely disastrous for business in this country"—

no doubt because, like me, he has been talking to those businesses. He then took a novel approach to collective responsibility by saying:

"I am very happy to be public about" the dangers of no deal

"and very happy if the Prime Minister decides I am not the right person to do the business industry job."

He was backed up by the Business Secretary, who said

"no deal is fully acknowledged—certainly by me and the industry—as being ruinous for our prospects"—[*Official Report*, 4 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 68.]

The Government's own figures show that no deal would mean a reduction in the economy of between 6.3% and 9% over 15 years, and every region would be poorer—Wales by 8.1%, Scotland by 8% and the north-east of England by 10.5%. Anybody who votes tonight to keep no deal on the table needs to explain to their constituents why they are taking that risk with jobs and our economy.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman has mistaken my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) with my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. It is important to make that correction.

What businesses are saying to me is that their key enemy is uncertainty. If they do not have certainty over the future terms of trade, investment decisions will

continue to be postponed. There is certainty over those terms of trade if we leave the European Union on 29 March either with the Prime Minister's agreement or moving to World Trade Organisation terms.

Keir Starmer: As for the anxiety of businesses over uncertainty, and their yearning for certainty and the impact it is having on their decision making and investment, that is absolutely true. It should be a cause of great concern to all of us. None of the businesses I have spoken to—I have spoken to thousands in the last two years—has suggested that the certainty they want is no deal. They all say to me that they do not want no deal, and they normally point out the consequences of no deal.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend is making the point that the worst deal is no deal. He has talked about manufacturing, and this issue has been raised with me by GMB, Unite and other unions. Does he agree that the uncertainty over the trade agreements between other countries and with the EU, which we trade under and which account for about 12% of our imports and exports, is already causing great problems for manufacturing, imports and exports and jobs in our constituencies?

Keir Starmer: Absolutely. They have real concerns about that, and they raise them regularly.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have great confidence in my right hon. and learned Friend, and he is making a very good speech. When this all started, those in my manufacturing sector were saying, "Surely, intelligent people on the Benches across the House could come to a solution." They have now changed, and they are calling for me to push here for a second vote or a people's vote.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, because it takes me to a point that was repeatedly made by the Secretary of State, which is that it is somehow somebody else's fault that the deal is not going through and that the Government do not bear any responsibility for failing to bring the House with them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: No. I want to make this point because it is important. The Government have failed to get the House behind their deal, and they cannot get away with simply saying, "That is somebody else's fault. It's not our responsibility. We've done nothing wrong."

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: No. I want to make this point because it is a really important point. The Prime Minister and the Government had a choice two years ago. They could have invited this House to express a view on the type of deal this House would accept, and they refused to do so—repeatedly refused to do so. Anybody in the Government must have been able to foresee the divisions on their own side. They must have been able to foresee that. In those circumstances, they would have been much wiser to seek the consensus two years ago that they may look for now. Having been blinkered, and having red lines that never came about, for the Government to come here now and say that it is other people's fault

for rejecting the very thing they said for two years that they would reject is not to take responsibility for their own actions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress.

I have been concentrating on the economic issues, but there are wider issues in relation to no deal. There is Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State spoke about Northern Ireland, and we all know how serious the implications are for Northern Ireland. No deal is a risk to the Good Friday agreement. The Government's own EU exit paper makes that clear.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: No! [*Interruption.*] I did not mean that rudely; it is just that I do need to make some progress.

The "EU Exit" paper from the Government last year said that

"WTO terms would not meet the Government's commitments to ensure no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland."

A hard border cannot be allowed to happen, and I do not think this Prime Minister or the Government would countenance that happening.

On security and counter-terrorism, as hon. Members know, intelligence and evidence passes across EU borders in real time every day and it saves real lives. That can only happen subject to agreements with the EU27—that is the basis for passing such information and intelligence—but we also need agreements to decide to what use we can put that evidence and intelligence and, crucially, to plan joint operations. I know that because for five years, as the Director of Public Prosecutions, I was part of that exercise in Eurojust. I know how seriously the Prime Minister takes this because I worked with her when she was Home Secretary, and she knows full well how that such provisions save real lives. A no-deal puts that at risk. No responsible Government would take that risk, and if they did take such a risk, they would not remain in government for long.

Mr Bradshaw: Given what my right hon. and learned Friend said a moment or two ago, which was absolutely right, about the Government's repeated failure to seek consensus to get us out of this Brexit mess, will he please reaffirm Labour's firm commitment to our policy of supporting a public vote, with remain being an option on the ballot paper?

Keir Starmer: I will. Back in 2017, we made it clear that we would respect the outcome of the referendum, and we set out in our manifesto what we would seek to negotiate if we were elected into government, which was an agreement that would have the benefits of the customs union and the single market. However, in that manifesto, we also said as a party that we would reject the Government's red lines, rip up the White Paper and reject no deal. We lost that election, and because we lost we voted to trigger article 50, notwithstanding how we had voted in the referendum, and we allowed the Prime Minister to start the negotiations. Consistent with our manifesto, we conditionally said what deal we would accept when it came back.

[Keir Starmer]

We have now got to a hopeless end, and it is a hopeless end. To lose by 230 votes eight weeks ago and then to lose by 149 votes is a hopeless end. The Government cannot just blame others for that; they need to look at themselves and ask why it happened. In those circumstances, both the things that we ruled out in our manifesto—the Prime Minister's red lines and no deal—are the only things on the table, which is why we support a public vote, to protect against those outcomes. I am proud that we are doing that at this stage in the exercise, and it is obvious why we need to do so.

Anna Soubry: All of us who believe in a people's vote are grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend—he is my friend, in a legal sense—for what he has said. Were such an amendment to be tabled, would he and his party now support it and get a people's vote up and running?

Keir Starmer: Two weeks ago on Monday, the Leader of the Opposition made it clear that we would support an amendment to that end or put one forward ourselves. Obviously, the timing depends on discussions across the House and with others, but that is the clear position that we have put down.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am aware that other Members wish to intervene. I am not being rude, but I really must press on.

Lady Hermon: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman allow me to intervene?

Keir Starmer: I will give way to the hon. Lady, for obvious reasons.

Lady Hermon: That is very gracious of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and no surprise; it is characteristic of him. He has been a great friend to Northern Ireland. He mentioned Northern Ireland earlier in his comments, but he did not spend enough time talking about his assessment of the constitutional risk faced by Northern Ireland if—heaven forbid—the United Kingdom were to leave the European Union without a deal. Will he reflect upon his assessment of that risk?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the opportunity to do so, because there is high anxiety in Northern Ireland, and indeed across Ireland as a whole—across all different communities—about the prospect of no deal. The people of Northern Ireland know that the open border is a manifestation of peace, and there is great concern that if anything happens at the border, that could put back the good work that has been done over the past 20 years. That anxiety is being debated while some of those elected to this House are not here to make known the views of those whom they were elected to represent. I do not say one way or another whether that voice should be here, but it is not in this debate. The Northern Ireland Executive are not functioning, so the constitutional circumstances that prevail in Northern Ireland, for a variety of reasons—I am casting no judgment—are such that there could hardly be a worse time to have this discussion. It has turned into a discussion about the very future of the island of Ireland. That is

why I am impatient with those who think that we could somehow deal with the issue with a drone and a camera, because we could not.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that opportunity to speak about Northern Ireland, but I must now press on and talk about the impact on health matters.

A no-deal would have a huge impact on our health service. It would put real strain on an already underfunded NHS, by disrupting medical supplies, access to medicines and the ability of hospitals to hire staff. Niall Dixon, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, has said:

“A ‘no-deal’ without alternative arrangements to protect patients is simply not acceptable and could put lives at risk.”

Chris Philp *rose*—

Keir Starmer: No, I am going to make progress.

Farming would also be badly hit. The National Farmers Union has been clear—I think it set this out this morning—that the proposed tariff regime would be a disaster for UK agriculture, stating that

“everything must be done to avoid a no deal Brexit, and the catastrophic impact this could have on British farming.”

I am not quoting the voices of politicians here; I am quoting the voices of those in the field in each of these areas.

Finally, as if the Transport Secretary has not struggled enough already, imagine how he would deal with a no-deal scenario, which would bring chaos to transport. Hauliers would face hours of delay as new checks would be put in place at borders, and family holidays could be jeopardised by a no-deal Brexit as British travel companies lose their current access and rights.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress.

For all those reasons and more, Labour will act tonight and oppose no deal. We support amendment (a), tabled by the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), because we believe that it is the cleanest and clearest way for the House to express its opposition to no deal.

We recognise, however, that simply opposing no deal is not the end of the story. It is necessary but it is not sufficient. The House needs to have a chance to debate the steps necessary to move forward, and I think there is growing consensus that that needs to happen. The Labour party supports a close economic relationship with the EU and, as I have just said, we also support a public vote.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I give way to the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve).

Mr Grieve: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the difficulty with the Government's motion is that it is in fact inaccurate? The fact is that the default position, indeed, applies only if we do not ratify or choose to revoke, which one could do either by our own motion or after a referendum, for example. That is why—he may agree with me—suspicions have been

raised in the House that the motion is slanted. That may be unintentional, but of course it is within the power of the Government potentially to remedy that with a manuscript amendment to their own motion before this debate is over.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention and agree with his interpretation. I think it would be helpful to have the motion amended. One thing that has not helped is the House making a decision only to find weeks later that the decision we thought we had made is called into question. I invite clarity on that, so that we can express a clear view.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): Further to the intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and with a view to trying to avoid the no deal that the majority of this House want to avoid, when the Government enter into discussions about the extension of article 50, the other side will want to seek a purpose. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if this House expressed a view, subject to the Labour party's public support for a public vote, in advance of the European Council on 21 March?

Keir Starmer: If the vote tonight is to reject no deal, and I think it will be, and the vote tomorrow is to seek an extension of article 50, and I think it will be, but it is only to seek an extension of article 50, the question of purpose will be absolutely central. That will be a test for the Prime Minister in the first instance, because she will have to make a decision whether that is the point at which she drops her red lines and her blinkers and opens up the debate to other options.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I want to finish this point because it is very important. The Prime Minister needs to decide, if it goes that way tomorrow, whether she is a Prime Minister who is willing and able to do that and to embrace other options, or whether she will press on only with her own deal. If she presses on with her own deal, I think we will still have to go on and look at other options and get a common purpose. If the Prime Minister forces us down that road, she will be forcing us down the road where the majority will be forcing a view on the Executive, and there are constitutional implications for that.

I accept the force of the point. The test will be tomorrow night, if it gets that far, when we hear from the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box as to what her attitude will be. If it changes from the attitude of the past two years, we might be able to proceed more quickly to find that common purpose. We need to find that purpose, we need to find a majority for it, and it needs to be a sustainable majority, not just for one night or one week. That is what we should have done two years ago.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I do not mean to pause the right hon. and learned Gentleman for too long, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) specifically asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who

opened the debate, whether he would agree to revoke article 50. His answer was clear: it is not the Government's policy to revoke. On the logic of voting to take no deal off the table and the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policy of a referendum, if the other side—an EU country or countries or the Parliament—rejected a proposal to delay, would Labour's policy, in extremis, then be to revoke article 50, in the sense of the question asked by my right hon. and learned Friend?

Keir Starmer: I believe in addressing each problem as it arises, but let me deal with the question of policy. The right hon. Gentleman makes it sound as if extension is a policy choice of the Labour party. It is not a policy choice of the Labour party. It is driven by necessity because of the situation we find ourselves in. We need to deal with no deal today, and with extension tomorrow.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress.

No deal should never have been an option. It is the worst possible outcome. Businesses know that, unions know that, and I suspect most of the Cabinet know that. It is extraordinary that the Government have acceded to a free vote on a matter of such importance today, and for them not to have a position on whether this country should exit the EU without a deal. It is the latest evidence of the Government not governing and that they cannot act in the national interest. I urge colleagues to support amendment (a). We can speak clearly and with one voice that this House will not accept leaving the EU without a deal, and we can bury that so deep that I hope it never resurfaces.

4.26 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): It is almost three years since we had the referendum, and we have reached this extraordinary moment. Effectively, we are back to square one. There is absolutely no consensus within the Government, within the main Opposition party, within this Parliament or among the public on exactly what leave means. We are having to have a debate today on the question whether, after three years of futility, in 16 days' time we just give up and leave and see what happens, although many of us know and fear the combination of things that are likely to happen if we do so.

This is bizarre because it is also still not totally clear how, if the House votes as I think it will by a large majority to rule out no deal tonight, we propose to guarantee that we deliver that conclusion. It sounds as though more attempts will be made to reach an agreement. I have voted for it twice, but the Government's withdrawal agreement is dead in the water. Any kind of agreement must now find alternative routes.

We will get there somehow in 16 days. Tomorrow, we will probably vote for an extension, but we have to be clear: extension for how long, and extension what for? The whole thing is dependent on 27 other Governments, all of whom are fed up to the back teeth with the state of British politics, and with trying to negotiate with a British Government who cannot say what they want because they cannot even agree internally on what they want. We depend on the approval of those 27 countries to avoid this disaster, so as we debate no deal, we must consider further things.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The Father of the House signed amendment (b) with me. Is not the reality of the situation that the only two choices in the hands of this Parliament are no deal—walking over the cliff—or revocation, a luxury that exists for only another 16 days because after 29 March it is gone too? The only certain choices are those two choices.

Mr Clarke: We have 16 days left. The hon. Gentleman and I have tabled an amendment that faces up to something that I think very few Members are facing up to. I have discovered in a fortnight that things change very rapidly—I did not anticipate 16 days ago that we would be in this debate—and anybody who forecasts with confidence the state of British politics in 14 or 16 days is being a little reckless. Unless somebody has an alternative, the only way of guaranteeing not leaving with no deal is to revoke article 50, as our amendment suggests.

We will have no other method to follow. I will not go back into the legalisms. I had this discussion with the Attorney General, who kindly sent me his opinion. He is a much superior lawyer to me—I am a very out-of-date criminal lawyer—but I do not altogether agree with him. It is the advocate-general who has expressed doubt about whether we could be said to be acting in good faith if we revoked and then invoked again. I think that is very arguable. I think we would be acting in extremely good faith if we made it clear that we were in no state to leave and would invoke again if and when we decided what we were pursuing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Clarke: I really should get on. I am not a Front-Bench spokesman, and lots of people want to speak. I am tempted to give way and debate—I would like to—but, knowing myself, I know I would take too long if I did.

I do not wish to intrude on tomorrow's debate, but we need to agree as quickly as possible what we are now seeking and the reason for the delay that I think the majority of the House is going to seek. It is important that we do that. Not only is opinion polarised here—lots of factions are pursuing their own preferred ways—but the public are even more polarised than at the time of the referendum. They hold the House in near contempt for the confusion they see, and the sooner we decide what the majority here wish to pursue as an alternative to leaving without a deal, the better, and to do that we may need some time. I have been calling for indicative votes for a very long time, and the Government have been resisting and avoiding them. The only way to proceed now is to explore and demonstrate the view of the House.

I have a suggestion for what might placate the public, satisfy a lot of leavers and remainers and command majority support across the House. If I was outside speaking on a public platform to a less well-informed audience, I would suggest reverting to leaving the political European Union and staying in the common market, which nowadays means the customs union and the single market, or something very much like it. I think that quite a lot of the public thought that that was what they were voting for when they voted leave. If we put that proposition to the public now, it certainly would not be as polarising as some of the arguments we are

having inside and outside this House, which are having such a dramatic and catastrophic effect on the nation's political dialogue.

Chris Philp: The Father of the House is making the case for membership of the customs union and single market while being outside the EU. Isn't the problem with that approach that we would have no decision-making rights over any trade deals that the customs union might agree or over single market regulations to which we might be subject?

Mr Clarke: I am being drawn outside this debate. The best deals with other countries are achieved through the EU—that is the basis on which British Government have proceeded for years—and it is a disaster that we are in danger in 16 days of falling out of some of the most favourable trade deals, which the British Government have played a part in negotiating. I think that if we insist on that proviso, and if we insist on tackling the problem of our no longer being directly part of a regulation-making power, we are powerful enough to be allowed more consultation than countries that are outside the EU and are part of, say, the European Free Trade Association or European economic area arrangements. We have to tackle the problems that arise from the fact that we are giving in to the idea of leaving the European Union politically, and leaving its institutions.

I think that these problems are grossly exaggerated. I have never heard anyone argue against the EU trade deals that we have with other countries. The Japanese deal was a tremendous stride forward. It is the biggest free trade agreement in the world, and we are about to fall out of it after only a month or so. We talk about losing our powers, and about the threat posed to our sovereignty by the fact that we are not allowed to pass our own different laws on product quality, consumer protection, health and safety, animal welfare and the licensing of products, but I have yet to hear a Brexiteer advocate the reversal of any European regulation that we have passed so far. Members of the public tend to demand higher regulatory standards, and I am lobbied for new regulation more than I ever am for sweeping away what we have.

If the virtue of no deal is meant to be leaving to have a trade agreement with, say, the United States, I can tell the House that I have been involved in trade negotiations with the United States under President Obama, and it is protectionist. The Americans are not dying to open up any of their market to us; they will want us to open up our food market to them. We will not be making regulations here. The Americans will not let the House of Commons decide on animal welfare or food standards. Those are nothing to do with us. We made an agreement. The House of Representatives and the Senate, along with the powerful American food lobby, will decide what the welfare standards for animals and the standards for food should be. We will not get a trade deal with the United States unless we agree to that.

I am being drawn into the merits of the basic argument, but I think it should be underlined that we must look at realistic alternatives to no deal. No deal was not being advocated by anyone at the time of the referendum. I do not think that it was being advocated by more than a handful of people until a month or two ago. Most Brexiteers were not in favour of it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is nodding. Even those who

campaigns for us to leave were not campaigning for us to leave with no trade arrangement with our greatest partner. This is just an accident that has loomed because the House of Commons is not able, and the Government are not able, to solve problems in a way that we can agree with the other 27. We are drifting into it, which will be a catastrophe.

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

Mr Clarke: I am going to be very brief—as brief as I can be. I have already taken longer than I intended.

The argument is that these matters were settled by the referendum, but one of the problems is that the debate at the time of the referendum does not resemble the debates that we keep having, with ever more frequency, in the House. That is not because we are out of touch with the real world. It is because the referendum was conducted in the most bizarre, broad-brush terms, with the leading figures on both sides using ridiculous or dishonest arguments in order to make their case, which had nothing whatever to do with the merits or otherwise of being in the European Union.

Remainers, I am afraid—the key remainers, David Cameron and George Osborne—decided to raise all those fears of immediate catastrophe, which did not actually materialise. That has led people now to say that every future warning from every major business lobby in the country, from the Treasury, from the Government and from everyone else is to be ignored. That is a classic case of crying wolf: one day the wolf actually arrives, and we cannot conduct the government of this country on the basis that we ignore every expert piece of opinion we have, which most of us in fact agree with because we think their warnings are correct.

The referendum gets invoked in all our other debates, too. When I ask my constituents who are leavers—most of them, I am glad to say, voted remain—it is clear that the idea that they were expressing a view on the Irish border and the problems of the Good Friday agreement when they voted to leave, or that most of them were expressing any opinion on the single market or the customs union, is absolute nonsense. Indeed when I talk to members of the public now—who are all expressing anger about the state of affairs we are in—they are still not lobbying me about the Irish border and the single market and all the rest of it. We are having to be engaged in this because our duty is governance; our duty is the medium and longer term better governance of this country, and we have to address the real world of a globalised economy and today's systems of regulation and the international order in which we have to earn our living against a background of bewildering technological change.

All the arguments about the damage to business and the threat to Ireland, including its constitutional position, and so on have already been addressed by others and I have agreed with every word that has been said. However, I want briefly to give my reaction to that handful—I think it is no more—of Members who seem to think now that no deal is positively desirable and that it is an objective we should have sought from the first. They make it sound very respectable by describing it as “WTO rules”, but I strongly suspect that many who argue that point had scarcely heard of the WTO at the time of the referendum, and I do not think most of

them understand what WTO rules actually comprise. I will not go into too much detail, not least because I have not refreshed my own memory too greatly, but there is no developed country in the world that seeks to trade in today's globalised economy only on WTO rules. They are a fall-back that cover all that international trade that is not governed by recognised free trade agreements. They are designed to ensure that there is no discrimination among countries with which we do not have an agreement. That is why they require a schedule of tariffs, to be accepted by the WTO, and then those tariffs to be imposed on all those countries with which there is no agreement. That means the EU is obliged by WTO rules, now much loved by Brexiteers, to impose the same tariffs on us that it imposes on other third party countries, and we are obliged to impose the same schedule of tariffs on the EU and all other countries with which we do not have a deal.

There are WTO rules that do not allow countries to abdicate a thing like the Irish border. We cannot say we are not going to put any border posts in, so we are going to have organised smuggling become the major industry of the island because we have no idea how we are going to enforce it all. Not only would the Republic be under great pressure from the rest of the EU, but WTO rules would require us to co-operate with policing our border, collecting tariffs, regulatory checks, customs checks and all the rest.

My main worry, however, is not entirely about these short-term consequences, catastrophic though they would be for some sections of our economy including agriculture and the motor industry. My main worry is that, whatever happens in the global economy, the effect of leaving with no deal in the medium and long term and on the comparative economic strength of this country will be that we and the next generation will be made poorer than we would otherwise be. That will be the result if we cannot move away from this no deal nonsense, and I hope a big majority settles that tonight.

Finally, I just want to be totally clear what the Government's intentions and motives now are. I hope I have been reassured that, if we pass this motion tonight, the Government will in all circumstances take whatever steps it is eventually necessary to take in 16 days' time to avoid our leaving with no deal. I do not want them to come back in a fortnight's time saying to the House, “It's your fault, because you will not vote for the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement, so sadly we are going to have to leave with no deal.” We are ruling this out. That really means having indicative votes to give us some idea of what the British are going to negotiate over the next two or three years. Failing that, it means revoking article 50. Speaking as someone who is a diehard European—

Mr Grieve *rose*—

Mr Clarke: My right hon. and learned Friend and I do not agree on referendums, but we agree on practically everything else. As he is a close political ally and a good friend of mine, I shall give way to him.

Mr Grieve: In the spirit of trying to encourage the Government to be clear with the House, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the difficulty with the Government's motion is that the revocation route is not acknowledged? The Government may not want it, and of course there are different ways of reaching

[Mr Grieve]

it—one is through a referendum; another is through a revocation by this House alone—but the difficulty with the Government's motion as tabled is that it pretends that that route does not exist. It seems to emphasise a binary choice. Does he therefore agree that getting clarity on that, and possibly a correction, would be immeasurably helpful? Otherwise, it gives the impression that the Government are trying to pull the wool over our eyes.

Mr Clarke: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend entirely. I have no idea why the Government thought it necessary to put the second half of the motion on the Order Paper. I have been reassured, however, so let me try to reassure him on this. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened the debate, he referred several times to revocation as the alternative—he is now nodding in the affirmative—and I think that if forced to do so, he would revoke. I take comfort from remembering the Prime Minister occasionally saying—normally to the right-wing nationalist members of my party—that if they were not careful, the alternative to her deal would be no Brexit, which amounts to the same thing. I would prefer the wording on the Order Paper to make it perfectly clear that we are ruling out no deal, but I take it that we have been given a guarantee that if no one can think of any better and more sensible way of resolving things, we are going to revoke article 50 and start all over again, because as I said when I began, we have got absolutely nowhere after three years of effort since the vote was announced.

4.47 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): It is always a privilege to follow the Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). I also join the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) in wishing the Prime Minister a speedy recovery. We entirely understand why she is not here for the debate, and, fair play to her, she came along and did Prime Minister's questions as well as spending time at the Dispatch Box yesterday. It was good to note that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said so many kind words about her, but then again, the Tories are often kind about those who used to lead them.

What a situation to be in—debating a no-deal exit. Next week, we will be 1,000 days on from the EU referendum. Today, we are 993 days on from it and, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe rightly pointed out, 16 days away from exit day. It is a shame that the International Trade Secretary has left the Chamber, because Vote Leave backers told us that this would be the easiest deal in the world and that we had nothing to worry about. Well, like much else from those who backed leave, those promises were not kept. It is good that the DEFRA Secretary is in his place, because he must take a huge degree of responsibility for the mess that we are in today. Not only has he had the 1,000 days since the referendum; he has had his entire political life to plan for this, yet 16 days out, we are planning for the worst kind of exit—the kind that we were told would never happen because this would be the easiest deal in history.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): Can the hon. Gentleman think of any circumstance in which a consent form would be valid if it were signed 1,000 days beforehand without the signatories knowing the exact procedure to which they were giving their consent?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady makes a valuable point, as she often does.

Before an election or referendum, we are expected to publish manifestos, White Papers and discussion papers—you name it—so that those who win can be held to account for the promises they made, critically, before any vote was cast. That is a fundamental of our democracy. The mess that we are in just now—and it is a mess—shows why Brexiteers such as the DEFRA Secretary avoided scrutiny during the EU referendum. Then, after being presented with the cold, hard reality in government by civil servants who work hard and present the facts, the promises were denied, often by those who used to be in post, including some of the DEFRA Secretary's former colleagues.

In the few examples where we have some concrete proposals, the promises were not kept. I am not just talking about the extra £350 million for our NHS that was never forthcoming, because the DEFRA Secretary himself promised that Scotland would get immigration powers. We need those powers, which would be good for our nation and good for the economy. I have raised that matter in the House on several occasions, as have my right hon. and hon. Friends and others, yet we are told that it is not a matter for the Government. The DEFRA Secretary is a senior Minister. If we cannot hold him to account, who do we hold to account for the promises that were made and broken? Who do we hold to account for Vote Leave? That is a basic part of our democracy, and our democracy has been let down badly. This is a situation of his making and he is responsible.

I was late to emojis, but they have come in handy. I do not know where I would be without the unicorn emoji. Any right-thinking politician worth their salt will have found it extraordinarily handy during this debate. It is the must have accessory for a decent-thinking politician in 2019. Here is a lesson: politics is about each and everyone one of us taking responsibility.

Patrick Grady: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Stephen Gethins: I will give way to my hon. Friend, who is good example of that lesson.

Patrick Grady: The DEFRA Secretary has told me from the Dispatch Box on at least a couple of occasions that other European countries will be looking enviously at the United Kingdom's withdrawal agreement. That can surely no longer be the case, so does my hon. Friend think that that may explain why the Secretary of State was so unwilling to take interventions from me and so many of our SNP colleagues today?

Stephen Gethins: This is the thing: just like that promise, every other promise fails to stand up to scrutiny, which is exactly why the DEFRA Secretary would not take any interventions from SNP Members. We have a clear position and know what we want, and the DEFRA Secretary should be ashamed of the role played by Vote Leave and the promises that have not been kept.

The DEFRA Secretary also said that the House has been good at saying no. I want to remind him and other Members about something to do with taking responsibility. After the vote, the Scottish Government took the responsible step and put together a group of experts—the SNP still thinks that it is worth listening to experts from time to time—including diplomats, academics, colleagues from other political parties with something to say and a former European Court of Justice judge, to consider the ways forward, and they came up with a compromise deal two and a half years ago. Did the Government respond to that deal? Nothing of the sort. It was the most thought-out plan for this mess and certainly a lot more than we have had so far. No wonder, then, that we are talking about no deal. The House should reflect on that and think about the economic disaster and the social impact on the future opportunities of our young people. Almost 1,000 days on, we are still discussing a no-deal scenario that should have been taken off the table the day after the referendum.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. Does he agree that to be prepared to deliberately and willingly inflict no deal on the people of this country, given all the hardship and chaos that it would cause, is really the action of a rogue state? It is bewildering that some Conservative Members still think that Brussels will be intimidated by the sight of us putting a gun to our own head. That strategy is not effective.

Stephen Gethins: As usual, the hon. Lady makes an excellent point. Hers is one of the few sane voices that we have heard throughout the debate, given her interventions and the way in which she stands up for her constituents and others in the United Kingdom.

I noted the other night, with regard to the no-deal situation that we are in, that one Conservative MP—in fact, the longest-serving Conservative MP in the House—described the “headbanger” wing of the Conservative party. I am not sure what the names of the other wings are, but I was taken with that: the party’s members are talking about a headbanger wing, which must be a sizeable proportion of the party. While we are talking about no deal, I note the words of the Dutch Prime Minister, who is alleged to have said that a decision to vote for no deal was

“like the Titanic voting for the iceberg to get out of the way”.

The Chancellor seems to get this, and in his spring statement today, he talked about a smooth and orderly transition that would be threatened by no deal. He knows that it would threaten jobs and wages, yet we still debate it and we still have not ruled it out.

I am not sure which wing the Secretary of State for Scotland belongs to, whether the headbanger wing or some other wing, but he claimed the other week—I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber—that the SNP wanted no deal. I do not have his experience, but I remind him that the SNP was the first to come up with a compromise, as I have outlined; we were the first to ask for an extension; and last week, we even tabled a simple parliamentary motion on ruling out no deal. I know that the Tories are trying to turn democracy on its head and claim that defeat is in fact victory, as we have just heard from the DEFRA Secretary, but that is surely a step too far. We wanted to rule out a no deal, and he could easily have voted for our simple motion.

Let me remind the DEFRA Secretary—I hate to break it to him—that Tories lost the last election in Scotland, again. The SNP won the last election in Scotland, again. Guess what? Unlike the Tory party, we kept the majority of our seats, so if he wants to talk about democracy and winning, he is welcome to take some lessons from us. On negotiating tactics, if we are in a situation of no deal and hearing what the Chancellor said today, it as if the Prime Minister has shot herself in one foot, then wants to shoot herself in the other foot, just to show everyone how terribly serious we are.

Today’s trade tariffs will hit our industries, not least the food and drink industry on which jobs in my constituency and others rely and for which the DEFRA Secretary has responsibility. *[Interruption.]* The Trade Secretary is back. He promised that the UK would

“replicate the 40 EU free trade agreements that exist before we leave the EU so we’ve got no disruption of trade”.

Secretary of State, how is that going? Not going well? No, it is not going well, is it? This is not just a political problem for the Conservative party, as Ministers seem to suggest—it is a problem for public services; it is a problem for jobs; and it is a problem if we want to look forward to the future. It is not just a Tory civil war that is being waged among Tories—it is a problem for us all.

Anna Soubry: Can I take the hon. Gentleman back a few sentences? He discussed the general election. I do not want to delve into the success of the SNP or whatever, because he made an important point. In the 2017 general election, the Government lost their majority. Does he agree that, on that basis, they also lost any mandate for a hard, no-deal Brexit?

Stephen Gethins: I hope that the right hon. Lady does not mind my saying that she and I will clash every now and again. She said the other week that there are times I might regret her sitting behind me, and she may well be right, but she makes a powerful point, one that she made on the night of the election as well. This Government lost a majority and lost support, yet they want to do untold damage. It is no wonder the DEFRA Secretary is walking away now. They want to do untold damage to jobs and the economy, and he cannot even sit here and listen. The Scottish Government have looked into this—

Chris Philp *rose*—

Stephen Gethins: This will be good. Let us hear it then. If you can defend why you lost your majority and still pursue this nonsense hard-deal Brexit—

Mr Speaker: I did not lose my majority. Mine went to a record level of 25,725, albeit with no main party opponent.

Chris Philp: The Conservative party’s share of the vote went up considerably and the Scottish National party lost a third of its seats at the last election. I wanted to raise a more serious point. The hon. Gentleman and the shadow Secretary of State have drawn attention to some of the dangers and risks of a no-deal Brexit. It is not the Government’s desire to see a no-deal Brexit, and it is not mine either. But by ruling out a no-deal exit entirely, people are, by definition, deciding either never to leave or to accept terms no matter how bad. Which of those two is the hon. Gentleman advocating?

Stephen Gethins: I thought that would be good. I wish I had my democracy for dummies book here. In terms of the vote, the SNP won, the Tories lost. Let us just nail that straightaway. In terms of no-deal, the SNP tabled a motion last week that was voted on, and Members across this House voted for it. It sought to take a no-deal exit off the table in any circumstances. The hon. Gentleman could have voted for that, but did he? No chance. So he could have done it and he did not. On no deal, the Scottish Government have had the courage of their convictions and published their analysis. What we have seen from that is the devastation that the Chancellor has warned of. The hit would be the equivalent of more than £1,500 for every man, woman and child in Scotland; a drop in Scottish exports of up to 20%; a hit in migration and a hit to our EU nationals as well; opportunities gone for young people, through the lack of freedom of movement and Erasmus gone; and the UK being pushed into recession again.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Given that nearly 50% of the people across the UK voted to stay in the EU, that most businesses, if we asked them, would prefer to stay in the EU and that the Secretary of State today evoked the prosperity of this country as a member of the European Union, does the hon. Gentleman not believe it is absolutely unacceptable that staying in the EU is seen as an unpalatable option?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady makes a good point. Staying in the EU is the best deal. The best deal is the one we currently have as a member of the European Union.

On public services, this Government are spending £4.2 billion on preparation for a no-deal exit, which we could have taken off the table 1,000 days ago. That is £4.2 billion that is not going into hard-pressed public services. It is £4.2 billion that is going into Government mess-ups—ferry contracts that we do not need. Public services will be further hit by a no-deal Brexit and overall by Brexit. This will hit the most vulnerable people in society. It will hit our public services, which have already been dealt a blow by a decade of austerity from parties of every colour in this House.

Crispin Blunt *rose*—

Stephen Gethins: Before I conclude, I will give way one final time, to the hon. Gentleman, because I respect him.

Crispin Blunt: Having said that this should have been taken off the table 1,000 days ago, perhaps the hon. Gentleman could explain why he put his name to a conclusion of the Foreign Affairs Committee report published two years and a day ago, which said:

“Making an equivalent mistake”—
and not preparing for no deal—
“would constitute a serious dereliction of duty by the present Administration.”

Stephen Gethins: Just how much could we have saved had we taken that off the table; the Government had not taken the responsibility of taking no deal off the table as they should have done. If the hon. Gentleman wants to refer to that report, I should point out that it was also the report that said that, yes, a no-deal exit would be bad for our European partners but it would be worse for the UK. That is something he put his name to,

as did other Brexiteer colleagues from across the House. This said that they would be prepared to hit the UK economy—they would be prepared for that hit—and he signed up to that very report. I know what was in that report.

It is strange that all we hear about now is not the benefits of Brexit; rather, we are limited to Ministers telling us that it will not be that bad. I heard one of the increasingly poor excuses last night, which was that we are in a Parliament of remainers. I am a remainder whose constituency and nation voted to remain, and it certainly does not feel like a Parliament of remainers to me. The extremists will never be happy.

This is about damage limitation. The Brexiteers, including the Secretary of State for International Trade and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, have blown it. I will not vote to make my constituents poorer and less well off because of their mistakes. Let me remind them that it is through the single market that we are wealthier, through its rules in areas such as workers' rights and parental rights that we are fairer, through joint action on climate change that we are greener and through work with the European Medicines Agency, sadly departed, and air-quality agreements that we are healthier.

The impact is being felt now. Even yesterday, a report showed that £1.2 trillion—an eye-watering sum—had been relocated from the UK, mainly to areas like Dublin. It is no wonder that similar-sized independent and sovereign states such as Denmark, Ireland and Finland see their futures as part of the European Union.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) will press her amendment to a vote tonight. That is important because we need to have no deal taken off the table, given the untold damage that it will do to public services and to our democracy. We have two different views. One is of a state being like our neighbours, and being joined, pooling our sovereignty and working together as an independent sovereign state. The other is of a UK that is isolationist, poorer, more remote and going backwards. Nothing emphasises that more than the fact that the Government have not taken no deal off the table. Let us push the amendment and take no deal off the table tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have just over an hour and a half and around 35 people want to speak, so there will with immediate effect, I am afraid, be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.7 pm

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Last night, I voted in support of the Prime Minister's deal to deliver Brexit. The deal would mean the UK would leave in an orderly fashion, honouring the result of the referendum. It was described as “good enough” by local businesses and would help us to move forward, so I was really disappointed that not enough colleagues supported it. I am no fan of delay, because time costs business money and that costs jobs. People really expect better of Parliament. Many people will be listening to us this afternoon, and I think of those who will hear us trying to rehash the referendum arguments or start up the blame game. None of it is helpful. They want us to put the national interest first. We must honour the referendum

result, but to do so without a deal in place would be, as the Archbishop of Canterbury said, a moral and political failure.

A constituent who lives in Chelmsley Wood, a large council estate in my constituency, wrote to me yesterday. This is what he said:

"Tonight I am in disbelief how 391 MPs have a complete disregard towards the will of the British people and over 17.4 million votes in 2016...I wish you could read this email in parliament. I have some strong points as a citizen of this country, the public '17.4 million' we are nobodies, we do not matter, we are just a tax code number, we do not count, we do not have any rights in our democracy and our democracy in this country is now proven to be dead."

These are his words.

"There is constant talk of a 2nd referendum...or no Brexit at all...In 2016 I and all my family voted in the referendum. We were promised this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and more importantly our vote mattered. The UK had the biggest turn out in history with over 17.4 million giving the instruction to leave the EU...Mrs Spelman I can tell you this (and wish you could read it to all MPs), I'm done with voting. As are my family and in conversation on social media tonight many of my friends are done with voting too."

This constituent has never contacted me before. I do not agree with everything that he has said, but, my goodness, those words did resonate. I may not agree with him, but I do believe that if this House cannot back a deal that takes us out of the EU, we will be letting millions of ordinary people down. Quite frankly, we do not deserve their votes if we do that.

The House knows that I do not support the UK leaving without a deal in place. It would be disastrous for the economy, especially in my region. The manufacturing industry employs very many people in the west midlands and has given many young people that start of a well-paid skilled job. We are already losing jobs in my region, in part through Brexit. Now, more so than ever before, we face the real possibility that we might leave without a deal by accident. If that comes to pass, we will all bear some responsibility.

The Secretary of State for the Environment did set out clearly what the consequences are of leaving without a deal and it was good to hear that from him. The stark reality of this is revealed by the Government proposals on temporary tariffs if we leave without a deal. Already the automotive sector is telling me that this regime would thoroughly undermine manufacturing in the UK. It said that the proposed rates are

"damaging, divisive and add extra complexity."

Of these proposed tariffs, the automotive trade body, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, said that the move does not resolve the devastating effect of a no-deal Brexit on the automotive industry. No duty-based measures could come close to compensating for the disruption, the cost and the job losses.

This House has demonstrated clearly that there is a majority against leaving without a deal. The Government accepted that and said that they cannot take us out of the EU without a deal without the explicit consent of Parliament. I am really pleased that the Prime Minister has brought forward a motion to rule out leaving without a deal on 29 March.

Heidi Allen: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I cannot give way because of the time limit.

The opportunity afforded by the Government motion of obtaining a really large majority in this House against a no-deal Brexit is greater than that afforded by my amendment, which was carried on 29 January. I really appreciate the offers of support from other parties, but I will be withdrawing my amendment. We cannot just be against something; we must say what we are in favour of. I hope that the result of tonight's vote on the Government motion will reassure my constituent that we have heard him and that we are capable of working together to deliver his hopes for our nation.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will come to the right hon. Lady's point of order in a minute.

May I gently say to the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) that she cannot withdraw her amendment? Her amendment has not yet been moved. Her amendment is, frankly, in the hands of the House of Commons. If she puts forward an amendment and then chooses not to move it, that is for her judgment and people will make their own assessment of that. It is perfectly possible for other signatories to it who do stick with the wish to persist with it to do so.

I come now to the point of order of the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Anna Soubry indicated dissent.

Mr Speaker: No? I have treated of the point that was concerning the right hon. Lady.

Anna Soubry indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: I am very glad to hear it.

5.13 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Yesterday, the House rejected the Prime Minister's deal for the second time. Today, we must reject leaving with no deal, and tomorrow, assuming that we vote that way tonight, we will have to ask the European Union for an extension to article 50.

Today is the moment when two and a half years of repetition of that nonsensical slogan "No deal is better than a bad deal" will finally be defeated in its fight against reality. It was always a slogan; it was never a policy. That is why the Prime Minister will have to vote against her own slogan when she comes to the Division Lobby tonight.

The arguments for rejecting no deal are really very simple: it would inflict the greatest damage on our economy; it is strongly opposed by businesses and trade unions; and it would mean a huge step into the unknown, the chaotic and the potentially dangerous.

Crispin Blunt rose—

Hilary Benn: I will give way once.

Crispin Blunt: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can explain why five of his remainder colleagues serving on the Foreign Affairs Committee signed up to this conclusion two years ago:

"It is possible to envisage scenarios in which 'no deal' might be better than a bad deal, as the Government has suggested; such as, for example, if the eventual proposed agreement only involves

[Crispin Blunt]

payment of a large sum to the EU in settlement of UK liabilities, with no provisions for any preferential trade arrangements or transitional arrangements towards a mutually beneficial future relationship.”

Hilary Benn: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I cannot speak for those colleagues. My view has consistently been clear that no deal cannot be a policy for this country. By the way, no deal is not what those who campaigned for leave in the referendum ever argued for, so I do not quite understand why someone should now be arguing for it when they did not argue for it then. No one who has spoken so far—I am not talking about intervening—has stood up and argued why no deal would be a good idea. It is not surprising why they have not. In responding to the schedules that have been published, Carolyn Fairbairn said this morning:

“This tells us everything that is wrong with a no-deal scenario... This is no way to run a country.”

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said:

“No-deal would be catastrophic for the automotive industry. It would end frictionless trade, add billions to the cost of manufacturing and cost jobs.”

We know why.

Mr Baron rose—

Hilary Benn: I will not give way, because time is so short. We know that if there is any disruption to the lorries that keep those car factories going every single day, it will affect the production line. The car industry has had enough bad news in the past two months without it being added to by people standing up saying, “No deal is a jolly good idea.”

A professor from one of our major institutions of higher education, whom I happened to bump into on the underground this morning, said to me that no deal would be “catastrophic” for the institution, its research funding and its ability to recruit staff. The truth is that these conversations are repeated in thousands of workplaces up and down the country, in thousands of sectors of the economy. That is why the twelfth report of the Brexit Select Committee said explicitly that leaving with no deal

“cannot constitute the policy of any responsible Government.”

If Members want to read the argument, they can go and look at that report, but I draw attention to the problem faced by a company that makes signs and exports them to Europe to be fitted by its workers. The company asked me what would happen in the event of a no-deal Brexit. I have referred to that in a previous speech. Since then, I asked a written question, to which I received the answer:

“UK nationals travelling to the EU for the purposes of work may be subject to extra conditions. Businesses will need to check individual Member State immigration rules for whether there are any requirements or conditions around supporting documentation, work permits or visas. Businesses should also check whether there are any restrictions on the provision of services, such as whether a UK professional qualification is recognised in the country in question.”

What use is that reply to a business that has worked hard to create jobs? There are those in this House who will stand up today and argue that that business’s future should be thrown into doubt, but what use is an answer like that? It basically says, “You’re on your own.”

The final point I want to make is this: given what happened yesterday, today’s vote is the next step required before tomorrow’s inevitable decision to apply for an extension to article 50, which the Brexit Select Committee report—it was published this morning with commendable speed after the events of last night—says will be necessary. Given the rather unhelpful coda, if I may put it that way, to the Government’s motion tonight, I think the House will vote to reject a no-deal Brexit on 29 March this evening, but Ministers need to recognise, be aware of and acknowledge that this House will never vote to leave the European Union without a deal, whether at the end of March, the end of June or the end of October. We are not prepared to take that risk with our economy, our jobs and the livelihoods of the people we represent—not today and not ever.

5.19 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): Amendment (f) stands in my name and the names of an eclectic and wide-ranging group of right hon. and hon. Friends from three separate parties. Many of us have perhaps not found ourselves signing amendments together much in the past. The purpose of the amendment is manifold, but one of its purposes is to avoid what may face us at the end of this month—a cliff-edge, no-deal Brexit for which it is clear that the country as a whole and, in particular, many of our major industries are not prepared, as the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) has just repeated.

I am conscious that some who will support this amendment are sanguine about an immediate no-deal Brexit, so I should set out my own position. I think that no deal on 29 March would be a disaster for the economy of the country, a particular threat to manufacturing industry, and, in practical terms, a particular threat to the day-to-day lives of my constituents and everyone else in east Kent. That is why I oppose it.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I have the utmost respect for my right hon. Friend, but I will be opposing his amendment. Is it not somewhat strange that the very people who voted last night to kill Brexit for 29 March this year are now signed up to voting, and will vote this evening, to delay Brexit? This will only be the first delay, of course, because there will potentially be others in future. We are in a very strange place at the moment.

Damian Green: The one point in that intervention I agreed with is that we are in a very strange place at the moment. I think the whole House can agree with that.

Lady Hermon rose—

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Damian Green: I will allow one more intervention—the hon. Lady.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. I would like him to explain in some detail whether or not the proposals that he is asking the House to vote on tonight protect the Good Friday/Belfast agreement in all its parts, and particularly the consent principle, which is guaranteed in the withdrawal agreement—the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal—on page 307.

Damian Green: That is an extremely valid point. I believe that they do. I will come on to what is actually in the amendment shortly, if I may.

As I hope I have made clear, I am as keen as anyone to reject an immediate no deal. I will support the Government's motion this evening. Indeed, this amendment is deliberately designed not to replace the Government's motion, as many amendments do, but to act in addition to it. But this House should not deceive itself. Voting against no deal does not mean that a deal will magically emerge. This House has to agree a deal, and that deal needs to be acceptable to the EU. We can pass motions ruling out no deal until we are blue in the face, but it will make no difference unless there are options that this House will support. That is a piece of realism that the House has not yet fully addressed. I voted for the deal last night, and indeed in January, and I am happy to assure the Government that I will do so again if they wish to try one more time.

More broadly, I campaigned for remain, but I respect the result of the referendum. I therefore draw the conclusion that I should vote for a deal that delivers Brexit. My principal aim in all this, and the aim of those of us who support this amendment, is to make sure that Brexit is as smooth as possible for the citizens and businesses of this country. This seems to me to be an honourable aim whatever view you took during the referendum. It is a view you can hold if you believe that Brexit is the best opportunity Britain has had for generations, or if you believe that it is a mistake whose damage has to be mitigated. From both those viewpoints, you can arrive at the same practical conclusion.

That practical conclusion is what lies behind amendment (f). It has four separate parts. I was grateful that the Prime Minister accepted at least two of them in full earlier today at Prime Minister's questions.

The first one that the Prime Minister accepted, and which the Government have already implemented, is the publication of the tariff schedules that we will need. I make no comment on the individual merits of each schedule—those are clearly a matter for legitimate debate—but the need for information as early as possible is paramount, and I am glad that the Government have taken that step, which is urged in the amendment. The second one is unilaterally guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens resident here. That has been a desire of Members on both sides of the House since the referendum, and I am glad that the Government are on board with that.

The third key element of the amendment is that the Government should seek an extension of article 50 until 22 May—the latest date possible to avoid European elections, the prospect of which brings out the Brenda from Bristol in all of us. That would be a useful delay, and it would give business more time to prepare for the new tariff regime.

The fourth and largest part of the proposal is to offer money and standstill agreements in a range of areas to the EU, in return for a period between now and December 2021 in which we could negotiate the future relationship. In other words, it provides a gentle glide path to that new relationship, instead of the cliff edge that might otherwise threaten us. The future relationship is, of course, much more important than the withdrawal agreement, which this House keeps turning down. It will decide our future prosperity and security. This

amendment focuses on that long-term goal, given the obvious difficulties of the short-term goal of a withdrawal agreement.

I know the objections; I have heard them. The first is that Monsieur Barnier has already said that he will not have it. It seems to me that if we do not proceed on a path just because Michel Barnier has said he will not have it, we will never get anywhere in these negotiations. The second is that this is a managed no deal. As I say, I would much prefer a deal, but if we cannot sign one, it is better to have a plan B that avoids chaos and gives us years to craft a proper trade deal as part of a future relationship.

I urge colleagues on all sides, whatever their views on wider European issues, to look favourably on this amendment. We live in a free vote world these days, so if necessary, they should ignore their Whips—they can be nice to them tomorrow. We need ways out of this impasse. This is one.

5.27 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): We have only two weeks to go, and businesses do not know whether they need to pay tariffs. We do not know whether public services will face shortages, and families do not know whether their food bills are about to go up. Nobody can plan. As the British Retail Consortium said today, there are ships already on their way to our great trading nation that do not know what kind of customs paperwork they will face by the time they arrive on our shores.

Police officers who are midway through important investigations to stop serious criminals and organised gangs operating across borders have no idea whether the European arrest warrants they have out on those criminals are about to be ripped up, which would mean they had to start again. Border officials who rely on European criminal databases to screen, with the flick of a passport, for sex offenders, child traffickers or organised criminals do not know whether those databases will be denied to them.

We should be standing up for British manufacturing and ensuring that it has a level playing field to compete in the world. Instead, no deal would be a hammer blow to the heart of our manufacturing base. In my constituency, we have manufacturers such as Haribo, which depends on ingredients from abroad and does not know what delays it will face; and Burberry, which does not know whether its goods will face tariffs as a result of no deal. Are we really going to say to small businesses that depend on imports that their livelihoods could be at stake because this House is prepared to accept no deal in just two weeks' time? Think of the florist who gets up early in the morning to collect a delivery, before any of us are even awake, who does not know whether they will be able to get their supplies and whether they will be able to trade. That is why we have a responsibility to say that we will not accept no deal on 29 March.

The Government have tried repeatedly to get their deal through, and they have failed, so we have to face up to what the default position should now be. The Environment Secretary said very clearly in his answer to me that, if we do not have a deal in place, the vote tonight will mean that the default position is no longer leaving the European Union with no deal on 29 March. I would really appreciate it if the International Trade

[Yvette Cooper]

Secretary could confirm that when he speaks tonight, because there have been different and confused interpretations, and it is really important to be clear.

The reason why we asked for and sought these debates was to be clear. We have a responsibility now—two weeks before Brexit day—to be clear about the default position. The Government have maintained for all this time that the default position is no deal, but that is not on any more. We have to decide now and vote tonight to change the default position: to say that we will no longer have no deal as the default position because it is too irresponsible. Tomorrow, we will take decisions on the way forward.

Heidi Allen: For clarification and for the benefit of many of us in the House who want to support amendment (a)—the right hon. Lady is one of the lead names on that amendment—will she be pushing it to a vote this evening?

Yvette Cooper: I have listened to the hon. Lady, and I have to say that I still support that amendment, which I think is the right amendment. I think we should hear the views of the House and the view of the International Trade Secretary, but my personal view is that, if that amendment is pushed to a vote, I will certainly vote for it. The International Trade Secretary needs to make this clear. We do not want any fudging about this, because it is really important. We are today ruling out no deal on 29 March. That has to be the purpose of our vote, with support for it from all parts of this House.

We will then need to move to the issue of what happens tomorrow on the extension of article 50. That has to be an extension for a purpose. It cannot simply be for more of the same, with the Prime Minister going back to Brussels, saying the same things about changing the backstop and having the same discussions we have already had many times before. We cannot just have the same meaningful vote on the same things when they have been rejected, so it has to be for something different. I would say to the Government that I think they should now put forward a timetable and a process to make some proper decisions on what the future partnership will look like. We still have no idea whether this is going to be Norway or Canada, or nearly Norway or close to Canada. We have no idea, and the Government have never come forward with that so that we can have proper debates and proper clarification.

Two big failings underlie what the Government have done: they have never sought consensus—the Prime Minister has never sought consensus and never sought to build agreement—and the Prime Minister has never sought clarity. She has deliberately sought a political declaration which simply fudges the future and gives us no clarity. We need clarity and we need consensus. That is why we should have a series of indicative votes. The Government should themselves put forward their own negotiating mandate for the future partnership and the future relationship, which we can then again have votes on and amend. That would actually give this House the chance to make some decisions about how we get clarity on the way forward, and also about how we get consensus on the way forward.

Whatever our different views about what the right position should be, I hope that this whole House can come together to rule out no deal. The Government's

basic responsibility is to keep this country safe, to make sure people can afford their food bills and to make sure that those who are sick can get their medicines. All of those are put at risk if there is no deal, and we should reject it tonight.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the level of interest in the debate and my desire to accommodate it as best I can, the time limit on Back-Bench speeches will have to be reduced to four minutes with immediate effect.

5.33 pm

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I resigned from the Government two weeks ago over the issues that we will be debating in the days ahead. Since Parliament has now taken direct control of events and decisions in this negotiation, I wanted to be free to participate in that debate and to make the case publicly on the Back Benches that I have made privately within the Government over the past year.

I fear that Parliament has set us on a dangerous course. We are in real danger, today, of signalling to the European Union and others that we are too scared to leave without a deal and, tomorrow, of ordering the Prime Minister to go on her hands and knees, and cap in hand, to Brussels—

Heidi Allen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

George Eustice: No, I will not give way.

We may be ordering the Prime Minister to go cap in hand to the European Union to beg for an extension to article 50, and we do not know what counter-offer it may make. It may demand that that extension must be for two years, and it may demand a large financial charge for that extension. It may even say that it will not give an extension, but that it is open to us to revoke article 50. Members in this House may face a very difficult, very uncomfortable decision in just a couple of weeks' time.

I believe that we must be willing, if necessary, to take our freedom first and talk afterwards. We know that the European Union—I worked closely in a lot of the preparations for no deal—is already seeking what is, in effect, an informal nine-month understanding.

There have been a number of points over the past two years when I think the Government could have reappraised their approach to the negotiations. Personally, it became clear to me a year ago, at the point at which the implementation period was agreed, that our negotiations were getting into a little bit of trouble, and that we were in danger of drifting along a path of least resistance, only to find that we had an agreement that Parliament would not accept. At about that time, something else interesting happened.

Lady Hermon: I am extremely and sincerely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Can I take it that he has made a point of speaking to the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, who has warned consistently about the dangers of no deal, of a hard Brexit and of a hard border on the island of Ireland?

George Eustice: I have not spoken to the Chief Constable, but I have been involved in a lot of other negotiations on the DEFRA front.

On 22 March last year, when I was visiting Oslo for some fisheries negotiations, our then ambassador to Norway told me that she had had a busy week, because she had been placed on standby by the Foreign Office to deliver a letter by hand to the Norwegian Government giving 12 months' notice of our intention to quit the EEA. In the end she was stood down, because of the transition agreement, and this country took a conscious decision not to give notice of an intention to quit the EEA.

That made me curious, because up until that point, and indeed since, the Government have always maintained that when we leave the EU our agreement under the EEA will automatically fall away. If that were true, and if it were the only possible interpretation of the EEA treaty, why was our ambassador armed with that letter to deliver to the Norwegian Government? After much probing, I established that there is indeed more than one interpretation that could be adopted, and the Foreign Office was concerned that, in the absence of giving that notice, we could be subject to challenge under the Vienna convention.

For me, that opened the prospect of a different approach: relying on our existing EEA membership, asserting our rights under that treaty, and simply applying to join the EFTA pillar of the EEA agreement. That arrangement means we would have had no customs union; control of our fisheries and agriculture policy; an independent trade policy; no need for an implementation period; no need for a backstop; and no need to worry about whether we have a codicil or a protocol, since we would be able to quit at any time, with 12 months' notice in writing.

I have tremendous respect for my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and was initially very encouraged when he picked up that idea and ran with it. However, as hon. Members who know him will know, he also has a tendency to overcomplicate things, so a simple and clean EEA model that could have given us an easy pathway out of this became Norway-plus, then the customs union 2.0, and then a backstop was added as well. The result is that it has alienated many Members on the Government side of the House who might otherwise have supported it.

In conclusion, my view is that, first, we need to unhitch the customs union and the backstop from any proposal based on our existing EEA membership. That might require us to be ready to leave without an agreement. Secondly, we can dynamically align our regulations over the next nine months. Finally, we can have the dynamic alignment as a bridge to a new arrangement in which we apply to join the EFTA pillar.

5.39 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): As we are moving dangerously closer to Brexit day, but with no deal yet agreed, it is finally time to bust the myth of "the will of the people." Opinion polls tell us that there is now a majority in the country in favour of staying in the EU. However, the Prime Minister and her Government insist on Brexit because they say it is the will of the people. I recently asked the Prime Minister how many of the

17.4 million people who voted to leave in 2016 voted for her deal and how many voted for no deal. She could not answer the question.

Yesterday only 242 Members voted for the Prime Minister's deal. Today a different and probably rather smaller number will vote to leave the European Union without a deal. According to the Prime Minister's use of language, both votes deliver the will of the people. The Brexit camp cannot agree what the will of the people is.

It is alarming that Members on the Conservative Benches have given up the argument that leaving the EU is good for the country. The only reason they put forward is that we have to respect the will of the people. Surely that means that they should support every Brexit vote, but they do not do so, and the reason for that is that they are reading into the referendum result their own opinion about Brexit, which has nothing to do with the will of the people. The will of the people is a fig leaf for Members in this House to pursue their own Brexit agenda. We need to see the mantra of the will of the people for what it is: a false argument. It is fake.

There is now a majority in the country for staying in the EU. I am on their side, along with my Liberal Democrat colleagues, the Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru, the Green party and the Independent Group. We are united in our view that our future is in the European Union. We stand for peace, collaboration and solving problems together, including the big issue of climate change. Although we represent at least 50% of the people of this country, our side of the argument has been completely sidelined in the past two and a half years. It is now time for Parliament seriously to consider the possibility of staying in the European Union.

In January the Prime Minister's deal was voted down by 230 votes. Yesterday almost the same deal was voted down by 149 votes. At least 40 Members have changed their minds within two months, not because the deal has essentially changed but because it has been clarified, amplified and explained in more detail. The 2016 referendum took place more than two and a half years ago. Many things about the EU and our membership have been clarified, amplified and explained. The people's vote coalition on our Benches understands that in a democracy people can change their minds and have a right to do so, just like MPs in this House.

On the false pretence that it is the will of the people, let the Conservative party and the Labour party stand for Brexit. We are standing up for the UK remaining a member of the European Union and for the right of people in this country to have a final say and to change their mind if they so wish.

5.42 pm

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Clearly time is short, so I do not plan to take any interventions unless someone objects to anything important I have to say.

May I start by telling my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) how much I appreciate the time and service he gave? It is a great pity that he is no longer in post, for reasons he has made clear.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade, who is sitting on the Front Bench, that I clearly cannot support the idea of taking no deal off the table, because I have always believed that

[Mr Iain Duncan Smith]

ultimately that is not up to us, unless, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) has said, we are prepared somehow to revoke. If we are not prepared to revoke, we will put ourselves in the hands of the EU, which may decide that it does not want us to extend. Where would that leave us? It would leave us having to leave without the withdrawal agreement. The idea of no deal is a bit of a misnomer, because in actual fact a whole series of things are taking place right now in the EU and even here that amount to deals, arrangements and agreements. I will not go through the list, because time is very short.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Duncan Smith: I was not planning to give way, because others want to speak, but I will give way briefly to my hon. Friend.

Mr Baker: During the course of the debate I have received a message from David Campbell Bannerman MEP, who says that the European Parliament in Strasbourg has today voted through no-deal measures on social security, road freight connectivity, basic air connectivity, the fishing fund, fishing vessels authorisation, railway safety and connectivity, and, on road haulage cabotage, the right for UK hauliers to operate within certain territory—and on it goes. Is it not the case that the Malthouse compromise—plan B—is emerging through the fact that both sides are taking sensible contingencies in their mutual interests?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. That is my point on the concept of no deal versus managed exit. That is how I would refer to the process: we do it either by a completely upfront withdrawal agreement, or by a series of agreements. My point is that it is about managing the process of leaving.

That is why I put my name to amendment (f), which was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green). I fully agree that it is not perfect but it seeks to find a way in which hon. Members with completely different views can come together, recognising that the people voted to leave and that our job is to deliver that. Is there a way to deliver it if there is not the chance of an agreement?

Lady Hermon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Duncan Smith: Forgive me, but I will not give way. I am sure the hon. Lady will ask the same question. The answer is that I have not spoken to the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland, but I take very serious consideration of that issue.

I do not believe that the Government's deal is dead. What made it almost impossible for some of us to vote for was the Attorney General's paragraph 19, which seemed to contradict the Deputy Prime Minister's comments the night before. That is why the Malthouse compromise has gone forward. It covers both categories—making the deal, or being unable to make the deal—and that will allow us to reach an agreement.

The key is finding a way to replace the backstop as it exists now with alternative arrangements, which are listed in amendment (f)—I will not go through them now.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford is correct to say that we have essentially asked for four elements, behind which lie a great deal more detail that has been discussed in a series of meetings with my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench. We reached what I thought was a pretty good agreement. I credit the Prime Minister and others for having bound in those alternative arrangements. They were not bound in absolutely but they did make big progress in the deal she laid on the table, which will help enormously, because if we replace the backstop with the Malthouse alternatives, we get rid of the risk of the backstop being an imprisonment or an entrapment. It would become customs arrangements that allow all sides, including Dover and Calais, to trade successfully without too many problems. That is really the point.

I know that some of my colleagues are concerned—rightly—about extending for the sake of it. I am not in favour of that. In any case, I believe that will be rejected by the European Union because there needs to be a purpose. The point of the extension we propose is to meet the practicalities of getting the arrangements in place ready for the process of managed withdrawal without a withdrawal agreement. I would not vote for an extension with no purpose because all we will do is kick the can down the road, as the Prime Minister has said, ending up with exactly the same decisions to make only a few months later.

I recommend the Malthouse process because it allows us to manage the process of leaving carefully with practical solutions, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford laid out. It allows us a period of time in which to create that. I recommend it to my hon. and right hon. Friends and Opposition Members. If we come together and vote for amendment (f), we offer two things: the opportunity to get an arrangement that allows us to leave with a withdrawal agreement or, in the event of not having such an agreement, we can manage the process of leaving in a way that takes away the fear of having no deal.

5.48 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): This is the first time I have spoken in any of the Brexit debates, although I have a way of making my opinion well known to the public elsewhere. I am really sick of the way the Government have gone about this. They are now saying, "It is my way or the highway." The highway is rocky and bad. They are asking hon. Members to walk down a road that has no surface, and we cannot see the end of it. They use the cover-all of saying, "We care about the national interest because we have got this really bad plan and you are not walking down it."—as if we do not all care about the national interest.

Conservative Members do not own the national interest. It is not the same as nationalism. We all care about the national interest very deeply. I do not know how the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs could stand in front of us today and tell us how our food prices would go up, and how it would be awful for agriculture, and then not move every fibre of his being to end it.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) talked about revoking, but let us be serious. If we cared less about being elected and more about the national interest, we would be

having a deeply serious conversation about making this stop and talking about the things that people where I live talk about. Others have touched on the will of the people. We in this House are terrified of the people in this country. Why are we so terrified of them? People in this place say: "17.4 million think this because I think this and I am going to lay my opinion on to them". We have nothing to be scared of because we have a responsibility to inspire people out there and to lead them somewhere. What has been missing from the very beginning of this horrid and torrid affair in British politics has been any semblance of the leadership and courage needed to take the country somewhere.

The reasons people voted leave are plentiful, and I will not pretend they all agree with me, but I am not scared of the people who voted leave in my area. I believe in parliamentary democracy, and if they do not like what I say, they can get rid of me. I am not frightened of that prospect. I only wish the Prime Minister had not been frightened of the people sitting behind her. She is certainly terrified of the people in the country. In the event of a no deal, people where I live will face not only the same levels of poverty and the same unstable jobs market, but much, much worse; they will be unable to afford food, which they can precious little afford now, and they will look up and say, "I thought there was going to be a golden era", and then they will be angry. That is what people in here should be scared of. We should not be scared of the country.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech, but, having studied this matter carefully, like she has, I take the view that the Prime Minister is respectful of those people, not frightened of them.

Jess Phillips: The right hon. Gentleman knows the Prime Minister considerably better than I do. If she had ever tried to talk to me about any of this, or anyone else with a seat like mine, perhaps we could have had a much better conversation in here. I do not know her, but to me she looks like a rabbit in the headlights. She looks unwilling to state the real facts and to say that this is really bad for the country. We hear it in briefings and in bars in Brussels instead of directly from a woman who should have the courage to say that she is terrified of all the things outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). She should have the courage to say, "I'm terrified of the implications for security, for food prices and for trade, and you know what? You might not like it, and I might lose my role as the Prime Minister, but I am going to do what is best for you". That is what courage and leadership are.

I respect deeply the people where I live, but I notice how selective the ERG are when it comes to caring about their needs: they want them when they back up their idea of northern town leave voters, but not so much when they need to give them welfare.

5.53 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Some 17.4 million people voted to leave. They were told by both the Government and the remain campaign that that meant leaving the customs union and the single market. They were told that many things would be damaging or wrong if we left. There was a series of very bad short-term

forecasts for the first year after the vote, and the public said to the experts, "We don't believe you", and they were right about the short-term forecasts: jobs figures went up, not down; growth went up—there was no recession; and house prices performed reasonably well. This was a specific forecast for the year after the vote and before we could conceivably have left.

Patricia Gibson *rose*—

John Redwood: I give way.

Mr Speaker: Order. Any interventions from now on are perfectly legitimate, but if Members intervene, they will be preventing others from speaking. I just want them to know that.

Patricia Gibson: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain how anyone can trust this Government? We were long told it was the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, but that is clearly not the case because the House could revoke article 50 if it so chose.

John Redwood: I do not agree. I think that that is exactly where we are: either we leave with the withdrawal agreement, or we leave without the withdrawal agreement. That is what the House voted for when it voted to send the article 50 letter, and that is what the House voted for when it enacted the withdrawal Act.

I am not here to recreate the arguments of the referendum. The public are heartily sick of Parliament's going over and over the same arguments in which we have engaged for three or four years now, in the run-up to the referendum and subsequently. They expect us to be purposeful, serious and sensible, and to sort out the issues and problems arising from the decision to leave the European Union. That is exactly what we should be doing, and I come here in that spirit. I understand that remain voters have real concerns, although I think that some of them are exaggerated. It is up to us, working with the Government, to show that all of them can be managed and that there are many upsides, to which we are looking forward and which leave voters clearly had in their minds.

I want to reassure the House. Calling certain views certain names is not helpful to a grown-up debate. It is not a no-deal exit that we are talking about; it is a many-deals exit. As we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), a series of measures have been enacted recently in the European Parliament. On both sides of the channel, serious work is being done to ensure that lorries can move and planes can fly. Goods will move across borders, and there will be an understanding about what happens in relation to customs and other checks. The drugs will come in, and the food will come in.

I think it is quite wrong to scaremonger and frighten people by pretending that none of that work has taken place—that German pharmaceutical companies will refuse to send their goods any more, or that the workers at Dover will get in the way and block them from coming in. It is not going to happen. We have heard very good news from Calais and Dover about all the work that has been done at both ports to make things work.

So let us come together and be practical, and let us understand that certainly all Conservative and Labour MPs were elected to this 2017 Parliament to get Brexit

[John Redwood]

through. We all stood on national manifestos that said we would do that. The public cannot believe that so many Labour Members in particular are now saying, “We did not really mean it; we do not care about that; we want to stop it; we want to delay it; we want to redefine it in a way that means it is no longer Brexit.”

Brexit means taking control of our own money and then being able to spend it on our priorities, and the sooner we do that, the sooner we will have the boost to our economy which taking that measure would bring about. It means having tariffs that make sense for British industry, and for importers who might like some tariffs to be removed. I am very glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has slashed tariffs from a load of imported goods that do not involve our competing actively in the United Kingdom. That will be better news for all the consumers who will not have to pay those tariffs any more once we have our own tariff schedule.

I have a big idea for the Government. I entirely understand that very many people in this Parliament want a bigger deal, or more deals, than what is currently on the table. My idea is that, even at this late stage, the Government should offer the European Union a comprehensive free trade agreement based on the best of EU-Canada and EU-Japan, perhaps involving more services, because we already have alignment with services. If the EU would agree just to talk about that—as I suspect it would—we could leave on 29 March without having to impose any new tariffs or non-tariff barriers on each other, and proceed, under GATT 24, to negotiate a free trade agreement. That, I should have thought, would unite a lot of moderate remain voters with most leave voters, and I strongly recommend it to the Government. Parliament must allow us to leave on 29 March, otherwise it will be the people against the Parliament.

5.58 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I think that I have heard only one Member utter that profoundly silly slogan, “No deal, no problem”, although I did notice some rather prosperous-looking people outside the Palace this afternoon brandishing posters to that effect. The rest of us, even the most sanguine adherents to no deal, concede that there would be some economic pain—“in the short term”, some say. I would say that there would be no pain for the comfortably set up. It is the squeezed majority who would feel the pain, and no deal would be particularly damaging to Wales. My party will vote tonight to take no deal off the table, and, in our opinion, it would be best to do so permanently.

Amendment (c), which stands in my name and those of my hon. Friends, seeks to extend article 50, and it seeks a referendum.

I want to refer to some of the problems we foresee for my country if we follow the no-deal course. It would of course endanger public services and put people's health at risk. According to Welsh Government analysis a no-deal Brexit would wipe £5 billion off the Welsh economy, meaning fewer jobs and lower wages. Some 60% of Wales's exports go to the EU; in that respect, we stand out among the countries of these islands in that we have an exporting economy.

With the economy in decline under no deal, public services would be endangered in Wales. The number of EEA nationals in the social care workforce in Wales has grown by over 50% since 2011; without a deal, EU citizens' rights to work here will be in question, at best, putting further unwarranted pressure on the NHS and the social care sector.

On health, people in the UK rely heavily on medicines imported from the EU; for instance 99% of the insulin used in the UK is imported, largely from the EU. The British Medical Association has estimated that no deal could lead to delays of between 12 and 24 months for life-saving drugs.

One concern that I have raised in the House—I did so last week—is the effect on agriculture. NFU Cymru president John Davies said this afternoon:

“There can be no doubt that a ‘no deal Brexit’ would be incredibly damaging to the Welsh agricultural sector and that eventuality should be avoided at all costs.”

In that respect, he agrees entirely with Glyn Roberts, president of the Farmers Union of Wales. We have two farming unions in Wales, and on this they agree.

The Secretary of State for Wales puts great store by saying he is the voice of Wales in Westminster, and he has the opportunity tonight, given that there is apparently a free vote, to stop playing games and come out strongly against the calamity of no deal.

6.2 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I cannot agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) that a no-deal Brexit is somehow eminently liveable with; it plainly is not. From looking at my own constituency, talking to the pharmaceutical companies that are there and looking at the costs already incurred by them to try to face up to the prospect of no deal and the risks they run if no deal goes ahead, it seems plain to me that no deal would be very damaging to this country indeed: damaging in the short term because of the chaos that will accompany it, and damaging in the medium to long term because I believe we will be seriously economically disadvantaged by it.

I find it genuinely very troubling that as we come closer to the crunch there seem to be more and more people who may previously have advocated a deal but, not seeing that there is a deal around, suddenly decide that no deal is the option because they cannot get what they want or the form of deal they might desire. It is an extraordinary form of frenzy: they smash up the china first, and when they are not satisfied with the china they have smashed, they decide to smash some more. That is what we are facing, and it is my duty to do everything I possibly can to prevent it, and I will continue to do that for as long as the opportunities for doing it present themselves.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend talks about smashing up the law; does he not accept that section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 makes it abundantly and expressly clear that we will repeal the European Communities Act 1972 on exit day?

Mr Grieve: It may do, but it lies within our capacity to change it, and we will have to change it; indeed, it is inherent that it will be changed in the next fortnight, and I will move on to that in a moment.

I do not want to dwell on the risks of no deal in practice because I do not wish to repeat what others have said perfectly eloquently. So then we turn to this process, and I simply point out that it is very unfortunate that instead of what I understood yesterday would be a clear opportunity for this House to express itself against the principle of no deal and make clear that we do not want it before moving on tomorrow to discuss what we might do to prevent it, which is a real issue, the Government have tabled a motion that gives the distinct impression that, like children, we will be offered the same pudding, if not eaten at lunchtime, at tea time, supper time and now for breakfast, when it is perfectly clear that this House has rejected this pudding in its totality.

As a consequence, something that might bring us together in reasoned debate has started to be undermined by a suspicion that the Government are interested only in forcing a binary choice between no deal and accepting their agreement. Listening to the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box earlier, I began to realise that perhaps that was not the case, but then why was the motion ever tabled in this fashion? I cannot understand that. In fact, the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) was correct in trying to identify and deal with that mischief.

The Government have a point, however. I agreed with a lot of what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) said, and there is an issue here. This House has lived under the protection of our party system for a long time. I am now beginning to see a distinction on my Benches, and actually on the other Benches, between those of us who have in a sense exposed ourselves and as a consequence get a huge amount of threats, flak and invective, and those of my colleagues—I do not include the Prime Minister in this, because she has many a burden—who are hiding behind the party system to avoid making the difficult choices. We cannot go on doing this. The party system might restore itself—I rather hope that it does—but as things stand at the moment, it is blown to pieces.

We have to make the decisions. Are we going to find a motion to accept the Prime Minister's deal being offered up again? I do not want that, because I think that it is a poor deal, despite her best efforts. Are we going to find some other deal? Or are we going to revoke? Revocation is not something that I would wish to do without going back to the public, because in the light of the referendum, that would be a rather draconian and dangerous step. However, we will have to address that question because, otherwise, we will go round in circles and the Minister is right to say that we will eventually run out of time. We will simply have pushed back the cliff edge. We will have to resolve this, but at the moment, the Government are not helping by tabling motions of this tendentious character. I really urge my colleagues on the Front Bench to face up to their responsibility and to ensure, first, that we get some clarity from them tonight, and secondly, that we can take this debate forward.

6.7 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is always a great pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who speaks with such wisdom on this issue. If the social and economic catastrophe that is no deal were being caused by some kind of natural disaster, there would be a collective outpouring of grief and concern. They would

be a huge amounts of Government action to try to mitigate it, and there would no doubt be offers of international aid as well. The fact that this catastrophe is being so actively, willingly and even, by some, enthusiastically chosen is the height of masochistic self-indulgence. Doubtless psychologists will spend many years analysing exactly why this psychosis came to infect so many members of our ruling class at this time and exactly how we ended up with this concept of masochism as revolt.

The desire to create such chaos, and the exhilaration that comes from it, is perhaps understandable in those who will not be affected by the results—those who can move the investments they might be lucky enough to have to Ireland, to take a random example—but this is certainly going to hurt our constituents, who are in many cases already struggling to get by. It is even more shocking that this is being deliberately embraced at a time when we know of the illegalities associated with the leave campaign and the evidence of Russian interference. I was looking at Twitter a few moments ago. As we are here debating no deal, people like Aaron Banks—the biggest donor to the leave campaign; the biggest donor ever in British history—is busy going round the European Governments and lobbying them to block any UK request for an extension of article 50. So let us be clear that we are being played for fools here and that we will be responsible for this if we do not wake up and notice it. And the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has some gall to stand at the Dispatch Box as though he is completely independent of all this and as though he is not complicit in it and was not an architect of it. That is the height of absolute shamelessness.

We have heard so much about the economic costs of a no-deal Brexit, and the effect on constituents in Brighton will be no exception. I have been lobbied by so many individuals, families, businesses and universities. The University of Sussex, where one in four staff is an EU citizen, is already having problems with recruitment and retention, research grants and so on, and the same goes for both big and small companies.

This is about much more than the economy, however. I worry that a no-deal Brexit would make it harder even to begin to address some of many reasons why people voted to leave in the first place. Of course, people chose to vote to leave for many different reasons, but a good many of them were voting to say that the status quo is intolerable, that the inequality in this country is grotesque and that they want their communities to have a say in the future. The idea that any or all that will be easier to address if we leave with no deal is fanciful and irresponsible.

We need an honest conversation with the people of this country. We need to level with them. We need a new social contract, better jobs, higher-quality public services and investment in the green economy. We need people of all backgrounds and communities to be treated with respect and given the opportunity and the power to thrive. We need genuinely to give back control to people. We need to put young people at the heart of all this. We need that kind of future. We need a green new deal, not the Prime Minister's failed deal or, worse still, no deal.

6.11 pm

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): When this House voted overwhelmingly to invoke article 50, we knew that the default position was that we would leave European Union on 29 March with no deal.

[Andrew Bridgen]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs opened this debate with his usual enthusiastic and energetic manner, but his words will have struck horror into the hearts of the 17.4 million people who voted to leave and Conservative activists and members across the country. Our manifesto said that no deal is better than a bad deal, and the Prime Minister has said at the Dispatch Box on over 100 occasions that we are leaving the European Union on 29 March with or without a deal. Where does that leave our democracy or belief in politics?

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) spoke at length, as he is wont to do as Father of the House, and I respect him for his consistent opinion on the European Union. He mentioned that the referendum was three years ago, which seems a long time, but he led the remain campaign in the east midlands while I led the leave campaign. I remember well that we debated, we were on television, we were on the radio and we went out to hustings, but when the votes came in at the end of the day the result was 59% to 41% in favour of leaving the European Union. He is right that his seat voted to remain, but it was one of few in the east midlands to do so, and I am disappointed, as will be the people of the east midlands, that he is treating that democratic decision so badly that he would invite us to revoke article 50 and go against the will of the British people, to whom this House decided we would give the decision in a referendum.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: As my hon. Friend knows, I never said that I would change my lifelong opinions on the strength of one opinion poll. If I fight an election and urge the case for a Conservative Government, but the Labour party wins and takes office, does my hon. Friend think that I should then attend this House as an Opposition Member supporting the Government's policies because they had just won a democratic mandate for them? That is not how we do politics in this country. It would be an absurd way to proceed.

Andrew Bridgen: My right hon. and learned Friend makes his points in favour of the European Union, as he has done consistently throughout his career, but the answer is that the people of the east midlands voted to leave the European Union, and I would have hoped that he respected that.

We have heard nothing about the Government's preparations for no deal, which have been played down. Some 9,000 civil servants are working on no-deal preparations, and the Treasury has allocated £4.2 billion of taxpayers' money to prepare for no deal. The preparations are moving forward. Business has been told that we are leaving and to prepare for no deal on 29 March. We have seen on the news that the Government have reserved warehouse space for extra stock. All that cost has been incurred by our country.

If we leave on 29 March—business does not like uncertainty, we know that—we end the uncertainty if we leave with no deal. We have already heard that is not no deal—it is a managed no deal. We have a huge trade deficit with the European Union—£67 billion. We can offer it GATT 24, with tariff-free and quota-free trade the moment we leave, which it would be advised to accept, given that it trades with us so much.

The European Union is on the verge of a recession. Germany has no growth and has only stopped quantitative easing for three months, since November, and it has slipped into recession. The European Union has started printing money again to support the euro. Now is the time, when we still have economic growth—it needs our markets—to push for more concessions. It is not the time to take no deal off the table; it is the time to keep it there as a threat to bring the European Union to heel. When we get to the compression point, it cannot be this Parliament or this country that blinks first. I urge all colleagues to keep no deal on the table. It is our only insurance for getting out of the European Union.

6.15 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I have to say that it is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen). With every word he says, I remind myself exactly why I took the decision to leave the Conservative party. The state of the Conservative party is best embodied by the hon. Gentleman. If you do not sign in blood in favour of Brexit there will be no place for you in that party any longer. That is the reality of the Conservative party now that we have had the referendum, and we have a Government who are taking us through, and forcing on this country, Brexit. The hon. Gentleman is making a positive case, as a member of the Conservative party, which has always prided itself on being the party of business, for no deal in the face of the Brexit Government's impartial impact assessments, which show conclusively that it would, in the words of the Business Secretary, who might know what he is talking about, be ruinous for this country.

I know whom I would rather listen to—the Business Secretary, not the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire, who has probably not even seen those impact assessments. Even if he has, and has read them—perhaps even understood them—he would reject them as some remain conspiracy, because they do not fit his perfect ideology. I gently say to him that the day may yet dawn when the good people of North West Leicestershire face the reality of Brexit—God help us if they ever face the reality of a hard Brexit—and lose their jobs and see the future of their children and grandchildren reduced because of his words and his actions. I hope that they will seek to put the blame where it absolutely lies—with him and all those who have led this country to make the biggest mistake we have ever made in our history, by voting to leave the European Union. I will not be part of that.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips)—unfortunately, she is no longer in the Chamber—spoke wisely. I do not fear my electorate. Good Lord, I was elected with a majority of 389, so I can look fear in the face—I understand these things. I also know that people respect you if you are honest with them, if you fight for them, and if you tell it to them as it is. They do not thank you for spin, and they do not thank you for false promises that you cannot deliver.

Mr Speaker, in case you do not know what is going on, it is fascinating. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) identified the fact that the motion is flawed. It does not do what the Government promised, and does not enable us to vote to take no deal off the table—that awful irresponsibility. The right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) tabled

an amendment, very wisely, that does the job and gives the House that opportunity. The Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and promised a free vote. That is not occurring. There will be no free vote, and now the right hon. Member for Meriden has been persuaded not to press her amendment. I hope it will be pushed and I hope people will show the courage that so many right hon. and hon. Members have done—Members such as the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), who had the courage to resign on a point of principle in order to do the right thing by his constituents and by his country. There is, however, a free vote on another Mickey Mouse amendment which undermines everything the Government stand for.

6.20 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who rightly points out that when you are honest with your constituents and tell them how it is, they respect you for it. My constituents have seen that we have discussed the economic consequences of a no-deal Brexit time and again. I am disappointed, but not surprised, that some of my colleagues have chosen the irresponsible course. Given a choice between compromise and chaos, they chose chaos.

We all know the facts. No deal could tip us back into recession, and will cost the north-west jobs and cripple our exports. It would undermine the difficult decisions this Government have had to make to strengthen the economy over the past decade. It is time for this House to state clearly that no deal is not in the interest of our country or our constituents, and that we will not countenance it. The negotiation is over. The deal is over. No deal is no longer just a threat to drive a hard bargain; it is a threat to our economy, and a sign to any future trade partners of how unwilling we are to compromise.

Dr Wollaston: Does the hon. Lady also feel that hon. Members should read the letter that they have all received today from Professor Andrew Goddard, the president of the Royal College of Physicians, setting out his stark warning for the health of our patients and the NHS in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

Antoinette Sandbach: I do. I also think that constituents ought to remember that a no deal is a threat to the promises made during the referendum. Vote Leave said:

“Taking back control is a careful change, not a sudden stop—we will negotiate the terms of a new deal before we start any legal process”.

Well, we know how far that has got. No deal is the most sudden stop anyone can envisage. However, it is not just the letter of the promises that will be broken, but the spirit of them, too. For months, you could not watch TV or listen to the radio without hearing the refrain “Vote Leave, Take Back Control”. Let us look at how no deal would take back control. It would mean our farmers would be reliant on the EU to list UK products of animal origin as meeting its import requirements for its countries. It would mean our pleading with the EU to issue an adequacy decision regarding our data protection rules. It would mean years and years of negotiations and trade-offs in order to rebuild a trading relationship that would be a mere shadow of what the Prime Minister's deal offered. And all because a few of my colleagues failed to realise that simply walking away does not cause

the EU to cease to exist, nor does it mean that its influence will cease. None of this is the control that was promised.

No deal cuts off the control we had within the EU, where we had a say in the making of laws. It cuts off the control the deal gave us by destroying any good will and willingness to negotiate that the EU had left in its negotiations with us. No deal condemns us to economic turmoil and, what is more, it does so by betraying the promise of the leave campaign. I have often been told to “respect the referendum result”. I did that: I voted for that deal twice. Today, I lay that same challenge at the feet of those on my side of the House who think no deal is worth it. It is not what you promised, it is not what 17.4 million people voted for and it is not what is best for the country.

6.24 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The responsibility of any Government is to protect its citizens against threats to society, whether they concern national security, the health of the economy or community cohesion. In 2008, the then Government were quick to respond to the global financial crisis that sadly plunged so many into despair. A decade on, many on the Government Benches actually advocate a no-deal Brexit that I believe would make people even more despairing—a destination that, according to the Bank of England, could plunge us into a situation far worse than the 2008 crash.

It is unusual for the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress to speak with one voice, but they are both against a no-deal Brexit. This time it is far worse than 2008, because the Government would be consciously and deliberately inflicting the outcome on the UK economy and, by extension, on our communities. It is truly shocking that the Chancellor claimed merely a few hours ago that the Government's approach to Brexit was pro-business. So many of their statements appear to be the opposite.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has detailed the devastating impact that a no-deal scenario would have across sectors, from transport to medicines to public finances. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) made clear the impact that no deal would have on the manufacturing sector in both the excellent meetings they held in the House.

I wish briefly to mention small businesses, because they are affected too. A woman in my constituency runs a fashion business. Let us not forget that fashion accounts for £35 billion, while fishing accounts for £1.8 billion—just a small comparison. She wrote to me:

“Dear Catherine...I thought I would share with you another email that I received...from a client in Denmark – who no longer wishes to trade with us... it's self explanatory.”

The email she shared reads:

“Dear Sandra

Thanks for your email.

With England leaving eu we have decided to focus on distributors from eu to avoid issues at the border.”

It was from Martin in Denmark. Up and down the country, small businesses are coping with this, day in, day out.

[Catherine West]

We have seen companies, trade unions, charities, the NHS and watchdogs all coalesce around the view that a no-deal Brexit will inflict chronic economic hardship on us all. Not only that, but it will fray even further the delicate fabric that holds us all together. The tone of the national debate has plummeted since Brexit became the national conversation around dinner tables. That is why I am proud to have co-signed amendment (a), and I am still keen to move it unless others can persuade me otherwise. I recognise that many Members on the Government Benches are not actively advocating a no-deal outcome, but with days to go before we crash out, we must all recognise that declining to vote for amendment (a), or at least to take it seriously, will make us complicit should such an outcome occur.

We have 373 hours left until the UK leaves the EU. I hope all Members will reflect on the specific ways in which a no-deal scenario will impact on households, businesses, schools and workplaces, and recognise that damage. I hope that with that knowledge they will vote to avert this chaos.

6.27 pm

Mr Sam Gyimah (East Surrey) (Con): This is one of the most important debates in the Brexit process, because we will decide whether, in just over two weeks, we will leave the EU with some deal, do something else, or rupture a 45-year relationship that permeates every aspect of life in this country. In that context, we clearly have a responsibility to the 17.4 million people who voted leave, but we—by which I mean not only Parliament but the Government—also have a duty to the 66 million citizens in this country and their safety and livelihoods. Every decision we take in the context of leaving with no deal has to take that into account.

Some people have talked about leaving with no deal as if it would be some kind of inconvenience—as if there would be a little bit of disruption like when your BT internet goes down for a few hours. Others have gone to the other extreme and said that it would not be unlike Dunkirk. Well, nobody said during the referendum campaign, “Vote leave and you’ll have to invoke the spirit of Dunkirk.” That is an incredibly low bar to set for the success of this project.

Andrew Bridgen: When we joined the European Union, food prices went up 10% and we severed trading links with historical allies such as Australia and New Zealand. Did anyone ever say that we crashed into the European Union?

Mr Gyimah: What I am talking about is a rupture after 45 years. Many people cite our manifesto, which says that we will leave the single market, the customs union and be outside the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice as a justification for such a move, but that same manifesto also says that we will leave with “clarity” and “certainty”. There is no way in the world that leaving without a deal provides clarity and certainty over our future relations. All the challenges that we have with the Prime Minister’s deal—the fact that there is no vision, that there is no clarity, that our bargaining position is weakened, and that we would have to go cap in hand to the EU—will apply even more in the case of a no deal, because we will be a distressed negotiator.

There are those who say that leaving means that we do not need any deals. That is not true at all. What happens is that on day one after we leave, we will not have a deal but we will rapidly have to negotiate a whole set of deals. We will have to rely on the kindness of strangers in order to be able to do so.

Should we have no deal on the table just for negotiating purposes? The EU knows that for a country that has been able to sign on to the PM’s deal where we leave our voice, our vote and our veto in return for best endeavours, we are not serious about no deal. It is not a credible negotiating position.

When we say that the WTO is better for us, we also then say that we want to negotiate other trade deals. Why leave the preferential position to go out and try to negotiate something better in terms of no deal? It just does not make sense, and it is not credible either. This idea keeps rearing its head in different ways—a managed no deal or a WTO Brexit. These are all rebrands of the same idea, and they mean that we are leaving without any arrangements—we are setting sail without knowing where we are going. I am willing to entertain the prospect that it could work—perhaps 20, 30 or 50 years down the line, as my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) has suggested. In the meantime, what would we have done to people’s lives in this country? What about manufacturing, or the farmers in my constituency who came to me and said, “If no deal goes ahead, we are completely wiped out”?

So much of this is about trade, about tariffs and about borders, but it is easy to forget about the people we are here to represent. If we leave on 29 March without a deal, we will be on a war footing when there is no external threat. We will have a massive civil contingency. The Prime Minister will stand in front of Downing Street on Independence Day having to say to the country, “Do not worry, we will manage all the traffic jams. Do not worry, we will make sure you get your medicine. I have now sent the Trade Minister to go and negotiate all those many deals. Do not worry, everything will be alright.” She will have to do that because, of all the negotiable options available, the Government have chosen the one that causes the most disruption to people’s lives. In what sense and in what world will that be a victory for this country? In what sense and in what world can we say to those who voted leave, “This is the vision that was given to you during the referendum campaign”? There is no way in the world that that is right.

6.32 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah) who spoke just as eloquently as his fellow Surrey MP on the Front Bench but rather more truthfully about the perils that Brexit—a no-deal Brexit or any other sort of Brexit—poses to our country.

In the 10 years since I have been an MP, we have lived through some extraordinary political moments—things that have seemed entirely impossible have come to pass. But even in this surreal age, it does seem to me that today’s debate, low key though it has been in many measures, is a particularly extraordinary surreal moment. We are debating here in the British Parliament the prospect of voting, or not voting, for a policy that the British Government have declared will cut 10% out of our GDP—out of our economy—over the next 15 years.

It will reduce the size of our economy by £200 billion over the next 15 years. It is utterly inconceivable that, in this era or in any other era, anybody sensible could possibly vote for a policy that will cut more than twice what we spend on the NHS each year out of our economy.

In an era where we have schools closing on Friday afternoons because they cannot afford to stay open, where it feels like teenagers are being stabbed almost weekly on our streets because of a dearth of police officers, and where the head of the NHS is telling the Government they need to de-privatise the NHS and invest in it, it is entirely inconceivable that this Parliament or any Parliament could vote to do such damage to our public services and our people. I do not think there is any prospect of this House, save for a few on the Government Benches, voting for that outcome. I do not think there was ever any prospect of no deal really being pursued by the Government. It has been a blackmail negotiating tactic by Government Front Benchers to hold all our feet to the flames to try to ram through a Brexit deal.

We all know that any version of Brexit will diminish our economy. Any version of Brexit is a jobs-eating Brexit. Even the version advocated by the Government Front Benchers will by their own admission cut not £200 billion, but between £40 billion and £60 billion from our GDP. That is why we must obviously vote against no deal tonight and obviously vote in favour of an extension to article 50 tomorrow, but we must be honest with the people of this country. I say this to those on my Front Bench as much I do to those on the Government Front Bench: we must be honest that Brexit in any regard will damage the livelihoods and opportunities of our constituents. We in the Labour party should be opposing it for that reason, if for no other.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) spoke courageously and eloquently this evening. She is absolutely right: we should not be frightened of speaking truth not only to power, but to our constituents. If that means my party wishes to deselect me or my constituents wish not to vote for me in the next election, then so be it, but I will know that my conscience is clear—I did not vote for triggering article 50, I will not vote for a Tory Brexit and I will not vote for a Labour jobs-first Brexit. I will vote tonight to do the country a service and stop a no-deal Brexit at all costs.

6.37 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I refer Members to my business interests as listed in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Very briefly, I encourage a note of moderation when talking about no deal. Many of us, if not all of us, prefer a good deal to no deal—that is one of the key logics of leaving the European Union—but I suggest that WTO rules are not the so-called disaster that everyone is suggesting. We have to look at economic reality. We trade profitably with the rest of the world outside the EU on largely WTO, no-deal terms. What people can forget is that investment is about comparative advantage and the extent that a country's corporation tax rates are lower and its labour markets are flexible, how good its top universities are and its financial expertise. In aggregate, those things are more important than

WTO tariffs. If proof were needed, we have only to look at how well the country is doing economically in the face of so-called concern that we could be leaving the EU on no-deal terms. Investment decisions over recent years have been made in the full knowledge that we could be leaving on no-deal terms.

Andrew Bridgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the truth is that many of those in this Chamber who wish to take no deal off the table want to stop Brexit, but have not got the guts to admit it to the electorate, because they know that two thirds of our constituencies voted to leave the European Union?

Mr Baron: Unfortunately, there is an element of truth to that, but I would not want to label everyone as being in that camp. Many Members have quoted predictions about the future, but I suggest that we have to keep the argument and the debate grounded in reality.

People need to remember that there were many predictions of economic woe and gloom should we vote to leave the EU in 2016. They came from the Bank of England, the IMF, businesses, and the various sector organisations and public organisations. Some of the predictions suggested 500,000 or 700,000 extra unemployed by December 2016. What happened? Actually, we created jobs, and economic growth did well. We now, today, have a record low unemployment rate that is half the EU average, record manufacturing output, and record inward investment. So we need to be careful of predictions, as Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, recognised. The Bank of England had to apologise publicly for getting it so wrong, as did so many others.

We have been told by our own Government that the preparations for no deal are in full swing. On 12 February, I asked the Prime Minister whether the Government are ready, saying:

“can she reassure the House that should we leave on 29 March on no-deal WTO terms, we are sufficiently prepared?”—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 752.]

Her response was just three words: “We are indeed.” So the preparations have been made, and I think we should take some comfort from that.

Ruling out no deal makes a bad deal more likely. There needs to be an element of moderation across the House when describing no deal. The economic reality is at variance with the various doomster forecasts that were proved so wrong back in 2016, and we should take note of that fact.

6.41 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to wind up this debate for the Opposition. It has been a good debate. It was opened by the Environment Secretary, who made a powerful case for why a no-deal Brexit should be opposed, and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who, as always, rose to the occasion with his usual rigour and honesty. We have had passionate contributions from, among others, my right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the right hon. and learned Members for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), the hon. Member for East Surrey

[Matthew Pennycook]

(Mr Gyimah), and the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), all of whom spoke with great force.

What I have taken from today's debate is that exiting the EU without an agreement is not simply one among several equivalent Brexit options—it is in a category of its own. Everyone will have their own views on the balance of strengths and weaknesses of other options, whether it be a Canadian-style free trade agreement or a Norway-style arrangement, and the appropriateness of the trade-offs and compromises involved in each. But those options can at least be contemplated rationally on the basis of their likely consequences for our economy and our security, their implications for the Irish border, and their chances of successfully emerging from the detailed negotiations on the future relationship.

In contrast, it is hard to overstate how damaging a no-deal exit from the EU in just over a fortnight would be, and speech after speech today has brought that home. A no-deal Brexit is simply not a viable option. Indeed, an exit from the EU on 29 March, or indeed any date thereafter, without agreement would be nothing short of a national disaster—a point that Labour Members have endlessly repeated over the past two years. A no-deal Brexit would affect every facet of our national life, and every region and nation of the UK. It would bring to an end, at a stroke, the whole body of legal arrangements that exist between the UK and the EU, plunging us into a legal and regulatory vacuum.

The focus of much of today's debate has rightly been on the impact of a no-deal Brexit on the economy—and for good reason, given the implications for businesses and individuals across the UK. The implications of crashing out without a deal on 29 March would be significant both in terms of lost growth over the long term and the grievous dislocation that we face in the short term. The proposals for tariffs under a no-deal exit that the Government published this morning, without any consultation with business, merely serve to underline what a disastrous outcome a no-deal exit would be.

However, the impact of a no-deal departure is about much more than just tariffs. It would mean a sudden and drastic change in the entire body of rules that currently govern how we trade in a range of crucial areas. It would threaten the complex law enforcement and judicial co-operation arrangements that keep Britain safe. It would almost inevitably result in infrastructure being placed on the Irish border, place untold strain on the Good Friday agreement and Anglo-Irish relations more generally, and exacerbate the current political instability in Northern Ireland, raising the spectre, as the Secretary of State for the Environment said at the outset, of direct rule from Westminster.

In short, such an exit is the hardest and most chaotic of departures. It provides no certainty, and no one can say with any real certainty just how extensive the damage would be. Of course we would survive, but why would any Government force the British people to cope with an entirely avoidable act of self-harm that opinion polling suggests only a minority of the public support? No responsible Government in their right mind should countenance a no-deal exit from the EU, especially when, as the hon. Member for East Surrey brought home in his contribution, the other side knows full well that it has always been a hollow threat.

The tragedy is that instead of simply announcing that under no circumstances will the UK leave the EU without a deal, this Government adopted such an outcome as their official plan B, endlessly repeating over months the nonsensical mantra that “no deal is better than a bad deal”, in a way that has de-sensitised many people in our country to the risks involved. As the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) said, the Government have spent a significant sum of public money trying to ensure that they are prepared for no deal—and trying is the operative word, because we know from the Government's own impact assessment summary that the UK is simply not prepared to leave the EU on 29 March.

If we leave aside the legislative burden that still needs to be faced, the impact assessment makes clear that Departments are on track for just over two thirds of the most critical projects. It is honest about the fact that, in the event of a no-deal exit, the UK would be at the mercy of the actions of the European Commission, EU member states and EU businesses. That brings me to my next point, which is that there is no such thing as a managed no deal—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a lot of background noise. I am not sure that the acoustics are as helpful as they might be, and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for that, but I urge him to project. Speak up, man—we want to hear you.

Matthew Pennycook: I shall do my best, Mr Speaker.

There is no such thing as a managed no deal, despite the protestations of the more cavalier Members on the Government Benches. It is a myth, and that is why the idea of no deal as an act of national liberation is so misleading. Not only would the Government in all likelihood lose control of events in a no-deal scenario, but they would inevitably end up supplicating before the EU. The Government's own technical notices make clear that in a no-deal scenario, agreement is required from Brussels in a swathe of areas.

If anyone thinks that, amid the acrimony that would exist following a no-deal exit, the EU would ride to the rescue and agree to a raft of reciprocal mini-deals in all the essential areas required, a waiver of the Union's rules or a standstill transition period without a withdrawal agreement, as amendment (f) suggests, they should remind themselves of the Commission's plans for a no-deal exit. Those plans make it absolutely clear that the EU will agree to co-operative measures only where strictly necessary and where it is in their own interests. The plans make clear that those measures could not replicate the benefits of membership of the Union and state plainly that they could be revoked at any time.

Chris Philp: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will not give way, because I want to ensure that the Secretary of State for International Trade has sufficient time.

It is yet another example of the misplaced confidence that has defined the approach of hard-liners on the Government Benches. Just like the notion of a cost-free, no-deal exit, it is a fantasy. That is why so many Government Members, including many members of the

Cabinet, whether they said so publicly or not, know that a no-deal exit is not a viable option and that it must be ruled out.

This House has already made its intentions clear in relation to a no-deal exit on two separate occasions. I agree with the comments made in all quarters today that the way the Government have framed their motion is disappointing. At worst, it is contradictory. At best, it is ambiguous, and as the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield said, it certainly raises suspicions.

It is of course a statement of fact that the current legal default remains that the UK leaves the EU on 29 March, and if we rule out a no-deal exit tonight, we will of course have to amend the European Union (Withdrawal) Act accordingly, just as we would have had to amend it if the Government's deal had passed yesterday. We will have to agree to an extension of the article 50 process so that an alternative way forward can be found. Both are a given.

However, the only question before us this evening is: does this House, in principle, definitively rule out a no-deal exit under any circumstances? No other question needs to be determined today, and that is why our preference is to support amendment (a).

There are only 16 days left now until 29 March. The possibility of a no-deal exit, whether by accident or design, is still very real, as the Father of the House made clear in his contribution. It is time we made a no-deal Brexit an impossibility, and this could be our last chance to do so. That is why I urge right hon. and hon. Members from across the House to decisively rule out a no-deal Brexit this evening, so that tomorrow we can turn our attention as a House to shaping what happens next.

6.50 pm

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): This has been a useful debate, if not unpredictable in its contributions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) made one of the key points in her contribution earlier when she said that we in this House were not given a request by the British public to leave the European Union; we were given an instruction by the British public to leave the European Union. This House triggered article 50, this House set the date for leaving as 29 March and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) pointed out, 80% of the Members of this House were elected on a manifesto commitment to honour the result of the referendum, which is not something we should take lightly.

I accept that many of those who seek a delay to Brexit have a range of motives, and I think an ounce of civility would sometimes do well in some of our proceedings. I accept that some seek a delay out of a genuine fear of what no deal might produce and want more preparations to be undertaken. However, there are also some in this House—we know it to be true—who seek to defy and reverse the result of the referendum itself. We in this House need to understand the democratic disaster that would await us if we took that course.

Many of us have made a number of compromises to be able to support the Prime Minister's agreement—I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for her tenacity and simple good manners in the way in which she has dealt

with the House—but if we are to leave the European Union in line with the instruction, it is a menu with limited options. We either leave with a deal, and the only deal available is the Prime Minister's deal at the present time, or we leave with no deal, with unavoidable consequences.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Dr Fox: I am not giving way.

The alternative is to revoke article 50 and have no Brexit at all, with unavoidable and unforeseeable consequences.

This motion focuses on the date of 29 March. At that point, we either have to leave with a deal, in line with article 50, or leave with no deal, for which the risks have been set out. If we choose neither of these, then we have to have an extension of article 50 either to make administrative changes for a deal that may already have been negotiated, or simply to have an extension when we do not know what the point of it will necessarily be. Let me say, on this extension, first, it is not in our gift unilaterally to grant such an extension; secondly, it requires unanimity among all 27 other European countries; and, thirdly, we cannot know what price might be extracted from the United Kingdom for that extension. It is not an easy option for the House or the country to take.

What are the alternatives to the Government's policy? We were told at the outset of the debate by the shadow Brexit Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), that Labour had repeatedly warned us about x, y and z. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have had nothing but inconsistency from the Labour Front Bench. The Labour leader did not want another referendum; now he does want another referendum, despite the fact that the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), says it is telling Labour voters they are stupid. The shadow Brexit Secretary wants a referendum, but will not put down an amendment to say that it can happen. Labour said that it wanted to end free movement of people; now it wants to be part of the single market all over again. It said it wanted an independent trade policy, but what it has is simply legally impossible, because the European Union rules do not allow a third country to have an influence on EU trade policy. *[Interruption.]*

Several hon. Members rose—

Dr Fox: Mr Speaker, I have made it clear that in the nine minutes available to me, which I accepted in order to allow more Members time to speak, I will not be giving way.

For much of this debate I did not recognise the country being described as the country I live in—a country that many seem to be describing as isolated, inept and intimidated by its own future. I believe in the future of this country. We are not passengers in our own destiny; we are able to control our own future. This is a country with exports at record levels; a country where last year, when global foreign direct investment fell by 40%, foreign direct investment went up by 20%; a country with employment at an all-time high; a country

[Dr Fox]

that has had more consecutive quarters of growth than any other G7 country; and a country that is producing these results under good Conservative management.

Neither did I understand the picture painted of the preparations already made for no deal, because we and the civil service have spent a great deal of time on the mitigations.

Mr Kenneth Clarke *rose*—

Dr Fox: Pharmaceutical companies are ensuring—*[Interruption.]* I am not taking interventions. Pharmaceutical companies are ensuring adequate stocks and increased air freight capacity. We have set out our new tariff policies for day one, liberalising our economy so that 87% of imports will be tariff-free, and setting up a trade remedies authority to protect our steel and ceramics industries. The EU has also made its own preparations.

Mr Clarke *rose*—

Dr Fox: We need to keep some balance in this debate. *[Interruption.]* I am not giving way—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is much gesticulation. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is seeking to intervene, but it is for the Secretary of State to decide whether to take the intervention. As I understand it, he is aware of the intended intervener but does not wish to take the intervention.

Dr Fox: The Father of the House already had more time to make his contribution than I have had today.

I want to answer the very direct question I was asked by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper): is the result of this vote that the default position is that we will not leave the EU on 29 March without a withdrawal agreement? That is the result of the motion we are debating tonight. But I have to say to the right hon. Lady that the only way to take no deal off the table in the longer term is to have a negotiated deal, unless we were to revoke article 50 and have no Brexit. There would be no worse outcome for this House, for this country and for our democracy than to have no Brexit. We have been given a clear instruction by the people of Britain. In the days ahead, we in this House must decide who in our democracy are the masters and who are the servants.

We heard from the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) what can only be described as a diatribe about the will of the people, which she derided. I happen to believe that when this House contracts out its sovereignty on an issue, which we did on the European Union, and we tell the people of Britain that we will accept what decision they take, we are honour-bound and duty-bound to take that decision. When she says that the will of the people does not matter, it might not matter to the Liberal Democrats, but it matters to the Conservative party. For me, this is ultimately a decision about our democratic values.

Wera Hobhouse: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I fear that it is more a point of frustration. No impropriety—*[Interruption.]* Order. I accept that the hon. Lady might be irritated, but the

right hon. Gentleman is not giving way and now is not a time for points of order. If she wants to make a point of order later, I will take it.

Dr Fox: For me, what we are engaged in is the most important democratic debate in this country's history. The British people have given our Parliament a clear instruction. It is time for us to determine who is the boss.

Mr Speaker: Under the Order of the House of today, I must now put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion. We begin with amendment (a), in the name of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who has since advised me and, equally—or more importantly—the House that she does not wish to move her amendment. I thank her for her courtesy in telling me and the House. However, I am advised that her co-signatory—it is in the ownership of the House—the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) does wish to move the amendment.

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the Secretary of State's assurances, but—

Mr Speaker: Order. The amendment must be moved formally. *[Interruption.]* Order. Do not tell me it is not moved. I know perfectly well what I am doing. The amendment is in the ownership of the House. The right hon. Member for Meriden has decided, perfectly properly, that she does not wish to move it; another Member who signed it does. It really is a very simple point for an experienced parliamentarian.

7 pm

The Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of business to be concluded at that time (Order, this day).

Amendment proposed: (a) Line 1, leave out from "House" to end and add

"rejects the United Kingdom leaving the European Union without a Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework for the Future Relationship.".—(*Yvette Cooper.*)

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 308.

Division No. 357]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote*
cast by Chris Leslie)
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul

Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas

Chapman, Jenny
Cherry, Joanna
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil

Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast
by Mark Tami*)
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon

Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, Liz

Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sheriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeter, Wes
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Nick Smith and
Bambos Charalambous

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam

Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David

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

Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian

Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles

Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill

Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeremy Quin and
Mr Alister Jack

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment proposed: (f), at end, add:

“; notes the steps taken by the Government, the EU and its Member States to minimise any disruption that may occur should the UK leave the EU without an agreed Withdrawal Agreement and proposes that the Government should build on this work as follows:

1. That the Government should publish the UK's Day One Tariff Schedules immediately;

2. To allow businesses to prepare for the operation of those tariffs, that the Government should seek an extension of the Article 50 process to 10.59pm on 22 May 2019, at which point the UK would leave the EU;

3. Thereafter, in a spirit of co-operation and in order to begin discussions on the Future Relationship, the Government should offer a further set of mutual standstill agreements with the EU and Member States for an agreed period ending no later than 30 December 2021, during which period the UK would pay an agreed sum equivalent to its net EU contributions and satisfy its other public international law obligations; and

4. The Government should unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU citizens resident in the UK.”. —(*Damian Green.*)

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 374.

Division No. 358]

[7.17 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Bridgen, Andrew
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Clark, Colin
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David

Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Garnier, Mark
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Goldsmith, Zac
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Hair, Kirstene
Hands, rh Greg
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon

Hoey, Kate
Holloway, Adam
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jack, Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Kawczynski, Daniel
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lewer, Andrew
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)

Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Philp, Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rowley, Lee
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stringer, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wragg, Mr William
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bill Wiggin and
Mr Marcus Fysh

NOES

Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Boles, Nick
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris

Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Cartlidge, James
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul

Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Frank
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gauke, rh Mr David
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Bill
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Griffiths, Andrew
Grogan, John
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hall, Luke
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Healey, rh John
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hoare, Simon
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
James, Margot
Jardine, Christine

Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Mr Chris
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lidington, rh Mr David
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast
by Mark Tami*)
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mak, Alan
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Masterton, Paul
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Miliband, rh Edward
Milton, rh Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine

Moore, Damien
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, Grahame
Morris, James
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Neill, Robert
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Perry, rh Claire
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, Mark
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
cast by Tracey Crouch*)
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Rudd, rh Amber
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sheriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura

Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stewart, Rory
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek

Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Peter Bone and
Steve Double

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 278.

Division No. 359]

[7.33 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Heidi
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Bebb, Guto
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boles, Nick
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic

Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Freeman, George
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Masterton, Paul
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward

Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Newton, Sarah
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pawsey, Mark
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Skinner, Mr Dennis

Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh John
Starmmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Nick Smith and
Bambos Charalambous

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen

Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke

Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermion, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoey, Kate
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott

May, rh Mrs Theresa	Shapps, rh Grant
Maynard, Paul	Sharma, Alok
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Shelbrooke, Alec
McPartland, Stephen	Simpson, David
McVey, rh Ms Esther	Skidmore, Chris
Menzies, Mark	Smith, Chloe
Mercer, Johnny	Smith, Henry
Merriman, Huw	Smith, rh Julian
Metcalfe, Stephen	Smith, Royston
Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Spencer, Mark
Milling, Amanda	Stephenson, Andrew
Mills, Nigel	Stevenson, John
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Stewart, Bob
Moore, Damien	Stewart, Iain
Mordaunt, rh Penny	Stewart, Rory
Morgan, rh Nicky	Stride, rh Mel
Morris, Anne Marie	Stuart, Graham
Morris, David	Sturdy, Julian
Morris, James	Sunak, Rishi
Morton, Wendy	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Murrison, Dr Andrew	Syms, Sir Robert
Neill, Robert	Thomas, Derek
Nokes, rh Caroline	Thomson, Ross
Norman, Jesse	Throup, Maggie
O'Brien, Neil	Tolhurst, Kelly
Offord, Dr Matthew	Tomlinson, Justin
Opperman, Guy	Tomlinson, Michael
Paisley, Ian	Tracey, Craig
Parish, Neil	Tredinnick, David
Patel, rh Priti	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Penning, rh Sir Mike	Tugendhat, Tom
Penrose, John	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Percy, Andrew	Vickers, Martin
Philp, Chris	Villiers, rh Theresa
Pincher, rh Christopher	Walker, Mr Charles
Poulter, Dr Dan	Walker, Mr Robin
Pow, Rebecca	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Prisk, Mr Mark	Warburton, David
Pritchard, Mark	Warman, Matt
Pursglove, Tom	Watling, Giles
Quince, Will	Whately, Helen
Raab, rh Dominic	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Redwood, rh John	Whittaker, Craig
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Wiggin, Bill
Robinson, Gavin	Williamson, rh Gavin
Robinson, Mary	Wilson, rh Sammy
Rosindell, Andrew	Wood, Mike
Ross, Douglas (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Tracey Crouch</i>)	Wragg, Mr William
Rowley, Lee	Wright, rh Jeremy
Rutley, David	Zahawi, Nadhim
Scully, Paul	
Seely, Mr Bob	
Selous, Andrew	
Shannon, Jim	

Tellers for the Noes:

Jeremy Quin and
Mr Alister Jack

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House rejects the United Kingdom leaving the European Union without a Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework for the Future Relationship.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House has today provided a clear majority against leaving without a deal. However, I will repeat what I have said before. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. We have a long time to go—both today and on subsequent days. Keep calm.

The Prime Minister: This is about the choices that this House faces. The legal default in UK and EU law remains that the UK will leave the EU without a deal unless something else is agreed. The onus is now on every one of us in this House to find out what that is. The options before us are the same as they always have been: we could leave with the deal that this Government have negotiated over the past two years; we could leave with the deal that we have negotiated but subject to a second referendum, but that would risk no Brexit at all—[*Interruption*—damaging the fragile trust between the British public and the Members of this House; we could seek to negotiate a different deal, but the EU has been clear that the deal on the table is indeed the only deal available. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The great likelihood—I await further comment, but I think that I can say this without fear of contradiction—is that there will be further opportunities for these matters to be debated, but in the immediate term, please, let us have some courtesy. There will be further debate on these matters, of that I think we can be sure.

The Prime Minister: I confirmed last night that if the House declined to approve leaving without a deal on 29 March 2019, the Government would bring forward a motion on whether the House supports seeking to agree an extension to article 50 with the EU, which is the logical consequence of the votes over the past two days in this House. The Leader of the House will shortly make an emergency business statement confirming the change to tomorrow's business. The motion we will table will set out the fundamental choice facing this House. If the House finds a way in the coming days to support a deal, it would allow the Government to seek a short, limited technical extension to article 50 to provide time to pass the necessary legislation and to ratify the agreement we have reached with the EU.

Let me be clear: such a short technical extension is likely to be on offer only if we have a deal in place. Therefore, the House must understand and accept that if it is not willing to support a deal in the coming days and as it is not willing to support leaving without a deal on 29 March, it is suggesting that there will need to be a much longer extension to article 50. Such an extension would undoubtedly require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May 2019. I do not think that that would be the right outcome, but the House needs to face up to the consequences of the decisions that it has taken.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Prime Minister for what she has said.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Tonight this House has once again definitely ruled out no deal. The Prime Minister said that the choice was between her deal and no deal. In the past 24 hours, Parliament has decisively rejected both her deal and no deal. While an extension of article 50 is now inevitable, responsibility for that extension lies solely and squarely at the Prime Minister's door. However, extending article 50 without a clear objective is not a solution. Parliament must now take back control of the situation.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

In the days that follow, myself, the shadow Brexit Secretary and others will have meetings with Members across the House to find a compromise solution that can command support in the House. That means doing what the Prime Minister failed to do two years ago: searching for a consensus on the way forward. Labour has set out a credible alternative plan. Members across the House are coming forward with proposals. Whether that is a permanent customs union, a public vote, Norway-plus or other ideas, let us as a House of Commons work to find a solution to deal with the crisis facing this country and the deep concerns that many people have for their livelihoods, their lives, their future, their jobs, their communities and their factories. It is up to us as the House of Commons to look for and find a solution to their concerns. That is what we were elected to do.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Let us be in no doubt that we are in a constitutional crisis of the making of the Prime Minister, who has run down the Brexit clock. What we see from the Prime Minister is a denial of the facts. She has faced two enormous defeats on her meaningful vote. Her deal is dead, and I am delighted that we have tonight given a very clear expression that under no circumstances and no time limit does this House want no deal.

The Prime Minister should have come to the Dispatch Box this evening with a degree of humility, accepting that she has failed and immediately putting in place the legislation to withdraw from legislation the threat of us leaving the European Union on 29 March. Why has she not done that? What this House needs to do tomorrow is take control of the process. We do not need a time-limited extension to article 50; it must be open-ended. I for one welcome elections to the European Parliament, if they are to take place.

We now must move on and have a meaningful debate about a people's vote. If necessary, we have to look at the revocation of article 50. I say once again to the Prime Minister that Scotland will not be dragged out of the European Union against its will. Everything that has gone on in this House is a determination that the best interests of the people of Scotland will be met as an independent European nation.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Now that the House has given effect to its will so clearly on separate occasions, can you give us the benefit of your help and advice as to how to translate these declaratory motions into practical action?

Mr Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me—to be honest, even if he will not—I prefer to hear the remaining points of order and then to invite the Leader of the House to deliver the supplementary or emergency business statement. We will see what is intended to take place tomorrow. We may well learn tomorrow of what is intended to take place in subsequent days. There has been a clear expression of will by the House. I rather imagine there will be conversations among colleagues.

Ultimately, the House can debate what the House wants to debate. We will see what it wants to debate and what shape events take in the days to come. I do not

want to express myself more forcefully than that—I do not think that would be right—but the right hon. Gentleman need be in no doubt that the matters will be fully debated. Members will have the opportunity to put their point of view. In all likelihood, many propositions will come to be tested.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you might be in a position to confirm that, as a matter of constitutional fact, a motion of this House, though important, cannot override statute law.

Mr Speaker: A motion of the House does not override statute law—that is true. If Members who have supported a motion want to ensure its ultimate success, further steps are required. I think that Members who have keenly attended to these matters in recent weeks are aware of that, and they know that there are opportunities available to them if they wish to take those opportunities.

Hilary Benn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Notwithstanding what the Prime Minister has just told the House, the time has come for two things to take place. The first is for the Government to respect the democratic instruction of the House of Commons. The second, since the Prime Minister says we have to be in favour of something—and I agree with her—is for the Government to facilitate the House of Commons having the chance to vote on a series of indicative propositions so that we can attempt to see whether we can find a way forward. If I may say so, Mr Speaker, I very much welcome what you said a moment ago about your willingness to ensure that the House of Commons gets the opportunity to debate that which it wishes to debate.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I stand by that: I think it is what any self-respecting Speaker should say and mean.

Caroline Lucas: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do wonder how the Prime Minister has the brass neck to come to this Chamber and to say that we should be worried about losing fragile trust when she herself is responsible for losing the trust both of this Parliament and of the country. She has just whipped her Members to vote against the deal that yesterday she stood at that Dispatch Box and promised would be a free vote. We urgently need an extension of article 50, and it needs not to be time-limited, because we need the time that is necessary in order to resolve this by going back to the country. If the last few weeks have proved anything, it is that MPs in this House are incapable of finding something they agree on, and it needs to go back to the people as soon as possible in a people's vote.

Mr Speaker: Let me say to the hon. Lady, who was attempting, I thought, to raise a point of order, that we will have to wait for the business statement by the Leader of the House. But unless I have a problem with my short-term memory—and I do not think I do—my clear recollection is that the Government indicated that if the House voted to demonstrate its opposition to exit from the European Union without a deal in the vote, or votes, today, there would be an opportunity on Thursday for there to be a vote, or possibly a number of votes, on an idea, or ideas, of article 50 extension. So I keenly anticipate that the hon. Lady will be in her place not

just for the business statement but tomorrow for such important proceedings as we can expect to take place.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When the arrangements for this week were announced, my understanding was that the Government were saying that if they lost the vote on their preferred deal, there would then be two days in which the House would be given the opportunity to express its clear opinion on no deal, and if that was clear, another day to say whether an extension was desired by the House, with the plain implication that the Government were going to accept the decision of the House and act on it. Indeed, we understand that a free vote was extended to Ministers so that the proper expression of opinion could be given.

As soon as the House expressed its opinion on no deal, the Government attempted to quash it and voted against it, putting a three-line Whip on the people they had previously given a free vote to, with a complete lack of success—the majority soared. If this evening the Prime Minister or another Minister will not accept that this is not just another motion, as if it was a women's institute debate that expressed an opinion—*[Interruption.]* I have higher regard for women's institutes' opinions than the Government have for the opinions of this House.

Can we have an assurance from somebody that tomorrow's debate is actually intended to set policy and is not a mere expression of opinion? That is my serious point, but no doubt I will be deluged with protests from women's institutes around the country about the unfortunate example I chose. I repeat my complete respect for the opinion of all women's institutes.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his point of order. My understanding, for what it is worth, is the same as his. That was the clear commitment. I am sure that that is what was intended. That was what was promised. That was what was understood. I have every expectation that the Leader of the House will reiterate today what has been said in recent days. It would be very strange if that were not the case. I have no reason to believe that the Government have suddenly shifted from the position they have taken in recent days. We will have to wait to see, but I have no reason to believe that at all.

Ms Angela Eagle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House has spoken, and the will of the House is clear, but the Government have given no indication so far that they are going to facilitate the will of the House becoming a reality by amending statute. If anything, the Prime Minister gave the opposite impression in her rather churlish response to tonight's events. If the Government decide not to facilitate our changing the statute to prevent us from leaving without a deal on 29 March, in clear contravention of the expressed will of the House, what can you do to facilitate this Parliament in ensuring that the Government do not get their way?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. My understanding is that the Government have tabled their motion for tomorrow, and it might help colleagues if they obtained copies of it. I do not think it is for me now to read out the Government's motion for tomorrow.

[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on!"] Very well. As I understand it, the Government—I thank them for this—have tabled a motion in the name of the Prime Minister which reads:

"That this House:

1. notes the resolutions of the House of 12 and 13 March, and accordingly agrees the Government will seek to agree with the European Union an extension of the period specified in Article 50(3);

2. agrees that if the House has passed a resolution approving the negotiated withdrawal agreement and the framework for the future relationship for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 by 20 March 2019 then the Government will seek to agree with the European Union a one-off extension of the period specified in Article 50(3) for a period ending on 30 June 2019 for the purpose of passing the necessary EU exit legislation; and

3. notes that if the House has not passed a resolution approving the negotiated withdrawal agreement and the framework for the future relationship for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 by 20 March 2019 then it is highly likely that the European Council at its meeting the following day would require a clear purpose for any extension, not least to determine its length, and any extension beyond 30 June 2019 would require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May 2019."

That is the Government's motion for tomorrow. That motion, of course, is amendable. If colleagues on either side of the House wish to submit amendments to that motion, they will have an opportunity to do so. I am speaking off the top of my head, but the same logic will apply in respect of that motion as has applied over the previous two days—namely, that any amendments to it tabled before the rise of the House tonight will appear on the Order Paper tomorrow. However, if manuscript amendments are tabled after the rise of the House, but before 10.30 am tomorrow, they will be accepted for consideration by the Chair—by me.

I would very politely suggest to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) that, although I will take one further point of order, if necessary—*[Interruption.]* Well, I would very politely suggest that, very soon, we ought at least to hear the business statement by the Leader of the House. I will take one or two very brief—

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Oh, very well—very briefly. *[Interruption.]* May I politely suggest that it might be advisable—

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I will take one who has signalled to me, the hon. Member for Wakefield, and then let us hear the statement by the Leader of the House. If there are then further points of order, I can take them afterwards.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful, but the motion you have read out at speed indicates that the Government are clearly making this House a prisoner of their deal. It is saying that we have to agree the deal by 20 March, and if we do that we will get the extension that this House is clearly going to be voting for tomorrow. When will the Government allow this House to express any alternatives to the deal that the Prime Minister, despite having been defeated twice, is still trying to railroad through this place?

Mr Speaker: That would be one of the merits of hearing about the business for next week, and there is also merit in colleagues conferring with each other, as—not surprisingly, and with frequency—they do.

Anna Soubry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is a constitutional crisis—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry if it bores people on that side of the House who have just voted as Conservatives for a no-deal Brexit. In any event, there is a real concern that time and again this House speaks and we vote, as you have seen this evening, and the response at the Dispatch Box is, in effect, for what we pass to be utterly dismissed. As a House, we seek your guidance as to how we can actually have a genuine impact on the way this Brexit is now conducted and how this Government respond. We hear tonight that four Cabinet Ministers abstained, and we hear of other Ministers who have resigned. It is a crisis of unprecedented levels, and I am afraid that yet again the Government Front Bench has many pairs of tin ears, and it has got to stop. Do we need now to enact statute in some way so that the will of this House can prevail?

Mr Speaker: I maintain that we should hear, before very long, the Leader of the House.

Mr McFadden *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will take the right hon. Gentleman.

I would say to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) that, as I think she is well aware, a number of Members across the House in recent weeks have had a concern about this particular policy issue. If significant numbers of Members across the House have a concern and a desire to act in common on this matter, it is open to them to explore the potential for doing so. They will find that they get professional advice on that matter, as any Member of the House is entitled to seek and obtain professional advice. It is not for me, here and now, to say exactly what should happen, but what I will say is that Members can work together and be heard.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Yes, all right. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) does not need to put up his hand as though he is in a classroom. It is not necessary.

Mr Seely: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Does the will of the House trump the will of the people?

Mr Speaker: That is a very interesting philosophical question, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has focused on it. This House operates in accordance with its own procedures, including, importantly, with its Standing Orders. It is not for me to seek to interpret the will of the people. The hon. Gentleman is a most dedicated public servant who has now been in the House for a little over 18 months, and he may well feel that he is very close to his people—I do not say that in any pejorative spirit, but he may well feel he is—and that he is deeply attuned to the will of the people. I do not claim that I am, and it is not for the Speaker to be. It is for the Speaker to seek to facilitate the will of the legislature.

Mr McFadden: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When the Prime Minister spoke at the Dispatch Box a couple of weeks ago to set out the arrangements for this week, she said that if the House voted down her proposed deal there would then be a vote on no deal. That has happened today. She said that if the House voted against leaving on a no-deal basis, we would then have an opportunity to vote to ask the Government to seek an extension to article 50. She did not say that was conditional on passing her deal between this week and the application for the extension. The motion that the Government have now tabled is a breach of the letter and the spirit of the assurances that were given at that Dispatch Box a couple of weeks ago. This is an attempt to stitch up the decision tomorrow, and the House should not stand for it. We should have a clean vote on instructing the Government to apply for an extension to article 50 without having to approve her deal beforehand.

Mr Speaker: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but the Government's position is not a matter for me. I say as a matter of pride that I have never been a member of a Government; that has never been part of my ambition. I must say that it is a lot easier to be Speaker than to be a Minister. My responsibility is to consider amendments if they are tabled. If Members want to table amendments to the Government's motion, they may do so. I rather imagine, from what the right hon. Gentleman has said, that he will want to do so.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has just said. Members across the House heard the Prime Minister say unconditionally that these days would be about a vote on whether we would accept no deal and then a vote on an extension, not a conditional vote. She is sitting on the Front Bench shaking her head. Perhaps she could now, through you, Mr Speaker, explain why what you have just read out is not a conditional vote, because it sure sounds like one to us.

Mr Speaker: Okay. No, the Prime Minister is not seeking to raise a point of order at this stage.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—and I think this might actually be a point of order. I am seeking some clarification, because you said that manuscript amendments could be tabled until 10.30 tomorrow morning. Well, the business begins at 9.30, so there might be some disparity there.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. I appreciate that he was listening attentively. There is no contradiction or tension whatever. He correctly surmises that tomorrow the House, as on every sitting Thursday, will meet at 9.30. However—I say this as much for the benefit of people listening to our proceedings as for the benefit of Members—Question Time is at 9.30, and at 10.30 we would ordinarily either have urgent questions or move straight to the business statement from the Leader of the House. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern not just for colleagues but for me, but I am perfectly sanguine about a deadline of 10.30 for the submission of manuscript amendments, and I am comfortable that I will be able to make judgments in

time for the start of the debate, and for the debate to take place on an informed basis. There is no problem there.

Neil Gray: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—and thank you for your forbearance. The House has spoken, and it has spoken very clearly. It has asked to rule out no deal at any time. You said in response to the hon. Members for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) that opportunities would be open for Opposition Members to ensure that the will of the House was followed through. However, given that the Government are in charge of the Order Paper, would you not expect them to be coming forward with the necessary legislation to ensure that no deal is ruled out at any time?

Mr Speaker: I am not sure that it is really for me to say that I expect one particular course of action or another. I feel, now that I have been around a little while, sometimes predictable things have happened and sometimes some very unpredictable and even, in some cases, rather curious things have happened, so I have got used to a range of possibilities and I do not think I would say that I expect this or expect that. What I do expect, not specifically of the Government, is that if Members feel strongly dissatisfied with what is on offer to them, they will communicate with each other and they will come forward, seek professional advice, seek my own and attempt to ensure that what they wish to be debated as elected Members of the legislature is indeed debated and, of course, by definition not just debated but voted upon by the House.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Following on from what you have just said, is it not a fact that if the moaning Minnies attacking the Government really had any guts they would table a motion of no confidence in the Government? That is how it is done traditionally, not through back-door means.

Mr Speaker: That is perfectly legitimate. The hon. Gentleman expresses his point of view with his characteristic force. It is open to people to table motions of no confidence—of course it is. That is a perfectly proper course of action and it can happen, and does, from time to time.

If there are no further points of order, we come to the emergency business statement by the Leader of the House.

Business of the House

8.21 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): Mr Speaker, in the light of tonight's decision, I should like to inform the House that tomorrow's business will now be a debate on a motion relating to an extension of article 50. On Friday 15 March, the House will consider private Members' Bills.

I shall announce next week's business tomorrow in the usual way.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Yet again the House has been given an emergency motion, and yet again we have only just had sight of it—a colleague has managed to get us copies of it. This is no way to run a Government and no way to run a country. We now have a situation where the Government are voting against their own motions, which is a terrible state of affairs. The Government are staggering from week to week, day to day, and motion to motion. The country deserves better.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the House.

Andrea Leadsom *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the House does not wish to comment. Fair enough. It is a business statement, so she can respond if she wishes but she does not wish to do so.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is no wonder that the Leader of the House chose not to respond, because that was a pathetic statement, given tonight's events and the chaotic cluelessness at the heart of Government. The public must be watching this place and wondering what on earth is going on. The Prime Minister gave a petulant and unsatisfactory response to the preceding events. This Government are still determined to flog a dead deal, but at some point they are going to have to accept that the game is over.

We have just got sight of tomorrow's motion and it seems to me that it is readily amendable. All we need to get rid of is the first two parts and we will get to what this House really wants and requires, which is an indefinite extension of article 50 until we get the issue resolved. The will of the House has to be respected in these matters.

I have seen the provisional business for next week and there is nothing in it—nothing at all—so the Government could table a motion that reflects the wish of this House to legislate to take no deal off the table. Is that in the thinking of the Leader of the House, and does she intend to do it? That is what this House expects, and it is now what this country expects.

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Prime Minister set out some time ago that should the House reject the withdrawal agreement and future declaration, there would be a discussion for the House to decide whether it wished to take leaving the EU without a deal off the table, and then, should the House make that decision, there would be a further discussion on whether the House wishes to seek an extension to article 50. That is the motion we will discuss tomorrow.

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has just said, tomorrow's motion will set out the fundamental choices facing the House. If the House finds a way in the coming days to support a deal, that will allow the Government to seek a short, limited, technical extension to article 50 till 30 June 2019, to provide time to pass the necessary legislation and ratify the agreement we have reached with the EU. If the House does not find the way to support a deal in the coming days, and is not willing to support leaving without a deal on 29 March, it is highly likely that the EU will require a clear purpose for any extension, not least to determine its length, and that any extension beyond 30 June 2019 would require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The motion, which we now know will be debated tomorrow—doubtless it will be subject to amendments—says that the House has to agree a motion

“approving the negotiated withdrawal agreement and the framework” by

“20 March”.

Does that mean that the Government intend to bring forward the same motion that we have dismissed in this Session on Monday or Tuesday next week? If so, I gently suggest to the Leader of the House that that flouts all the conventions that have operated in this House since the 16th century. It has always been held that, if a motion has been dismissed in one Session of Parliament, it cannot be brought again. Clerks regularly refuse to accept ten-minute rule Bills and private Members' Bills that have been disposed of in the Session. Will we have that motion on Monday or Tuesday? If so, does the Leader of the House confidently expect Mr Speaker to refuse to allow it?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the House has just voted twice on the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) among others. That vote was on the same amendment.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It appears to me that the Leader of the House is merely organising meaningful vote No. 3 on exactly the same deal in complete contravention of the will of the House expressed in two defeats of the Government motion. Instead of attempting to play this ridiculous game of chicken with the future of our country, and attempting to tear up all the conventions of this House, showing nothing but contempt for how it has made its decisions, should she not facilitate the decisions of the House by moving an amendment—a statutory instrument—that will take the date of our leaving the European Union of 29 March 2019 out of the statute? Is that not her job?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that tomorrow's motion is amendable. It is for the House to decide whether it wants to put forward amendments and vote on them. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, if the House votes for an extension, she will seek to agree it with the EU and will bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Does the programme motion tomorrow mean that the votes will be at the moment of interruption, or will they be at some other time?

Andrea Leadsom: The programme motion sets out that the vote will be at the moment of interruption, but it is subject to the agreement of the House.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House undertake this evening to use her best endeavours to ensure that, at the end of this process, the Government facilitate and enact the will of the House by bringing forward and making time for statutory changes, instead of simply offering more motions that do not have the operative Executive impact for which this House has voted?

Andrea Leadsom: The Prime Minister and I have both said that if the House votes for an extension, we will seek to agree that extension approved by the House with the EU and bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension. As has been said several times, it is not within the Government's gift to insist on an extension. That will be a matter for agreement with the EU and will potentially be subject to conditions imposed by it, and the hon. Lady will be aware that it will require unanimous agreement by all 27 members of the EU. I can reassure her, however, that the decision would come back to the House finally and would need to be approved by Parliament.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It was only a little while ago that the Government were attacking the Leader of the Opposition for not agreeing to meet the Prime Minister. If we are trying to fulfil the will of the House, surely the Government should be reaching out to all sections of the House to find a way through. Where in this timetable is there a facility for those sorts of discussions to take place?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Prime Minister has sought to reach out to Members across the House. The Leader of the Opposition was willing to meet once only and that was very late on in the discussions, but the Prime Minister and Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, have sought the views of Members across the House and will continue to do so.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): As the right hon. Lady knows, the Leader of the House has a hugely important constitutional role—to be the voice of Parliament to Government. The Government seem to be ignoring vote after vote in this Chamber, as we heard from the Prime Minister earlier this evening. The Leader of the House has announced that tomorrow we are to have an amendable motion on extending article 50. If the House passes those amendments, takes out the conditionality that the Government have put into it, it appears from the last two or three votes that they will just ignore that. How can we have confidence in the motions we discuss and pass and confidence in the Leader of the House, who has demonstrated in other areas that she can speak up for Parliament? She should be roaring to the Executive that the expressed will of Parliament is being ignored. What is she going to do about that?

Andrea Leadsom: I take very seriously my role as Parliament's voice in Government and at all times I seek to ensure that the views across the House are heard in the Government very clearly. I will always stand up for Parliament in that way. As I have always said, the Government take very seriously views expressed by this House. The Prime Minister has been clear that if the House votes for an extension, the Government will seek to agree that extension with the EU and will bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): This need not be the Schleswig-Holstein question all over again, but it does risk driving us all a bit mad. Now that the House has ruled out no deal, is not the only thing now entirely within the House's gift—as opposed to relying on members state of the EU—the revocation of article 50?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware that the revocation of article 50 would mean not leaving the EU and so would put us in direct contravention of the will of the people expressed in the referendum, and the Government will not be doing that.

Mr Speaker: Order. I simply say to colleagues that I think it is clear that whatever the House decides, it will not be a state secret. It will become public. It will be known. The message will be communicated. In fairness, I think the Leader of the House has acknowledged that whatever the House decides, it will be communicated to the European Union. That will happen, and the wording of what has been decided will be absolutely crystal clear. The will of the House will be forwarded to the European Union, whatever that will is.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Given that we have seen plenty of briefings indicating that meaningful vote No. 3 will take place at some point next week, and given that the pound appears to be going tonto just about every day, can the Leader of the House tell us when meaningful vote No. 3 will be, so that the markets can be prepared for the same nonsense again next week?

Andrea Leadsom: What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I will announce next week's business tomorrow. Obviously, however, he will be aware that we are currently focusing on trying to identify the will of the House, which is why we have tabled a motion enabling it to discuss tomorrow its desire, or otherwise, for an extension of article 50.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I will not rehearse the sequence of events that we were promised this week in the context of why we have reached this point tonight, but I am utterly astonished that the Leader of the House has produced a motion for us to debate tomorrow which is essentially a forerunner to meaningful vote No. 3. The entirety of the motion is dependent on the expression by the House of its view again, by 20 March, on not what she described to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) as “a deal”, but “the” negotiated withdrawal agreement and “the” framework for the future relationship, namely the current EU withdrawal agreement and the current framework for the future relationship that the House has already rejected twice. If the Government are listening to the

will of the House, the motion should clearly say, “We have listened to the will of the House, and we will go back to the European Union to seek an extension”, should it not?

Andrea Leadsom: As I have said to a number of Members, the Government are listening very carefully to the views of the House. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that if the meaningful vote was not passed, we would come back to the House today with a vote on rejecting a no-deal Brexit, and in the event that that was passed, we would come back to the House tomorrow to seek its views on an extension of article 50. That is exactly what we are doing. The Prime Minister has further said—as have I, just now—that if the House wants an extension of article 50, we will seek to agree that with the European Union, but what Members must understand is that it is not in the Government's gift to insist on an extension. That will be a matter for agreement with the European Union.

Mr Speaker: I think everyone is aware of that. I do not wish to be unkind to the Leader of the House, but I do not think she is telling us anything that we do not know. We all know that.

Andrea Leadsom: Members are asking me the same old question.

Mr Speaker: Well, repetition is not an unknown phenomenon in the House of Commons. I understand what the Leader of the House is saying, but I think everyone is perfectly well aware that an extension request is just that: a request.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): In claiming that the Government are listening, the Leader of the House really is stretching the boundaries of credibility. The Prime Minister was told after Chequers that the Chequers proposals did not command a majority of the House. She ignored that, and went off to Brussels. She then came back with something worse, and feigned surprise when, funnily enough, the House did not vote for it.

The Prime Minister and the Government have now been told twice—not by small numbers, but by unprecedented, historic numbers—that this deal does not command the support of the House of Commons. What the Leader of the House is trying to stand up this evening is, as has already been said, meaningful vote No. 3, and that will not succeed either. All that she is doing—or facilitating, as Leader of the House—is running down the clock, limiting our options and harming our country. I think that that is reckless and irresponsible, and it is not how she should be behaving as Leader of the House. Can she tell us when she plans to bring us meaningful vote No. 3? Why not do it tomorrow, so that we can inflict the defeat sooner rather than later?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. The Prime Minister set out, in response to the strong desire of this House, a trajectory towards a second meaningful vote, and if that was not passed towards giving the House the opportunity to take leaving without a withdrawal agreement off the table, and if that was passed giving the House an opportunity to ask for an extension to article 50. The Prime Minister has been clear that she will comply with the House's request, and all I am pointing out is two things. One is that it will be

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

a request—the Government cannot insist on it—and, secondly, the motion tomorrow will be amendable. So if the hon. Gentleman wants to put forward an alternative proposal that he believes will carry the House then of course, by definition in an amendable motion, he is able to do so.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Since the last vote I have taken the opportunity to canvass the external Brexit campaign groups to find out their opinion as to whether, in the light of all this, we were right to vote down the deal, and I can tell the Government that unanimously so far the opinion is that the deal was so rotten that we were absolutely right to vote it down and that come what may we should continue to do so. And I tell the Government now that when meaningful vote No. 3 comes back I will see to it that we honour—honour—what we owe to them: to keep voting this down however many times it is brought back, whatever pressure we are put under, and come what may. Please don't do it: go back to the EU and say, "It won't pass."

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend and I clearly have a different perspective on this. In my opinion the Prime Minister's proposal delivers on the will of the people as expressed in the referendum. It means we are leaving the single market and the customs union; we are taking back control of our money, our laws and our borders; we are getting out of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy; and, importantly, we will have the opportunity to write free trade deals with other nations around the world. But important too is the fact that the Prime Minister's deal respects the views of so many who did not want to leave the European Union, because it ensures that we will continue to have a close and collaborative relationship with our EU friends and neighbours. So in my opinion it is the best combination to deliver on the will of the referendum.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind—and I am always interested to hear his views—I would prefer to conclude the exchanges on the emergency business statement and if he is still keen to raise his point of order then I shall be happy to hear him.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): When we were in talks with the Prime Minister before—probably a month or six weeks ago—she was absolutely adamant that it was no deal, her deal or revocation. Now the Government have pivoted to extension. So why is there this change of position? Why did they not stick to no deal, her deal or revocation? Her deal is dead so it is now between no deal or revocation.

Andrea Leadsom: Actually what the Prime Minister was saying was that she was concerned that the House was not giving due consideration to her negotiated proposal, and what she was pointing out to the House is that the Government are determined to fulfil on the will of the people expressed at the referendum and that the alternative to either a negotiated deal such as her deal or not fulfilling on the will of the people was to leave the EU without a deal, which nobody believes would be in the best interests of the country.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): My right hon. Friend has said that we would need to have a clear purpose in order to extend article 50, particularly if that was for a short period of time. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether she believes that a change of chief negotiator will amount to such a clear purpose?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to the excellent work of the civil service, who have spent the last two and a half years above and beyond the call of duty—so many of them focused on delivering on the referendum. That is something to be proud of.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House not recognise that the Prime Minister will not be able to pass a deal simply with the support of the Members sitting behind her—and if she had not fully recognised that until this evening surely she does now? If there is to be any deal that we can take to the European Parliament, European Commission and European Council in order to try to secure any sort of deal other than a no-deal Brexit, she is going to have to negotiate a deal with Members on the Opposition side of the House—not just to talk to Members on the Opposition Benches, but negotiate a deal with them.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend has indeed reached out to Members across the House, and the hon. Gentleman knows that full well.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Once again the Government are happy to use the most arcane and incomprehensible procedures when it suits them in order to frustrate the will of the House, and also to ignore them when it suits them to do so. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who is no longer in his place, has pointed out that the Government seem determined to cast aside the time-honoured tradition that if you put forward a motion and lose it once, it is gone. Also, if the Government have already decided, as they clearly have, when the crucial third vote will be held, surely it is another time-honoured tradition to have the courtesy to give the House such information now, rather than keep it for some other time. Will the Leader of the House give a commitment that when the meaningful vote is brought back and the discredited deal is rejected yet again, every member of the Government will honour the time-honoured tradition of three strikes and they are out?

Andrea Leadsom: I find it a bit odd that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we are using arcane procedures when we are actually using business motions and motions of the House that are by no means arcane. We are merely fulfilling the commitment that the Prime Minister gave to ensure that the House could vote on whether it wished to take no deal off the table and then vote on whether it wished to request an extension to article 50 from the European Union.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Can the Leader of the House tell us whether there will be time to debate one quite interesting aspect of the withdrawal agreement? It really is an encapsulation of much of what is wrong with the Government's attitude to the House. It involves the backstop proposals for how the technicalities of customs will work at the border. They are silent on VAT

and they will require the EU's permission to be workable and compliant with the EU customs code. They will also require the EU to agree on what the law on our borders will be. This goes against the statement that the Government keep making that we will have control of our money, borders and laws through the withdrawal agreement. How can we identify this and explain it more fully than the Government have done to date?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure that there will be Ministers from the Department for Exiting the European Union on the Front Bench tomorrow. That might be an appropriate time for my hon. Friend to raise his specific questions.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am a new MP and I have lost my circus programme, so can the Leader of the house tell me what time close of play will be tomorrow? Or will there be an extension?

Andrea Leadsom: The motion that has been laid suggests that the House will carry on its debate until 5 pm, but that is a matter for the House to agree.

Mr Speaker: In other words, it is an amendable motion.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I would like to ask the Leader of the House whether it is still a convention that if a Government Minister breaks a three-line Whip, they are expected to resign.

Andrea Leadsom: Whipping is a matter for each Chief Whip. I am pleased to say that it is not a matter for me.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given that Parliament has rejected leaving the EU in a no-deal scenario, the Leader of the House has outlined that tomorrow we will debate extending article 50. She has also told us tonight that the Government cannot go back to the EU to ask for that extension of article 50 unless a proper deal has been agreed in Parliament. What is she doing to bring forward the mechanisms for Parliament to decide what they want to take back to the EU for the purposes of extending article 50, instead of this nonsense of another meaningful vote on a deal that we have already rejected twice?

Andrea Leadsom: I think perhaps the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. What I said was that if the House should vote to extend article 50, the Prime Minister has said that she will indeed go to the EU to seek its agreement to that. However, the fact is that that would only be a request. The Government are not able to insist upon it because it requires the agreement of all 27 EU members. So we can request the extension on behalf the House, and will certainly do so, and if the EU agrees to such an extension, the Government will bring forward legislation. The point that the Prime Minister was making is that we cannot insist on that extension.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): After Aberdeen's brilliant result against Rangers last night, it was probably only right to give Kilmarnock a wee win.

Last night, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House both gave a commitment that if this House backed no deal as a way forward, that would become Government policy. The extension of that principle and that logic, which is important after what the hon. Member

for Wycombe (Mr Baker) said, means that the Government should now adopt no "no deal" as their policy, so why is the first item of business tomorrow not a statutory instrument removing from legislation the exit day of 29 March?

Andrea Leadsom: The Prime Minister committed to allowing the House to decide whether it wanted to decline to leave the European Union without a deal, and the House made that decision. The Prime Minister also said that she would give the House the opportunity to decide to extend article 50, with a clear commitment to making that request should the House decide to agree to it. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the only way to avoid the legal default, which is still that the United Kingdom leaves the European Union on 29 March with or without a deal, is to put in place an alternative deal or, indeed, to extend article 50. I have merely stated the fact that that in itself requires the agreement of the all other 27 EU member states.

Business Without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FOOD)

That the draft Veterinary Medicines and Animals and Animal Products (Examination of Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 10 January, be approved.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the draft Product Safety and Metrology etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 7 February, be approved.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 20 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 6 to 8 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the draft Detergents (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 February, be approved.

That the draft Detergents (Safeguarding) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 14 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Uncertificated Securities (Amendment and EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Closure of Middleton Crown Post Office

8.52 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I rise to present a petition signed by 1,183 residents of Heywood and Middleton. The Post Office recently announced a plan to close 74 Crown post offices, including the Middleton post office in my constituency, and to franchise the services to branches of WHSmith. That will put jobs at risk, affect quality of service and accessibility, and have a negative effect on Middleton town centre. In addition, there is uncertainty about the future of WHSmith itself, which has recently announced the closure of some of its high street stores. It is a huge risk to relocate post office services into a business that is closing stores and may lose more.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government and Post Office Ltd to keep Middleton Crown Post Office open at its current location.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Heywood and Middleton,

Declares that Crown Post Offices provide a vital service to their communities; further that the Post Office propose to close the Middleton Crown Post Office and to franchise the service to a local branch of WH Smith; further that there is concern that this will adversely affect jobs, quality of service, and accessibility, and have a negative impact on Middleton town centre; and further that a local paper petition and online petition on this matter has received signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government and Post Office Ltd to keep Middleton Crown Post Office open at its current location.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002438]

War Pensions: Appeals Process

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Andrew Griffiths.)

8.54 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We have had another momentous debate and series of votes affecting the nation's future, but our role can also involve raising individual cases of injustice, so I am grateful for the opportunity to recall an issue that has affected one of my constituents. His experiences may well have affected others, which is why I want to bring it to the attention of the House. I hope that by debating it we can not only find a solution for my constituent by giving the Government an opportunity to do the right thing but also ensure that this situation does not happen again. I hope that by setting out the history of my constituent's complaint lessons will be learned.

Those who serve our country make many sacrifices defending our interests, and they rightly deserve our respect, support and fair treatment both during and after their service. I want to take this opportunity to thank all our armed forces personnel, past and present, who represent our country across the world and stand ready to defend our country day and night. It saddens me that I have to bring this debate today to highlight a case in which a former serviceman has not, I believe, been treated fairly or with the respect that he deserves.

My constituent, David Cottrell, who lives in Neston, served in the Army, in the Cheshire, then Mercian, Regiment, for a period of 22 years, from 1987 until 2009, during which time he saw active service in both Northern Ireland and Iraq. As a result of his service, he was left with a number of serious and long-term medical conditions and was awarded a war pension at 50% and a lower standard of occupation allowance in 2012. He suffers from a number of conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, which causes him to suffer disturbed sleep, anxiety and flashbacks. He also suffers from polyarthralgia—aches and pains in his joints—and a number of medical conditions affecting his back that cause him severe difficulty in standing, walking, using the stairs, sitting and bending. It also causes him difficulty in using his wrists to lift and carry everyday objects.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have sought the hon. Gentleman's permission to intervene. Does he not agree that there must be a simplified appeals process for war pensions, when we take into account the fact that the stress of that process for those suffering from PTSD, to which he referred, can be the straw that breaks the camel's back? This is another example of how our veterans are being let down by a system that must be reviewed urgently.

Justin Madders: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. In these times of uncertainty, we can rely on the certainty that he will intervene in the Adjournment debate. The point that he made is absolutely pertinent to my constituent's experiences. As the debate develops, I will show that he has experienced a convoluted appeals process, which only exacerbated his general condition.

As Members will know, the war pension scheme is run by Veterans UK to provide benefits for people with disablement caused or made worse by service in the armed forces. There is no list of prescribed diseases;

claims can be made for any medical condition that is suffered provided that there is a causal link between the condition and military service. Rates for a war disablement pension depend on the degree of disability suffered, which is assessed on a percentage basis akin to the industrial injuries scheme.

A range of allowances and supplements may be granted depending on an individual's circumstances, including for employability, mobility, constant attendance or severe disablement. As of 31 March 2018, there were 101,630 disablement pensioners and 15,854 war widows in receipt of a war pension, and in the year 2017-18, £517 million was paid out. With that amount of money at stake, it goes without saying that the process for assessment must be robust.

War pension claims are made to Veterans UK. If individuals are unhappy with the outcome they can request a review of their war pension decision, and they can also make an appeal to an independent tribunal.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend may be aware of the ongoing issue affecting those who allege that because of taking Lariam when they were in the forces, they have been completely disabled in later life. The way in which that has been dealt with is Kafkaesque. That affects many veterans, so does he agree that that needs to be sorted out as a matter of urgency?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are many scandals that are not going to go away and will not be resolved until truth and justice are delivered, so I support his call entirely.

I would like to discuss the review and appeals process, because it has utterly failed to assist my constituent to receive the war pension to which he is entitled.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): This soldier was in my regiment and I suspect in my battalion. May I ask the hon. Gentleman whether his constituent has consulted regimental headquarters, either in Chester or in Lichfield?

Justin Madders: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I do not know the answer to that. My constituent has sought numerous sources of assistance throughout the years, some of which I will go into. This has proved to be an extremely time-consuming and convoluted process, which has caused him unnecessary stress—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to that—and has undoubtedly exacerbated his ill health and affected his quality of life. Opportunities to act and put things right were repeatedly missed throughout the handling of his case. I hope that his experience has not been repeated in the other 588 war pension appeals cases that, at 11 November 2018, were still in train.

As I have stated, my constituent was awarded a war pension at 50% and a lower standard of occupation allowance in 2012, following an assessment that noted that Mr Cottrell

“cannot walk more than 200m without stopping or severe discomfort”. Upon leaving the Army, he worked as a tutor for Manchester College for a number of years, delivering training to professional drivers, which included on-the-road training as well as classroom-based training. In 2013, he applied for his pension from the college to be released early on health grounds. He was referred to Dr Nightingale

in December 2013, via the occupational health team, for an assessment to be made. Dr Nightingale concluded that he was unable to work as she did not

“envisage significant recovery to facilitate return to work in due course to enable ‘gainful employment’ at 30 hours per week, every week, on a sustained basis for a 12 month period”.

As Mr Cottrell was unable to work, he submitted a deterioration claim to request a formal review of his war pension assessment in January 2014 and was sent for an assessment with Atos Healthcare in April of that year. The report from this assessment is scattered with errors, which is not surprising, given that Mr Cottrell informs me that he was not asked all the questions that appeared in the report. We have all heard about the errors and indignities our constituents have suffered during these assessments, and earlier today I took part in a Westminster Hall debate on disability assessment services, where Member after Member brought up harrowing examples of flaws with the assessment procedure. Now is not the time to rehearse those massive flaws in the way those assessments are carried out, because, flawed though that assessment was, I am here today because of opportunities that were not taken afterwards to put the situation right.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the pension age has been increased to 67 and we have WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—women who must also have served in the Army, perhaps in this regiment, and they are entitled to a pension as well, along with others?

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and he is right; the injustices the WASPI women have suffered have been repeatedly mentioned in the Chamber. When they see how we are incapable of finding a way through our current predicament, they will be disheartened to see that this Government cannot deal with such a major injustice.

Let me return to Mr Cottrell's assessment. It contained many errors, including saying that Mr Cottrell drinks alcohol occasionally when he was not asked about alcohol during his assessment. It exaggerated his ability to walk, saying that he was able to walk further than 800 metres, despite only being observed walking 10 metres to the examination room during the assessment. Let us not forget the earlier assessment in 2012 said he could not walk more than 200 metres, and clearly his condition had not improved in the meantime. Perhaps the most incredulous part of the assessment was the conclusion that his PTSD was ‘likely to improve’, an assumption that was not based on any medical evidence whatsoever. In fact, it was direct contradiction to what Dr Nightingale said in her report, which was that this would not happen. Clearly, her views were not given anything like the same weight as the views of the Atos assessor, who saw Mr Cottrell for only a short amount of time.

As a result of the incorrect report, Mr Cottrell received a decision letter in July 2014 stating his war pension rate would not change. He disputed the findings of the assessment, as he did not believe that the medical evidence had been adequately taken into consideration. His complaint was referred to the independent complaints executive, which informed Mr Cottrell that his complaint was not in its remit and so he requested that Veterans UK investigate his complaint. Mr Cottrell

[Justin Madders]

informs me that the chief medical officer of Veterans UK reviewed the complaint and concluded that Dr Nightingale's assessment was incorrect as it only referred to him being unable to work for the next 12 months. Rather incredulously, he also said that the report should not be trusted due to the close relationship Mr Cottrell would have with Dr Nightingale as his GP. Given that Dr Nightingale assessed Mr Cottrell via the occupational health department of his employer and was not his GP, this demonstrates clearly that her report was not properly considered, understood or possibly even read at all.

In fact, the contents of Dr Nightingale's report are really the nub of the issue, as it has since transpired that the paperwork shows that the decision on Mr Cottrell's claim was made three days before the medical report from Dr Nightingale was received by the assessors. The report was recorded as being received by the department on 14 July, although for some reason the recorded date is 15 July, but, crucially, the decision on Mr Cottrell's claim was made on 11 July. This is a basic error—it is factually indisputable—but since that point, the whole process has been characterised by a total failure to acknowledge that mistake and act accordingly.

An example of that failure is that the records reveal that when the assessing doctor was informed that Dr Nightingale's report had been received late and was asked whether that would have altered his decision, the assessing doctor did not actually look at it again, because the response was in fact from a different colleague, who said that the assessing doctor was not available, but that in the new doctor's opinion the original decision remained appropriate. It seems to me to be wholly inadequate to have one professional trying in effect to second-guess what another professional might have said. It should have been sent back to the original doctor to do the whole thing again. Had that happened, I very much doubt that we would be here today.

Following that decision, Mr Cottrell proceeded with the internal complaints procedure of Veterans UK, while also appealing the decision at tribunal. His case was eventually heard in February 2015, and the tribunal was unsuccessful. Worryingly, papers from the tribunal demonstrate that half Dr Nightingale's report was omitted from the appeal pack. So, for a second time, the full evidence was not considered. Following that, Mr Cottrell was told that only procedural issues could be dealt with via the remaining complaints procedure.

Mr Cottrell informs me that because of the controversy over Dr Nightingale's report, he decided to write to her in September 2015 about the interpretation that the department had made of her report regarding the period for which he was unfit for work. Dr Nightingale responded by stating that in her professional opinion, as had been detailed in the report previously, Mr Cottrell was permanently unable to work. That letter was then sent to the MOD.

In the meantime, Mr Cottrell made a new deterioration claim for extra allowances for his war pension, and Dr Nightingale's letter was added to the new claim file, rather than being considered as part of the ongoing dispute regarding the 2014 Atos assessment. This review resulted in an increase in Mr Cottrell's war pension from 50% to 70% in August 2015, and he got

unemployability supplement in November 2015. Indeed, on 26 November 2016, Mr Cottrell received a letter from Veterans UK saying that he was entitled to unemployability supplement

“because we think you are unable to work”.

Curiously, this decision did not require a medical assessment, and instead used both the letter submitted by his GP and the report made by Dr Nightingale. So, 18 months on, we finally got the right decision, even though the medical opinion had not changed during that time. Given that both the information from his GP and Dr Nightingale had been discounted by Veterans UK previously, Mr Cottrell feels that demonstrates that the objection to his appeal was unfounded and that his award should be backdated to January 2014, when the deterioration was originally reported and the application made.

In the meantime, with regards to his complaint, Mr Cottrell was informed by Veterans UK that it would no longer respond to his or his solicitor's correspondence, so he referred the complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. Following this, Mr Cottrell received a visit at home from the customer services manager of Veterans UK. He tells me that during this visit he felt he was being encouraged to drop his complaint because his new claim had been approved. I find that a rather curious approach to take, if not an improper one. Frankly, the implication that he should be satisfied with his lot is simply not good enough.

My constituent deserves to receive the war pension to which he was fully entitled from the beginning. He should not be expected to write off several years of underpayment just because the MOD got it right in the end. I am deeply concerned that because the appeals process open to him was not sufficient to deal with his complaint and instead resulted in a drawn-out affair, he had to use a solicitor, running up a bill of nearly £5,000. It was only because of the financial costs that he could not pursue his legal case any further.

I have been trying to resolve this unfair situation since June 2015, just after I was first elected. That is nearly four years. In that time, I have written to the Minister responsible on nine occasions and twice to the independent complaints panel, which subsequently took up Mr Cottrell's complaint. At this point, I pay tribute to my caseworker Eve, who has done a great job in keeping the issue going all the way through. We should all acknowledge the great work that our staff do. I think that every Member would agree that without them we would not be anywhere near as effective as our constituents would like us to be.

As the House can tell, the details of this case are long and complicated, but at the heart of it lie two simple truths: first, a mistake was made in assessing Mr Cottrell's deterioration claim in 2014; and secondly, since then, no one has been prepared to admit that mistake and put it right. That is not how justice is supposed to work in this country. If a wrong has occurred—I hope that it is patently obvious from what I have said that the original decision was wrong—then nobody, and certainly not someone who has suffered as a result of service to their country, should be faced with such a begrudging attitude, which is essentially, “Well we got there in the end, albeit a few years late, so be satisfied with your lot.”

That brings me back to where I started. Our servicemen and women deserve respect, support and fair treatment both during and after their service. I do not believe that we have seen that in this appeals process. I am concerned that the bodies and processes are not sufficient to deal with complaints in general.

Eventually, the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees found in Mr Cottrell's favour and strongly recommended that his war pension was backdated, yet Veterans UK ignored this recommendation. I appreciate that it is an "advisory" committee, but what is the point of making recommendations if no one listens to them and they cannot be enforced? Mr Cottrell was also concerned that he was not able to present his case in person to the VAPC, which meant that he could not, for example, make the case for repayment of his legal fees. Mr Cottrell does not know what evidence was considered by the panel, and his communications with VAPC were via Facebook Messenger. I think there is now an acceptance that that was not an appropriate channel for communication, but it does bring into question the resources available to the VAPC to deal with the administration of hearings, which seemed to take an age to happen.

It has also been brought to my attention that the Independent Complaints Panel is made up of members of the VAPC, so how, in those circumstances, can it really be independent? In my correspondence with the Minister, and his predecessor, I have asked for a review of the way that this case has been handled, so that mistakes are learned from and no one else has to suffer in the way that my constituent has. I believe that my constituent deserves an apology from the Ministry of Defence, compensation to cover his solicitor's fees and the backdating of his award to the original application date.

As the Minister himself confirmed in his letter of March 2017, the backdating of awards can be considered when there has been an error in the handling of a case, and I believe that that is the only reasonable outcome. It is manifest that there was an error in the original assessment, and after four years there was a recognition by the VAPC that the original decision was wrong, but why my constituent feels so strongly about this, as do I, is that it should not have taken four years to go through this process, which at the end of it turns out to be something that cannot be legally enforced.

Although there is obviously the individual injustice that my constituent has suffered, questions need to be asked about how such an obvious error was allowed to continue for so long. The Government also need to review the powers of the VAPC. If its decisions cannot be enforced then it is a toothless body, which gives people false hope and wastes people's time. Frankly, our veterans deserve better.

9.12 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on securing this evening's debate on this very important subject. At the outset, I should pay tribute to all members of our armed forces, in whichever service they serve in, for their bravery and commitment to protecting the values and freedoms that we are so fortunate to enjoy in this country. I am sure that the House will agree that both

they, and those who served before them, are deserving of an enduring debt of gratitude by the nation. That is precisely why debates such as this are so important and why, as I said, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman for his persistence in this case.

The Government's concern for servicemen and women does not end when they leave Her Majesty's armed forces. In the context of this debate, we are determined to ensure that, where they have been injured, they have speedy, fair and transparent access to pension and compensation rights. The hon. Gentleman rightly raises the case of his constituent, Mr Cottrell. He also rightly highlights that this has been the subject of extensive ministerial correspondence now over some four years. Indeed, I was the Minister's predecessor, so some of the correspondence has been with me. Therefore, I am only too well aware of that case.

The hon. Gentleman goes into enormous detail of the case, and much of that has been dealt with in the detailed correspondence that we have had. For the purpose of the debate this evening, it would not be in the House's interest for me to go through all of that detail, not least because I do not have time. There is a wider point here about how this process works. What I would like to do—I will come back in some detail later—is to touch on some misunderstandings about how this process works, or is seen to work. Crucially, I hope also to touch on how we are looking at improving this process so that, hopefully, cases such as this will be more transparent and will not go through the long-winded process that we have seen.

The tribunal was created in 2008 as part of the unified tribunal system, which was established at that time under the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007. Formerly, it was dealt with by the pensions appeal tribunal. There are separate tribunals for veterans in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but United Kingdom law applies throughout. I will come back to the separation of process, because that is one area where we can improve.

As the tribunal service is part of the Ministry of Justice, I stress that any decisions reached at appeal are wholly independent of any decisions that may have been reached by the Ministry of Defence. The first-tier tribunal has jurisdiction to hear appeals from veterans who are unhappy with a decision reached by Veterans UK, the organisation that receives claims from service personnel under the compensation schemes that it administers. Veterans UK administers two schemes: the war pension scheme, which deals with injuries sustained or aggravated by service in Her Majesty's armed forces prior to 6 April 2005; and the armed forces compensation scheme, which deals with injuries sustained in service on or after 6 April 2005.

The tribunal appeals process is determined by the Tribunal Procedure (First-tier Tribunal) (War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber) Rules 2008. I will explain how the process works. A claim is made by the claimant to my officials within Veterans UK. We have heard about that. They assess the merits of the claim and reach a decision based on service and medical records and external medical evidence from the claimant's general practitioner and hospital consultants, as appropriate. A claim may typically be for a disabling injury or battle stress psychological disorders. If Veterans UK does not allow the claim, the claimant can seek a review of that

[Mark Lancaster]

decision. In the case of a claim under the armed forces compensation scheme, that is called a reconsideration. If the decision remains the same on review, the claimant may appeal to the first-tier tribunal, but they must do that within one year of receiving written notice of the Veterans UK decision. In the case of claims under the armed forces compensation scheme where a reconsideration has not been requested, that will none the less be carried out as part of the appeals process.

Following an appeal against a decision being made to my officials within Veterans UK, it prepares what is known as a response document. That document includes all the evidence upon which the decision under appeal was based, along with any relevant medical and legislative information. A copy of that is sent to the tribunal service, the appellant and their representative at the tribunal. Once that has been received by the tribunal service, it begins the process of listing the hearing at a venue as close to the appellant's home as possible.

The appeal to the tribunal is a full-merits hearing, which means that it is a complete reappraisal of the case. The appellant can bring evidence and witnesses to the tribunal and the panel is made up of a judge, a medical member and a service member. The panel ensures that proceedings are balanced and inquisitorial in their approach. Tribunals are less formal than court environments and every effort is made by the panel to assist appellants in putting their case. Sometimes appellants are helped by members of various support groups and charities such as the Royal British Legion, the Royal Air Forces Association, Combat Stress, Blesma: the Limbless Veterans, the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association and UK armed forces charities.

Bob Stewart: I thank the Minister for giving way, and I thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for securing this debate. I make the point to the House that one of the things that Mr Cottrell might or might not have done is lean on his friends in the Ellesmere Port company. There is a Cheshire Regiment old boy network there, and that is very important. If the hon. Gentleman would like to give me more details—I seem to remember a Cottrell serving with me in Bosnia—I will make sure that there is a connection.

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes an important point: while there is very much a process—this goes very much to the heart of our armed forces and how we operate—the wider support mechanism through the regimental associations that he describes can also offer significant assistance to our veterans, particularly when they have to go through what can be a fairly challenging and difficult process. I hope the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston will follow my hon. Friend's advice and do that.

Let me return briefly to the tribunal process. A decision of the first-tier tribunal can be appealed to the administrative appeals chamber, or the upper tribunal, if it appears

that there may have been an error of law. England, Wales and Northern Ireland are the only parts of the United Kingdom where appellants in these cases must lodge their appeal with Veterans UK rather than the tribunal itself. Indeed, it is unique in this regard in the unified tribunals system. I appreciate the concerns of many stakeholders in this area of law, expressed over several years, that this inconsistency is undesirable. Indeed, the complexity of the process seems to have made a contribution to the hon. Gentleman's constituent's case. It has been suggested that the fact that Veterans UK is part of the MOD means that there is a lack of independent assessment of claims. However, the Government are satisfied that Veterans UK is scrupulous in assessing veterans' claims. While it is accepted that there can sometimes be a delay in the sending of appeals documentation from Veterans UK to the first-tier tribunal, this is an inherent risk in any system in which there are separate tiers of administration.

The process in Scotland is quite different. There, appeals are sent by veterans directly to the tribunal. This is known as direct lodgement. The Government agree that direct lodgement should also apply in England and Wales, although for this to happen there would first need to be changes to the tribunal's procedure rules, which are made by the independent Tribunal Procedure Committee. Subject to the necessary changes being put in place by the committee, the Ministry of Justice intends to introduce direct lodgement as part of an ambitious programme of court and tribunal reform in which it is investing about £1 billion, and which is already under way. The aim is to introduce direct lodgement for veterans' pension and compensation appeals in England and Wales next year—in 2020—if we can, but because of other work ahead of it in the reform programme, I cannot give the House the firm assurance that that will happen.

I would like to draw the House's attention to the vital role played by my officials within the Veterans Welfare Service. They can and do assist our veterans in submitting compensation claims, and provide advice about how to submit an appeal should they be unhappy with a decision reached about their compensation entitlement. In addition to this, the welfare service can provide help and advice on a much wider range of issues, including access to charitable assistance, housing and entitlements to benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw the House's attention to the challenges that his constituent has met while going through this process. While the principal substance of his appeal was dismissed, there has been an apology for some of the handling of his case. I hope that I have taken this opportunity to outline to the House how we are looking at ways of making this process better and more fit for purpose in future.

Question put and agreed to.

9.22 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Divisions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)

That the draft Waste (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 18 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 235.

Division No. 355]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey

Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine

Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel

Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch*)
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross

Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Heidi
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Davies, Geraint
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine

Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Norris, Alex
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherrieff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom

West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Williams, Hywel

Williams, Dr Paul
Wilson, Phil
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (IMMIGRATION)

That the draft Immigration (European Economic Area Nationals) (EU Exit) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 11 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 276.

Division No. 356]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey

Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon

Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch*)

Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen

Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma

NOES

Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Heidi
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela

Reynolds, Jonathan	Smeeth, Ruth
Rimmer, Ms Marie	Smith, Angela
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey	Smith, Cat
Rodda, Matt	Smith, Eleanor
Rowley, Danielle	Smith, Jeff
Ruane, Chris	Smith, Laura
Ryan, rh Joan	Smith, Nick
Saville Roberts, Liz	Smith, Owen
Shah, Naz	Smyth, Karin
Sharma, Mr Virendra	Snell, Gareth
Sheerman, Mr Barry	Sobel, Alex
Sheppard, Tommy	Soubry, rh Anna
Sherriff, Paula	Spellar, rh John
Siddiq, Tulip (<i>Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft</i>)	Stephens, Chris
Skinner, Mr Dennis	Stevens, Jo
Slaughter, Andy	Streeting, Wes
	Stringer, Graham

Sweeney, Mr Paul	Vaz, Valerie
Swinson, Jo	Walker, Thelma
Tami, rh Mark	Watson, Tom
Thewliss, Alison	West, Catherine
Thomas, Gareth	Western, Matt
Thomas-Symonds, Nick	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Thornberry, rh Emily	Whitfield, Martin
Timms, rh Stephen	Williams, Hywel
Trickett, Jon	Williams, Dr Paul
Turley, Anna	Wilson, Phil
Twigg, Derek	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Twigg, Stephen	Yasin, Mohammad
Twist, Liz	Zeichner, Daniel
Umunna, Chuka	

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 March 2019

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Application of the Family Test

9.30 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the application of the family test.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am delighted to have secured this debate and to be introducing it; it is a refreshing change to be in this Chamber talking about something other than Brexit.

I secured the debate because this year marks the fifth anniversary of the family test, which was introduced when David Cameron was Prime Minister, so I felt it would be an appropriate time to review the test's application across Government. While conducting my review, I was intrigued to learn that almost 150 parliamentary questions had been asked on the topic since the test's introduction. There is significant interest in its application—particularly among my Conservative colleagues, if I may say so.

I am pleased to present to the House the review of the family test that I conducted with the Centre for Social Justice—I have a copy here. I place on record my thanks to Frank Young of the CSJ for his work with me on producing it, and to my parliamentary assistant Sam Yung, for his very hard work. As an elected Member, I get the credit for the report, but I should acknowledge that, as usual, other people have done most of the hard work to produce it.

I hope that the Minister will read the review and consider its recommendations; I know that he has already had a look. It was carried out with the intention of providing the Government with constructive and practical recommendations for improving the application of the family test, so I hope that he and his officials will take that on board when they consider it. I welcome the Minister for the Cabinet Office's comment:

"We know that there is work left to do in order to ensure that the Family Test becomes fully embedded in every department."

We are sympathetic to the view expressed by Ministers and officials that making the family test a statutory obligation would create a tick-box culture, contrary to the test's intentions. We have tried to avoid repeating the argument for making the test statutory, following oral evidence to us that suggested that doing so would make the test "a political football".

Strengthening family life should always be a Government priority. Stronger families improve outcomes for children, while the break-up of family relationships is often the quickest route into poverty. Poverty figures show that children in families who break apart are more than twice as likely to experience poverty as those in families who stay together. The consequences of families breaking up and the role of stronger families find their way into every part of Government, which is why the family test is so important.

New polling evidence from the Centre for Social Justice shows that

"the general public support a government prioritising family within its policy making and rhetoric... Approaching three in four (72 per cent) adults in Britain think that family breakdown 'is a serious problem and that more should be done to prevent families from breaking up'... More than eight out of ten adults...think that 'stronger families and improved parenting are important in addressing Britain's social problems'."

The review is also intended as a reminder that the test will be important if the Minister shares my ambition for the Government to do everything they can to strengthen families as part of a wider approach to policy. I regret that my review shows that such a commitment is not shared by all his ministerial colleagues; I say that as someone who supports them and is willing them to be more ambitious in their approach to social reform. However, I commend the Departments that are clearly taking the issue seriously and that came out well in our research: the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health and Social Care were able to provide very detailed examples of the use of the family test and its application to their work.

By its very nature, family does not fit neatly into a single Government silo, which is one reason why the Government-wide family test was introduced in the first place. Family can also be a challenging subject for officials to consider, particularly the practical relevance of family breakdown. That is clear from some examples of bespoke guidance to officials on the test's application, in which the guidance is technical in nature and provides no clear evidence base or clarity about how family applies to a particular Department, or about the consequences of family breakdown for its work.

My first recommendation and request to the Minister is, I believe, simple: each Department should appoint a named senior policy lead, as the Cabinet Office has done, who would be tasked with strengthening the family test network and spreading expertise within the Department. They would amend departmental business plans to include the family test, the Department's objectives that relate to the family and the impact on families of its work. I do not believe that that would be particularly challenging to the Government, but it is one change that could be made immediately. I hope that the Minister might lead on the matter and ask Departments to appoint a lead. I put him on notice that in six months I intend to return with parliamentary questions on whether that has been delivered.

Saying that, may I praise the work of officials in the Minister's Department on promoting the family test across Government with a new family test network? I know that he and they are looking to refresh guidance to Departments; I ask that he consider conducting a formal Government-wide review to mark the fifth anniversary of the test. That does not need to be a difficult exercise, and it would renew the Government's stated commitment to family policy. I recommend that the review be led by someone outside the Department who can bring an external perspective.

External advice can be helpful to the Government in building the evidence base for the impact of family on Departments. The issue of evidence is particularly challenging, so wise counsel is needed. We recommend that the Government make

"better use of external expertise (for example, the Relationships Alliance) by creating an expert reference group. This group should be formalised through a paid expert chairperson who would act as a lead to the group. The group would assist with difficult policy

[Steve Double]

questions relating to the Test... The group would also help each department establish an evidence base on issues relating to the family."

Our review involved writing to 14 Departments with a series of questions about their implementation of the family test almost five years after it was introduced, supplemented by written questions to all those Departments in the other place. The responses from Ministers were revealing and, in many cases, concerning. Not a single Department, including the Minister's, routinely records the application of the test, so none of them could tell me or CSJ researchers how many times it had been applied—despite his Department's clear guidance:

"It is important that the application of the Family Test is documented in an appropriate way as part of the policy making process."

We uncovered some good examples of Departments that were able to evidence the application of the family test and its impact on policy making. Others, astonishingly, claimed that family had no relevance to them. In answer to a written question, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy claimed:

"The majority of BEIS policy areas do not have a direct impact on the formation, make-up, or breakdown of families."

I am not sure that working parents struggling with work and family life would agree. Surely the Government understand the connection between work and stronger families.

A lack of transparency about the application of the family test has led to concern that it is not being applied across Government in the way that was intended. Since the introduction of the test in 2014, 149 parliamentary questions have been asked in both Houses of Parliament about it. The Centre for Social Justice has taken oral evidence from MPs who regularly ask parliamentary questions on the application of the family test, and who have criticised Ministers' responses, which are opaque because no record of the test is kept; there is no statutory requirement to do so. That should not be something to hide behind.

There is good reason not to make the family test a statutory requirement, but equally we need to improve transparency around the test and confidence in its successful application. Although I understand that the intention of the family test is not, and never should be, to reduce family life to a tick-box exercise, there is plenty of evidence in the review that more could be done to record its consideration separately from any requirement to publish that deliberation. We have called for a duty to record. The Minister, as the Government's lead on this, could make it part of his work to ask Departments to record the number of times the family test has been applied, and to what areas of policy, and to publish that information with an annual statement. That would help to ensure that the test's prominence is assured across Government.

We have heard of examples of Ministers rejecting advice or proposals if the test had not been applied. We would like that practice extended. Any review of the family test should simply advise Ministers routinely to reject proposals that do not come with a clear statement on the family test. We are told over and over again that the Government are committed to strengthening families, but when we ask if the family is being properly considered in the work of Departments, they cannot even tell us if

they have applied the Government's own family test. The review should make Ministers stop, think, and tell officials clearly that they simply will not consider any ideas unless there is clear evidence that the impact on family life has been thought through.

In coming months, I will challenge the Government to up their game on strengthening families, as I am sure other colleagues will. A Government review would be welcome, to complement the work done by the Centre for Social Justice. I ask the Minister to meet me and other interested colleagues very soon to discuss the family test and how we can work together to help improve its application.

9.42 am

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) for bringing forward this debate, and the work of the Centre for Social Justice over many years on this issue. My hon. Friend quite rightly said that it is refreshing not to be speaking about Brexit in a debate, but over many years, many of us—particularly those sitting here—have spoken often about strengthening family life. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that much more needs to be done, and to be done by this Government.

In December 2017, I submitted written questions to every Department—15 of them—asking how they had applied the family test. More than half provided an identical and completely inadequate response:

"The Government is committed to supporting families. To achieve this, in 2014 we introduced the Family Test, which aims to ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning are recognised early on during the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions made by Ministers. The Family Test was not designed to be a 'tick-box' exercise, and as such there is no requirement for departments to publish the results of assessments made under the Family Test."

That is very ironic, given that it is something of a 'tick-box' reply, and only really restates the importance of the question.

Several other Departments provided equally inadequate replies or replies that lacked any information. I will share some of them. The Attorney General Office's reply was one line long:

"The AGO has not been the sponsoring department for any legislation in this session."

Officials must have—or should have—considered the issue during the Session.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said:

"Although not a statutory requirement, the impact on families is considered as part of the Department's compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty as specified in the Equality Act 2010."

That does not tell us anything about what the Department did.

The clear contrast between the duty under equalities legislation and this legislation is interesting. A clear duty is being properly and systematically applied and honoured under equalities legislation by every Department; they look at legislation in that context in a way that they do not in the context of strengthening families.

The Cabinet Office's reply was three and a half lines long, and we should bear in mind that the Cabinet Office is the responsible Department for having a broad overview of how Departments apply legislation. Its reply was much the same:

"The Government's guidance on the family test is available on Gov.uk and provides that the test should be taken into account, if sensible and proportionate, when considering all new policies that might have an impact on the family, including those set out in legislation."

It took three months to reply, but it was not the worst. I had to issue a reminder to the Home Office, which took six months to reply to my important question.

As my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay said, ironically, the Department that provided the best and fullest answer was the Ministry of Defence. I cannot possibly read the whole answer, but it provided the kind of reply that I had hoped to receive from every Department. Among other things, it says:

"We recognise the vital role that their families play...we are developing flexible engagements for those who wish to vary their deployability to better fit their Service career around family life, all of which aims to contribute to increased family stability. A key component of the Families' Strategy is to ensure that Service families are considered in people policy development, supporting the principles outlined in the Family Test. This is achieved through consideration of the Service family as part of each relevant submission or policy discussion, and through regular engagement with the single Services and the three Families' Federations who represent the needs and views of Service families. The Department also monitors the development and implementation of policy to assess the impact on families."

That is the kind of response that we hoped for, and which we deserve, from every Department.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making an interesting point about the Ministry of Defence. It is very good that it has policies of that kind, but, in practice, I have a constituent who is looking for flexible working—she is looking to support her poorly mother and a child. She is getting absolutely stonewalled by the Ministry of Defence. Does the hon. Lady agree that policies are good, but they have to be put into practice and they have to work on the ground?

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely. I recommend that the hon. Lady points her constituent to that reply and challenges the Department accordingly. That is one of the reasons that we raise such questions.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Having well over 2,000 serving defence personnel based in my constituency, I wanted to comment on my hon. Friend's important points about the Ministry of Defence. Does she agree that rather than being seen as a kind of hindrance, a pro-family policy is incredibly important for morale, not just for the armed forces but right across the civil service and across the country? It should be looked at as a positive thing, and not as something that somehow gets in the way.

Fiona Bruce: As so often, my hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point. We need to ensure that strengthening family life is embedded within our policy making, because it is good for the individuals involved, but also because it is good for the country. I am convinced that our productivity levels, which are lower than they should be compared with many other developed countries, have some connection with the fact that we also have one of the highest levels of family breakdown in the developed world. People need to be supported and secure in their home life, from which they can then go out to work and be fulfilled.

As my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay who introduced this debate said, we all pay the price if we do not have strong families. There is pressure on housing, because families are divided. There is also addiction, underachievement at school, mental health problems among young people, pressure on GPs' surgeries because of depression, and, as I have said, underperformance at work. All that adds up to far more than the £51 billion cited in one assessment—I think it was by the Relationships Foundation. We need to look much more closely at underproductivity; it will cost our country dearly if we do not. Clearly, those who are responsible for safeguarding the security of our nation—working in defence—deserve that to be addressed more than anyone.

The Government Equalities Office sent an amusing reply:

"The family test was not formally applied to any of our regulations, as they do not have a direct or demonstrable impact on family relationships."

It quoted three such regulations, including the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 and the Equality Act 2010 (Equal Pay Audits) Regulations 2014. If they do not have an impact on families, what does?

I will pass over the Department for Exiting the European Union's tick-box response. I am sure that we all agree that Brexit will affect every family in the land, if it does not already. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave a one-and-a-half-line reply:

"The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not applied the family test to date, as it applies to domestic policy only."

The Department of Health and Social Care replied with only four and a half lines, stating:

"The Department does not keep a formal record of the legislation to which the family test was applied."

That is really important, because it is the exact point we are making: given that there is no requirement to record any assessment, there is no evidence of it being done, which is not satisfactory.

As I said, the Home Office—after a reminder—sent a reply six months later, which was three and a half lines long. It said:

"The Government's guidance on the family test is available on gov.uk...The Home Office will apply the family test if sensible and proportionate."

It gives no further information at all. I could go on, but I think colleagues get the gist.

What do we do about this? We need to ask the Government not just to take action, but to take on board the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill. It is a draft Bill that was introduced in the Lords by Lord Farmer, and which I introduced in the Commons in May 2018. I would like the Minister to explain why nothing has happened about the Bill. It addresses the concerns that we are talking about today. The Bill would require

"public bodies to accompany any proposal for a change in public expenditure, administration or policy with a family impact assessment".

We felt that "family test" was perhaps not the best term, because it implies a pass or fail. By contrast, a "family impact assessment" is a broader exercise. The Bill would also:

"require the Secretary of State to report on the costs and benefits of extending family impact assessments to local authorities"

[Fiona Bruce]

within six months of passing the legislation. We wanted to press for that because local authorities keep virtually no data on the extent of family breakdown in their areas. If we do not have the information, how can we start to address an issue?

It is very interesting that a number of local authorities are actively addressing this issue in a way that those of us who work on strengthening family life have recommended to Government in our policy paper, “A Manifesto to Strengthen Families”. I am sure that the Minister is aware of the document, but I never miss an opportunity to pass a copy to a Minister in such a debate. The document is now supported by about 70 Members of Parliament and contains several policies to strengthen family life.

It is disappointing that the Government have not collectively embraced the policies in the manifesto. Ideally, we would like to see that done through the leadership of a Cabinet Minister for families. That is not in any way to denigrate the work or enthusiasm of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson). I know that he is interested in this subject, because he has told me so. However, if we are to make real headway on this issue, we need to have a Secretary of State who is responsible for strengthening families. Once again, I ask the Minister to take that message back—it is a key ask in the manifesto.

Another key ask is the development of local family hubs. These would not be Sure Start centres, which are just for pre-school children. The Minister might tell us something about the working group on young children, of which he is a member, and we support that. However, in each community we need a family hub where people can go if they have family difficulties and challenges regarding children of all ages, couple relationship problems or problems caring for an elderly relative. People need somewhere to go to get support on all those issues.

It is very interesting—this will bring me back to talking about the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill—that many local authorities are setting up family hubs, despite the national Government not providing any particularly strong incentive for them to do so. Across the country, we are getting such hubs set up. In fact, we will hold a family hubs fair in the Jubilee Room on 5 June, and I invite the Minister to attend. There will be examples from all over the country of local authorities that aim to strengthen family life. As I said, without the requirement for data to be produced by local authorities so that they can understand the extent of the issue in their area, how can they address it? That is why the requirement is in the draft legislation.

We also state in the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill that we want there to be proper evaluation of “progress towards family stability”. The Secretary of State in each Department should publish an annual report on progress towards stabilising families within the Department: what action have they taken? The family impact assessment would then begin to gather together information, recording how policies ultimately have a negative or positive impact on families.

When Lord Farmer introduced the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill in the Lords, he quite rightly said we need it because there is no systematic

way that policies are developed to support family relationships; there are only individual Ministers doing this. It is interesting that the Department of Justice gave a tick-box reply, because it has actually taken up strengthening family life with great gusto. It indicates that the dots are still not being joined up within Departments regarding officials’ work on this issue. I commend the Department of Justice for the way it is developing the Farmer review, but we need to do more.

Our Bill would put family impact assessments and their publication on a statutory footing and, as I have said, require the Secretary of State to report annually on progress. The Government need to do much better. Some of us have been speaking in this place about the matter since this Government came to varying forms of power. It is now almost a decade. We will shortly enter our tenth year—that is half a generation that we have now lost, when we could have taken action to help children who are growing up in dysfunctional families.

We talk about how we will be held to account for the way that we address Brexit, but those children are not able to hold us to account. They cannot go to the ballot box next year or the year after, but they are being dreadfully impacted by the fact that we are failing them and failing to look at how we can strengthen family life in this country. If I am right, there are now 27,000 children involved in gangs. What are gangs if not substitute families? Those children are looking for somewhere to belong, and we must do something urgently to address that. The Government must get a grip on this issue. The responses to our questions about the family test show that that is simply not happening.

The Government should adopt our draft Bill and get on with it. Will the Minister please explain why that has not happened? The whole point is to highlight the importance of the family perspective in policy making. Perhaps one of the problems is that officials and Ministers need training. Perhaps we need to help them assess the impact of policies on family life. We expect them to do it, but perhaps we need to help them by giving them training. As a comparison, we all agree that antisemitism is a concern. Officials are rightly being given training in how to address it, and I believe that the Government have allocated more than £14 million for that. That is positive, but how much is being put in to strengthen family life holistically? Which Departments have sent anyone on courses to train them in how to assess family impact? If that has happened, who was sent, where did they go and what was the outcome? If it has not, why not?

Please let me know if I am speaking for too long, Sir David. I will conclude shortly, but I would like to turn to the loneliness strategy.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): We have until 11 o’clock. I will call the Front Benchers at 10.30 am.

Fiona Bruce: And I believe there is just one other speaker.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Yes.

Fiona Bruce: Plus the Front Benchers, obviously.

The loneliness strategy, published in October 2018, states:

“Family wellbeing is crucial for preventing loneliness.”

It continues:

“Government’s intention is to embed consideration of loneliness and relationships throughout the policy-making process. Government will explore various mechanisms for doing this and will, for example, include it in guidance for the Family Test.”

We are six months on. Will the Minister tell the House what action has been taken to fulfil that commitment? If he cannot do so today, will he write to us? The strategy also commits to a cross-Government approach to be led by the Minister for Sport and Civil Society. What steps have been taken across Government to fulfil the Government’s commitment to

“developing and improving its approach”?

The Minister is from the Department for Work and Pensions. Is this on his desk? I believe that he has families in his job description. If not, could he find out what stage this is at? The fact that this is on the desk of the Minister for Sport and Civil Society shows that this issue ends up being split into silos if we are not careful. There is not an overarching senior Minister responsible for it. Whose desk is this on, given that the Minister is from DWP? Could he find that out and ascertain how the Cabinet Office is ensuring that this issue is being taken forward in a cross-departmental way? How many Departments have highlighted the progress they are making on addressing loneliness through their 2019-20 departmental plans? I hope they have them now. Any efficient small business would. How many have published an annual progress report on the loneliness agenda, as set out in the strategy?

The strategy says:

“More research is needed in this area. But current evidence suggests that frequent loneliness and its wider impacts are costly for society as a whole as well as for individuals. Supporting people in this situation to become more connected to their families, friends and wider community also links to government’s aim to promote a more integrated and productive society.”

That is very interesting. I refer back to my question about the connection between family breakdown and productivity. If more research is done on that, we might be able to persuade the Treasury that investment in strengthening family life would be well made.

When the loneliness strategy was launched, I asked the then responsible Minister whether she agreed that one of the greatest antidotes to loneliness is stronger families. She agreed and said:

“We recognise the importance of families in tackling loneliness... we can quite often forget members of our family, so all that is at the heart of the strategy.”—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 460.]

The Government have a poor history of applying the family test. I will give a specific example, which I thought was an affront. The first family test published was on the Enterprise Bill and the issue of Sunday trading. Several of us had to press Ministers to get it published, despite the fact that the Bill would surely affect every family in the country. In the end, it was begrudgingly published on the day that the debate was taking place in the House of Commons, and the piece of paper was brought into the Chamber. That was completely unacceptable.

Subsequently, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), who was the responsible Minister, said that she would encourage Departments to publish family tests. That was in response to a question from our former colleague David Burrowes, who is now

executive director for the manifesto for strengthening families and still works on this issue continuously. We very much hope we will see him back in this place very soon so he can continue his excellent work in the House.

This is not just a tick-box exercise. It is not just about keeping bureaucrats in their jobs or creating red tape for the sake of it. It matters. It is about people’s lives. It is about saving relationships. It is about preventing addiction. It is about reducing loneliness. It is about addressing mental health problems. It is about improving life chances. It is about improving education and employment opportunities. It is about tackling homelessness. It is about poverty. It is about productivity. Why has this important exercise never been properly embedded in the Government’s thinking or procedures? What is the Minister’s answer to all that?

10.7 am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I thank my Cornwall colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for securing this really important debate. It is good that we continue to return to this subject. I know the Minister to be a man of compassion and empathy who wants to do the right thing in this area.

I would like to think that I am a Back-Bench Member of a progressive Government. At the moment, it might be difficult to see signs of that. I listened to the responses that my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) received from different Departments, and there seems to be a real lack of enthusiasm about applying the family test. I absolutely support the creation of a Secretary of State in this area, which would be important for the wellbeing of our great nation, and the establishment of family hubs.

A great number of topics have been covered already. I will touch on some specific examples of where we are failing families, and where there is evidence that the family test is needed. The review of policy is not helping but hindering family units. The establishment of a one-stop shop where families can go to get help and support whenever things arise would be very welcome. I was very pleased to put my name to the “Manifesto to Strengthen Families”. I often look at what progress we are making in delivering those outcomes.

It is just common sense to apply the family test to legislation. Doing right for families in Government policy has to be the most effective way of creating stronger, healthier communities that feel well, cared for, valued and empowered to play their part in caring for each other. The issue concerns not just people in families, but those who are not, because strong families are a very important part of addressing isolation and loneliness for those who do not have loved ones.

I will mention a series of examples. I have not plucked them from the media or social media; they are examples from my constituency that show where we are failing families, often through policy and its implementation. The Home Office has been mentioned, and I have been working with the Home Secretary on one particular case.

As part of our immigration policy, we welcome people from the Commonwealth to work in our armed forces—this year we are increasing their number to 1,000. For various reasons, they tend to do jobs that are not significantly

[Derek Thomas]

well paid. I had one such case, which has now been resolved through some clever working of the law. These people are not allowed to bring their loved ones, including their children. They are not allowed to do other jobs because their visa and their commitment to the Ministry of Defence mean that they cannot top up income and reach the threshold that allows them to bring over their wives and children.

The crazy thing about that particular part of immigration policy is that there is no risk that the people will disappear, because they have fixed contracts with the MOD and have to return to their original countries when they finish their contracts, which, in this case, are 12-year contracts. They are provided with housing and there are no concerns about their being a burden on society, so it is a bizarre breakdown of immigration policy and concern for families. Fortunately, in the case I mentioned, we have found a way for this particular individual to come over, but among the 1,000 people who will come from the Commonwealth this year, a number of men and women will not be able to bring their husbands, wives or children.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours. We have seen great progress in the diagnosis, treatment and removal of brain tumours in this country, but for children that progress has been poor. When they survive a brain tumour—I was pleased to be able to mention this at Prime Minister's questions last week—they are left with an injury and we fail them because we do not put in place the available therapies and care, which would be available to a stroke patient with a similar type of injury. We do not do that for those children. Families are put under incredible pressure because we do not support them in supporting the child to have the best life chances. As a result, families spend a lifetime receiving support from social services and the NHS, which could be avoided—that is proven.

Another area where we fail families and that the family test and application of Government policy should address is special needs education in schools. Schools are now under enormous pressure and unable to provide the necessary support to children with special educational needs. The impact on family is not the breakdown of relationships between the child, the family and the school, but the child's removal from a school that is unable to provide adequate support, however hard it tries. That means that families suddenly become isolated and lost from the system as they try desperately to give their child the best start.

Steve Double: Does my hon. Friend agree that this relates not only to education, but to the huge burden faced by families with children with special educational needs during school holidays, when all the support on the education side is taken away? Will he join me in commending the Cornwall Accessible Activities Programme, a local charity in Cornwall that provides support to parents with children with special educational needs during the school holidays?

Derek Thomas: Absolutely. It was really good to have a debate in the main Chamber recently about the work of voluntary organisations in supporting families in that very situation. The Government still have responsibility and we should look at how Government policy helps or hinders the lives of families.

Another example from my constituency is a family with two children in separate schools—they were doing well, having moved from other schools. Because of a situation at home, they were evicted and the council's response was to move them out of the area, away from their schools. Suddenly, through a breakdown of proper legislation and support, the family was ripped out of their local community and support network, and the children were ripped out of schools in which they had become established and were beginning to do well. That is another example demonstrating that the family test is either not considered or not applied and that we are failing families.

As well as the issue of special educational needs, another problem is what the Department of Work and Pensions calls "natural migration" to universal credit—the Minister will know about that. Natural migration sounds very easy, straightforward and normal, but it is not at all. People who naturally migrate on to universal credit have quite often had devastating changes to their lives and situations—for example, a loved one who is the household earner suddenly developing an illness, a significant health problem or another reason why they can no longer be the breadwinner, meaning that they move on to universal credit.

As support mechanisms and transitional arrangements are not being introduced until next year, that change is proving difficult and causing real hardship for families. I have met the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about this. She explained that work coaches should be sensitive to the issue and should not pursue natural migration, but I know from constituents that that is not the case.

Natural migration happens when someone loses a loved one. In those situations, families are broken apart through circumstances beyond their control, and without even realising, they are suddenly subject to the welfare system. When universal credit is eventually complete, that system will probably be better for them—I am not opposed to it—but natural migration to universal credit is causing hardship for many people. Many find that it works when their circumstances change for positive reasons, but for those who fall through a disastrous net—or, dare I say it, over a cliff edge—we must intervene quickly.

On mental health, I have a case in which loving parents are at the absolute end of their resources and energy because of a very unwell 13-year-old daughter. The problem is that, despite the involvement of lots of agencies, the people from them go home at the end of the day and leave the parents to do what they can with a very unwell young lady. Having worked on and watched this situation closely, I can say that we are not providing the right support, empathy or care for families in which young ones have mental health problems.

An issue that I have raised many times is fuel poverty. Government policy should look at how we improve people's homes. With poor-quality homes and fuel poverty, children do not attain what they can, do not reach their potential in education, and their homes are not as productive as they could be. The older people in those homes find that they enter into social services and NHS care far more often than they would otherwise. It is a massive issue for places in this country, including my constituency, where homes are not of the standard they should be: they are leaky and fuel-poor. Since I was first

elected, I have argued that Government could use infrastructure money to address that situation, and that doing so would be a cost saving to Government. I have yet to hear a serious response from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

It is absolutely right that the family test should apply to new legislation. That is good and necessary, but I would also like the Minister to consider how we can review existing legislation and the examples I have given, to look at what the Government can do to ensure we are on the side of families and avoid some of the issues that I have set out. That would be a win for Government; there is huge support across the country for strengthening families, and for Government policy to support families.

We must show a commitment to families, make life easier for them where possible, and remove the unnecessary barriers and unintended consequences that Government policy is causing for our families. Communities are so much stronger when families work well. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to speak in this debate.

10.19 am

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. I am glad to be able to sum up for the SNP this morning.

I give credit to the hon. Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), and for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who secured the debate. Their commitment is honourable, but the reality of the family test is that it is barely worth the paper that it is written on. The answers that the hon. Member for Congleton received from all the different parties indicate that. The Government say that the test is not designed to be a tick-box exercise, but in reality it is no kind of exercise at all. It is perfectly clear from cases that I deal with in my constituency that the Government are not applying the test to the policies that they come up with, either in theory or in practice.

On 30 January last year, in a debate on marriage in Government policy—hon. Members may have been there—the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), speaking from the Conservative Benches just there, said this of the time before he left Government:

“I was nominated to construct the family test against which everything was going to be measured. When I finally left—of my own volition, by the way—at no stage had I managed to get agreement from any of the key players about what it would consist of. While there was a principle, which was that the Prime Minister wanted a test that all decisions would be set against, the reality was that the Treasury in particular was not keen on any of it. I urge the Minister to press for a definition of the family test, by which all the effects of policy decisions could be looked at to see whether they would damage the family or make things more difficult. That would make logical sense.”—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 271-272WH.]

That was last year, and nothing has changed. The policy might exist in some form somewhere, but it is perfectly clear that its application is non-existent. It is utter escapism, and full of contradictions.

I have campaigned on a lot on the first issues that I will discuss, which are to do with child poverty and austerity. The family test has no relevance at all to the two-child policy; I know because I asked Ministers

about that when they were talking about bringing the policy in. I have raised the policy at least 60 times in this Chamber and the main Chamber, asking questions about it and campaigning on it. It is completely destructive of families for many different reasons, not least because it moves children into poverty, making it far more difficult for their families to cope and survive.

The two-child policy has been condemned by Professor Philip Alston in a recent UN report, and just this week by CEDAW—the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women—which recommended scrapping it. On Monday, I met a range of organisations, including the Church of England, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, representatives of Scottish Churches, the Child Poverty Action Group, Turn2us, Women's Aid, Rape Crisis—I have heard from the Scotland, England and Wales, and Northern Ireland equivalent organisations—and Refuge; all of them, as well as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing, condemn the policy, because they know that it is damaging to families and meets no aspect of the family test. It means that families will be at least £2,780 worse off per year, which makes it far more difficult for them to survive.

The first element of the family test is:

“What kinds of impact might the policy have on family formation?”

The two-child policy deliberately encourages families to have fewer children—that is its stated purpose and aim. That is inimical to family formation. The policy also discriminates against families who wish to come together from two previous relationships. In blended families, where someone has two children from one family and wants to marry and have a third child, or another child comes from the other family, the impact is that families lose out. The policy does not meet that aspect of the test.

The second question of the test is:

“What kind of impact will the policy have on families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities, or the onset of a long-term health condition?”

The UK Government had to be taken to court, and an element had to be added. A woman who had taken on caring responsibilities for her two siblings lost out when she had a child, so the Government were taken to court—and lost, because the policy is unfair; they had not taken into account the impact on those with caring responsibilities.

There is also an impact on bereavement. Say a family had three children, and everything was fine because they could well afford those children—the Tories often say that people should only have the children they can afford. All of a sudden, one of the partners dies; the other has to claim universal credit and reduce their hours worked. The two-child policy does not meet the second aspect of the test, because it deliberately punishes people who end up in those circumstances, which they could not reasonably have predicted.

The third question of the test is:

“What impacts will the policy have on all family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities?”

Again, the two-child policy means that anyone who has three children but whose circumstances change will struggle to play a full role in family life. They would not

[*Alison Thewliss*]

have enough money coming in, or would have to work longer hours and so would have less time with their children, who, as the hon. Member for Congleton suggested, might look to other sources of support, such as gangs. There is a huge impact on the ability to play a full role in family life, not least because of the poverty aspect.

“How does the policy impact families before, during and after couple separation?”

The two-child policy has an impact on that as well, because it creates a perverse incentive: people with three children will get more money if they separate their family, becoming two single parents—a family with two children over here and a family with one child over there. That is the incentive under the policy; the Government cannot deny that.

The final question is:

“How does the policy impact those families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown?”

As I say, families are incentivised to stay apart, rather than to stay together. The Government have not recognised that in any part of the two-child policy.

As Conservative Members present will know well, the policy also has a disproportionate impact on people of religious faith—those who will not use contraception or do not believe in abortion. People who have four children and are affected by the policy lose out, and that disproportionately affects those of religious faith, including the Jewish community, who have spoken out against the policy—as has the Church of England—and those of Muslim faith. That is out-and-out despicable. The Government do not accept that, but it is absolutely true. Furthermore, the two-child policy will have a chilling effect as it impacts on thousands of families throughout the country. People will lose out on their entitlement and on their ability to support their family, which is ridiculous.

In my constituency, I have many cases of families affected by Home Office issues and by Government policy on how they can live their lives. There are people who cannot afford to live as a family, because of the £18,600 threshold that has to be met before someone can bring a spouse over to this country. People who desperately want their partner to come here and to be reunited with their children cannot do that because of an arbitrary figure. I have constituents who lost out by a couple of pounds, and so were not allowed to bring family members into the country. What impact does that have on family life? Where does that fit with the family test?

The minimum income threshold also puts huge pressure on earners in the family. I have a constituent who works two jobs. He works as a bank clerk—a mortgage adviser—and at night, stacking shelves in a supermarket, so that he can bring his family here. That has a huge impact on his mental health and wellbeing; he has to work all the hours he can to get his family in. The Home Office is still making that incredibly difficult for him.

The Government policy of no recourse to public funds also has an impact. People have come to this country and been granted their status, but the Government have decided that they are not entitled to any working-age benefits at all. I have a constituent, case No. 3 in my books—the third from when I was elected in 2015—who

still has no recourse to public funds. She is almost destitute. Every year, she has come to my office, looking for support for school uniforms or Christmas presents for her children, because despite the fact that she is working, she cannot afford them. She is working all the hours that she can, but under this Government's cruel policy of allowing no recourse to public funds, she cannot earn enough to live on. It is heartbreaking. I had her and her daughter in my office at Christmas time, and her daughter came back into my office after she and her mum had left and said, “Alison, why have we not got any money?” I cannot answer that question. It is for the Minister to answer why he wants to put families in a position in which their children are heartbroken and in poverty, and are judged by their friends, and do not have any kind of a life because of the Government's cruel policies.

Home Office policies such as the hostile environment make it very difficult for people to carry on family life. There is the impact of policies that prevent people from staying in this country. I will give an example. At my surgery one Friday, the first of a number of people to see me were a couple. The wife was a British citizen and the husband was from another country. They had been told by the Home Office that they both had to leave and go to the country where the husband was from because they had no family ties here. They did not have any children, so they could go and live there, and that would be just as easy for them as staying in the UK—there would be no problems there. They asked me, “Alison, would it make any difference if we had children? Would we be able to stay if we had children in this country?” I said, “Probably not. This is just the way the Home Office does things,” and I offered them support.

The next couple, who came in straight after, had quite a young baby and a toddler. They were in much the same circumstances: they had been told by the Home Office to go back to some other country to live, and that it would not make any difference because their children were young and would not know any better. They asked, “What can we do? We have family ties here.” The Home Office computer still said no. That is a huge insult to people who want to come here and do us the honour of choosing to live in this country. We tell them, “No, go and contribute to some other country, because we do not want you here.” That is despicable; it is against everything that the family test ought to stand for.

The family test is not worth the paper it is written on. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Congleton says that it took the Home Office six months to reply. She is lucky; in many of my cases, it has taken much longer. The Home Office does not care how it treats people. A family with three children who were due to report to Brand Street as part of their obligations under the Home Office's hostile environment policy had to take one child out of nursery and the other two out of school, and did not know if they would be able to go back afterwards. They did not know if they would be removed and sent to Dungavel. What kind of family test is that? What kind of impact will that have on family life—the stress, the distress and the indignity of being forced to report to Brand Street without knowing if they would go home afterwards? It is utterly despicable.

I talked about the impact of people living on low wages having no recourse to public funds; I would like to talk about the Government's pretend living wage.

They know that it is not enough for people to live on. That has an impact on family life. People who are working away without enough to live on will struggle to maintain a family life, to do all the things they would like to do with their family, such as going places, and to pay for things such as schools trips or books, which would make for a better family life. It is worse for parents under 25, because they are not entitled to the Chancellor's pretend living wage. There is a growing gap for those under the age of 25, who are entitled to much less but may have exactly the same obligations. They may have children to support. They have different lives to lead, and they do not get a discount on their rent for being under the age of 25. The Government need to recognise that and ensure that a fair day's pay is earned for a fair day's work, which is not the case in this country.

Under the family test, there is no protection for families when people reach old age. I refer to the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign; those women have worked their whole life, and sacrificed their time with their family, only to find their retirement cruelly stolen from them. That has an impact on the family; often they are expected to look after their grandchildren, but cannot, because they have to keep working, and the mums have to keep working to pay the nursery fees. That has a detrimental impact on family life.

I want to talk about Brexit. The hon. Member for Congleton mentioned it briefly, but it will have a hugely detrimental impact on family life. Those people who have chosen to come and live in this country now feel that they have very little option. Some are leaving the place that they called home because they no longer feel welcome. They are giving up the links that they made here, and they are disrupting their family life. There is probably nothing that covers that in the family test, but Brexit has a real impact on families right across these islands. It is hugely sad that the Government are pursuing it, and it will mean that EU nationals in this country will be forced into the same kind of hostile environment that the Home Office applies to everybody else, causing the problems I have outlined.

In Scotland we are doing our best; we are trying to provide baby boxes, and grants for families to support children in the early years, so that they have the best place in the world to grow up in, but we are hampered by the policies of this Tory Government and by the decisions of Westminster. I firmly believe that if we were an independent country, we would make it true for everybody that Scotland was the best place in the world to grow up in. Proper family tests—not something that is barely worth the paper it is written on—would be applied to all our policies.

10.34 am

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on securing this debate. He rightly pointed out the importance of families and parenting. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) told us that the Government have a poor history of applying the family test. She spoke of the impact of family life on productivity; I wonder whether she would support Labour's policy of ending zero-hour contracts, to improve the quality of family life. The hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) spoke thoughtfully about a number of areas where

policy is failing families, and particularly about the impact of natural migration to universal credit, which is causing hardship for many families. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) spoke passionately about poverty and austerity, and the impact of the two-child policy.

The family test has admirable aims, but this Government have not quite followed through on it in full. It is not clear whether the initiative has made a significant impact. When it was introduced, it was not made mandatory to publish the outcomes of the test; to date, few have been published. Could the Minister tell us how many tests have been carried out or are under way? Will he commit to publishing them in full?

In 2015, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), said that the Social Justice Cabinet Committee would take the lead in ensuring that the family test was properly applied across Government Departments. Will the Minister confirm whether the committee still exists, and when it last met?

The family test was introduced to provide a family perspective in the policy making process. While that is a laudable objective, it is clear that Government policy since 2010 has completely undermined that aim. Families across the country have suffered the impact of this Government's austerity measures, particularly through cuts to social security. One only has to think of the upheaval and misery caused by the bedroom tax to see that; families were uprooted from their community because of an ill-considered and heartless policy.

The test includes five questions to consider when making policy, including assessing what kind of impact the policy might have on family formation, families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, and all family members' ability to play a full role in family life, yet Government policy appears almost designed to disrupt and interrupt family life. Indeed, they have made it much harder for parents to secure a safe and happy upbringing for their children. When Professor Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, visited the UK last year, he lifted the lid on a national crisis. He said:

"People I spoke with told me they have to choose between eating and heating their homes, or eating and feeding their children. One person said, 'I would rather feed my kids than pay my rent, but that could get us all kicked out.' Children are showing up at school with empty stomachs, and schools are collecting food on an ad hoc basis and sending it home because teachers know that their students will otherwise go hungry."

There is no use speaking about the family test while ignoring the growing stark reality of people's lives. More than 14 million people in the UK are in poverty, including more than 4 million children. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, that figure will rise to more than 5 million by 2022. No child should have to go to school hungry, or go without heating or clothing, but the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported last year that more than 300,000 children had to do just that. Its report found that 365,000 children experienced destitution in 2017. Shockingly, 131,000 children woke up homeless on Christmas day last year, according to Shelter. Most people would consider that completely unacceptable in 21st-century Britain.

The Library recently analysed the extent of the cuts to working-age social security, and found that £36 billion has been cut from that budget since 2010, including

[Margaret Greenwood]

nearly £5 billion from social security. That has made it extremely difficult for many families to pay the bills. Two years ago, we asked the Government for an impact assessment of the cuts on women, after we published Library analysis showing that 86% of the impact of austerity had been shouldered by women, yet despite their supposed commitment to the family test, the Government still refuse to publish an impact assessment of the cuts on women.

The family test was introduced in 2014. I take this opportunity to examine the policies introduced since then and their effect on families. The two-child limit, which has been mentioned, is expected to push 200,000 additional children into poverty by the time universal credit is fully rolled out. The policy breaks the vital link between what families require to meet their daily needs and their entitlement. The Child Poverty Action Group says that the policy means that

“some children are held to be less deserving of a decent standard of living than others, simply because they have more siblings—a circumstance which they cannot control.”

It was described as “fundamentally anti-family” by the UK’s foremost religious leaders.

The family test asks policy makers to assess the impact of policy on family formation. The Child Poverty Action Group says the two-child limit

“risks creating incentives for larger families to separate, and could discourage single parents from forming new ‘blended’ families. It could also penalise children in separated families who switch the parent they live with—for example to be with siblings, or to remain in their school if one parent moves away.”

It goes on to say that the policy

“may also leave women who become pregnant with a third child, for example through contraception failure, with a difficult choice between moving into poverty and having an abortion.”

Clearly, that is extremely shocking. The two-child limit completely undermines the aims of the family test and the fabric of family life. Can the Minister confirm that it was subjected to the family test? Will he make that assessment public and explain how the policy passed all five tests?

Another policy introduced in 2015 was the freeze on social security, which quite simply increases poverty. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, almost half a million more people will be driven into poverty by 2020 as a result of the freeze, which it says is the single biggest driver behind rising poverty. The Secretary of State sought to reassure the public that the benefits freeze would not be extended beyond next year, but that is not soon enough. The value of working-age benefits is expected to be cut by £1.5 billion over the next year. We have repeatedly called on the Government to end the benefits freeze immediately. Ahead of today’s spring Budget, we say it is not too late for the Government to stop the freeze. The Government have the opportunity to lift 200,000 people out of poverty altogether by ending the freeze, so will they take action?

Since its introduction by a Labour Government, child benefit has been a vital means of supporting families. It is now frozen, having been cut repeatedly since 2010. According to Unison, a family with two children is £450 a year, or £8.67 a week, worse off than it would have been in 2010. Unison analysis shows that, at current prices, that would buy 1 litre of skimmed milk,

15 medium eggs, a Warburtons medium white sliced loaf, a bag of straight-cut chips, washing-up liquid, pork loin medallions and eight sausages—clearly, all things that families could do with. Again, can the Minister confirm that the social security freeze was subjected to the family test, and will he make that assessment public and explain how the policy passed all five tests?

Universal credit has undergone rapid expansion in recent years. However, its roll-out has been chaotic and hampered by cuts—especially those made in the 2015 summer Budget. Universal credit is not working for families, and it is driving many people into poverty, debt and rent arrears. The five-week wait, which was originally a six-week wait, is unrealistic for low-income families. It is difficult to see how families are supposed to survive for five or six weeks without any payment at all when children need to be fed and clothed. The Government say universal credit is linked to food bank use, yet they have failed to address that issue competently and have offered people loans instead. Once again, can the Minister confirm that universal credit—in particular the 2015 cuts and the five-week wait—has been subjected to the family test, and will he make that assessment public and explain how the policy passed all five tests?

Fiona Bruce: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Greenwood: I am very short of time, so I will continue.

Sadly, Government policy is putting intolerable strain on some families. Under this Government, mixed-age couples will be denied pension credit and forced to claim universal credit instead. What is more, younger partners will potentially be subject to the sanctions regime, too. Some families are set to lose as much as £7,000 a year. There have been reports of couples who have been together for more than 20 years considering separation as a result. What assessment have the Government made of the impact of that policy on families? Does the Minister believe it meets the five tests?

There are many more areas that betray how Government policies have undermined the interests of families. Cuts to local government are forcing councils to overspend on their children’s services and social care budgets and run a huge deficit in their reserves for schools. As many as 1,000 Sure Start centres may have closed because of Government funding cuts, and the Government’s change to the threshold for free school meal entitlements could leave 1 million children without a hot meal at school.

We believe that when we all get old or sick, or we have a family, our public services should step in—they should help families remain secure and avoid poverty—but austerity is making that much more difficult to achieve. Indeed, the policies I have mentioned would, in my opinion, demonstrably fail the family test. I hope the Government listen to the points I have made, end austerity and develop policies in line with the stated aims of the family test.

10.43 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, in this very calm and sensible week for Parliament. I am sure all eyes will be focused on this very important debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) for securing the debate. He has an exceptional track record in this important area; it is a real credit to the work he has done that he has so much support from the colleagues who attended the debate. I pay tribute to his work alongside the noble Baroness Eaton with the Centre for Social Justice, which culminated in its recent report on the family test. That excellent piece of work was a really good way to focus minds—not just in my Department, but across Government. I will go into more detail about that.

I also thank all the other Members who contributed, in particular my hon. Friends the Members for St Ives (Derek Thomas) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). I will cover many of the questions raised, but let me say two quick things before I forget. I would be delighted, diary and parliamentary duties permitting, to attend the family hub event, so I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton to make sure I have all the details of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives has done fantastic work as an MP to support those with special educational needs, using his wealth of experience from his work prior to arriving in the House. I recognise his point about supporting families with special educational needs children.

I pay tribute to one of my local special educational needs schools, the Uplands School, which has made a very small change that could easily be adopted by all schools and is making a huge difference. Like all schools, it has parental support classes, which offer peer-to-peer support—parents get together over cups of tea and talk about the challenges they are facing and how they can support one another. The headteacher, Jackie Smith, has ensured that parents get an invite to those support classes once they know their children will end up at the school, rather than having to wait until the day they come. That ensures that peer support is provided from the very early days, which is making a huge difference.

We also had a contribution from the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who perhaps stretched the intention of the debate—most of her comments were probably better suited to a Home Office debate. I am sure there will be opportunities for Home Office Ministers to respond in the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) for welcoming the principle of the family test. I appreciate that, but she then applied a series of political statements loosely to the principles of the family test. It would be remiss of me not to correct some of the points she made. For example, under this Government there are now 500,000 fewer families on the housing waiting list. Food affordability—the measure of whether families can afford the basics in terms of food—has almost halved in just under five years and is 2.5% lower than the EU average. Material deprivation has never been lower. Income inequality has fallen under this Government, having risen under the last Labour Government. There are now 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty. Welfare spending under the last Labour Government—

Margaret Greenwood: Will the Minister give way?

Justin Tomlinson: The hon. Lady was not willing to take interventions from colleagues who actually stuck to the principles of the debate, so I will not.

Under the last Labour Government, welfare spending rose on average by £3,000 per house. Imagine the impact on hard-working families.

Fiona Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Justin Tomlinson: I will shortly. The Opposition voted against income tax threshold changes that have given families an additional £1,200 a year. Our spending on childcare will have risen from £4 billion in 2010 to £6 billion by 2020—a 50% increase—and we are delivering record employment in all regions of the UK, yet again supporting families. I give way to my hon. Friend.

Fiona Bruce: The Minister has actually made my point for me. The speech by the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) highlighted the fundamental difference in the way we approach this issue. The Opposition's solution to so many social problems is throwing more money at them. There was no money left when they finished in government.

We are saying that if we strengthen family lives, just like the teacher the Minister mentioned, we will prevent those problems—mental health problems in school, addiction, people going to GP surgeries with depression and losing work days, and so on—from arising in the first place. That is the fundamental difference. That is why we are pressing for the Government to strengthen family life: because we believe that prevention is far better and cheaper than attempted cure.

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is spot on. It was clear from my colleagues' speeches that they have a constructive, proactive and real focus on the absolute principles of the family test, and I shall now turn to that.

Many hon. Members have underlined the importance of the family test, and I am pleased to see sustained interest in that test among colleagues. I restate the Government's commitment to the family test, which was introduced in 2014 to help put families at the heart of policy making. In designing the test, alongside the Relationships Alliance, we wanted to help policy makers understand how policies might, positively or negatively, affect families.

We want potential impacts on families to be considered early so that they can shape proposals, rather than at the end of the process when we are preparing to announce and implement any changes. That point is key, and the test helps to ensure that potential impacts are properly considered in the advice that Ministers receive. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay was spot on when he said that such issues must be embedded into that early thinking.

Alison Thewliss: Will the Minister give way?

Justin Tomlinson: I will respond to the thrust of the debate. We want the family test to be broad and flexible, reflecting the nature of 21st-century families. The test already encourages policy makers to consider a wide range of impacts, including on family formation, families going through key transitions, the ability of all family members—dads, mums, and the extended family—to play a full role in family life, families who have separated

[Justin Tomlinson]

or who are undergoing separation, and those families most at risk of a deterioration in relationship quality and breakdown.

I acknowledge that some would like the family test to be a statutory obligation, but feedback from policy makers, and points highlighted in speeches today, suggest that a statutory test could risk becoming a box-ticking exercise at the end of a policy process, with pass or fail outcomes, rather than something embedded at the beginning of the process, which is key. A legislative test would also risk losing the flexibility to adapt and change.

I welcome the review of the family test by the Centre for Social Justice, and I thank it for highlighting these important issues, many of which my officials have been working to address with the relevant Departments. There is a strong alignment between the report's recommendations and our approach to strengthening practice in the use of the test. I agree that individual Departments should take responsibility and ownership of their application of the family test—interestingly, the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton highlighted both good and bad practice.

Fiona Bruce: Yes.

Justin Tomlinson: There we are—it is on the record, and those Departments will no doubt be held to account. The Attorney General's response is probably the shortest that I have heard from any Department, and I know my hon. Friend will scrutinise it carefully.

We are working with a network of representatives from all domestic policy Departments to develop tailored resources to help officials apply the test in their unique policy contexts, and ensure that advice to Ministers reflects the impact on families. That will be underpinned by refreshed central guidance for officials, which we expect to publish this summer—I will return to that important work at the end of my remarks, with a request for those Members who have demonstrated passion about this issue to ensure that we get it right. My Department will actively consider including the family test in the DWP business plan.

I am pleased to be part of the inter-ministerial group that is focusing on how to improve support for families in the first 1,001 days. Another of the report's recommendations is for Ministers to take a more active role in ensuring that the family test is applied in their Departments. I have raised the family test with that inter-ministerial group, and I will ask Ministers actively to consider whether the test has been considered in all the advice they receive, on any topic, in their Departments.

The excellent report by the Centre for Social Justice builds on important issues raised by colleagues who published the "Manifesto to Strengthen Families". It also highlights examples of where Departments have used the family test, and where that has made a difference to the policy making process. We recognise, however, that more progress can be made to ensure that the test is robustly applied to all domestic policy. That is why my Department, which has the cross-Government lead on the test, has been taking action to strengthen its implementation across Government.

Each Department has a nominated representative on the new family test network—my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay highlighted the importance of that—and the network is identifying, developing and sharing best practice on applying the family test. That helps us to deepen our understanding of how the test is applied across Government, and what further support officials need to embed it fully as part of any considerations made when formulating policy.

The network pays particular attention to the need highlighted in the report to build evidence, and we are currently exploring ways to support Departments in that. We will continue to encourage and support Departments to apply the family test, and to make their own judgments on whether and when publishing assessments is appropriate. We will consider whether more can be done to improve transparency, which includes reflecting on the report's recommendations. It is unclear, however, whether knowing how many family tests a certain Department has applied would bring much greater or more meaningful transparency.

I am keen to avoid introducing layers of unnecessary bureaucracy to the policy making process, but I understand the thrust of the point being made. Insights from the family test network are driving our review of family test guidance, published on gov.uk, which helps officials to understand why, when, and how they should apply the test. Revised guidance planned for summer 2019 will better reflect the needs of users.

We are helping Departments to develop a toolkit of resources for officials to improve consistent and meaningful family test application across Government. Given that effective implementation of the test is fundamentally an issue of capability, we are also working with Civil Service Learning and the Policy Profession unit, to consider how best to support policy makers to apply the family test effectively.

Let me share some examples of how the Government are actively working to make lives better for families, and how our policies are responding to the key questions and evidence set out by the family test. My Department is currently implementing the Reducing Parental Conflict programme, which is backed by £39 million. That programme helps councils across England to recognise the evidence about the damage that parental conflict can do to children's long-term outcomes. It will soon provide evidence-based, face-to-face support for parents in 31 English local authorities. I attended an important roundtable with those local authorities, and there is real enthusiasm to deliver this programme and build that tangible constructive evidence.

Fiona Bruce: I welcome this programme, but an integral part of it needs to be a focus on strengthening couple relationships, not just parent-child relationships. Will the Minister look into that?

Justin Tomlinson: We are digesting all the successful bids for the various strands of that programme, and I am sure that many organisations will have a proven track record in that area. I am happy to consider that specific issue in greater detail in a meeting on the programme.

We want face-to-face support to be available to those families who need it most. This is why we will prioritise help for workless and disadvantaged families, and why

we are exploring how to ensure that those eligible parents with whom we are already working, through Jobcentre Plus and the Child Maintenance Group, are able to access such support as early as possible.

All local authorities can access funding to increase their strategic capability to address parental conflict, as well as training for frontline staff. We are funding even more innovation through our joint work with the Department of Health and Social Care to support children of alcohol-dependent parents, and with our new £2.7 million Reducing Parental Conflict challenge fund. A number of Departments have highlighted that fund to their stakeholders to ensure good engagement.

The principles of the family test are visible across the Government. The Department for Education recently announced that all children and young people will soon be taught about the importance of healthy relationships, including marriage and family relationships. I welcome the positive comments from my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay about the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health and Social Care, and the Ministry of Justice is also considering how we can reduce conflict in families that are going through a divorce. The Troubled Families programme is driving better ways of working around complex families, improving outcomes for individuals and reducing their dependency on services, and delivering better value for taxpayers. That programme aims to achieve significant and sustained improvement for up to 400,000 families with multiple high-cost problems by 2020—something I passionately support.

In conclusion, I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the thrust of this debate—particularly my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay, who has been a real champion in this area. We welcome the continued constructive work by the Centre for Social Justice, and its review of the family test, and we are actively considering its recommendations.

The importance to our society of strong families cannot be understated, and we look forward to working with all hon. Members as we continue to strengthen our use of the family test and make a difference for families. I would greatly welcome the opportunity to meet my hon. Friends from the Centre for Social Justice and have a deep-dive look at the recommendations in their respective speeches and the recent report.

10.59 am

Steve Double: I thank hon. Members for their contributions to this good debate. We may have differences of opinion on how to address this issue, but it is encouraging to hear that everyone has recognised the importance of strengthening families and the role that Government policy can play in that. I welcome the Minister's response. We are encouraged by his clear commitment to ensuring that the family test is applied consistently and meaningfully across Government. He will find that many hon. Members, particularly on the Government Benches, are ready and willing to work with him, to ensure that the policy works as best it can to benefit families up and down the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the application of the family test.

Acute NHS Care: South-west Hertfordshire

11 am

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered acute NHS care in South West Herts.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Sir David. I start by saying that none of my comments about the health provision that allegedly looks after my constituents or about the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust are, in any shape or form, about the frontline staff. The doctors, the nurses, the porters and the cleaners are fantastic. However, as I said the other day in a letter to Mr Stevens, the chief executive of NHS England, frankly we have absolutely no confidence in the management of the clinical commissioning group for West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

That lack of confidence that we are being represented and looked after in the best possible way has united the community over many years. It is not new. We have been let down time and again. Unlike a certain other subject that is occupying a lot of our time at the moment, there is no political or community division in west Hertfordshire about what we need from hospital acute provision in our part of the world. I will not go on about the other problems we have with health provision, but I have called the debate today—indeed, I was asked to do so by the community—to discuss how we can trust what is going on in our area.

A package is being put together that is convenient for West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust and it appears that the CCG and, I am sad to say, NHS Improvement and NHS England are going along with it. To put it in context for the Minister, we used to have acute hospitals in St Albans, in Hemel Hempstead and in Watford. Years ago, there was an evaluation and the decision was taken to close the acute facilities at St Albans. We were told not to worry, as Hemel was very close and would continue to have its acute provision, and there was a minor injuries-type facility in St Albans for elective surgery. After another consultation called “Investing In Your Health”, all the promises that had been made went out of the window and the acute services in Hemel were closed. As a sop, we were given a 24-hour urgent treatment centre.

Guess what? The urgent treatment centre is now not open for 24 hours a day and has a completely different name. Is it open at night? No, it is not. Where does everybody have to go? Even though Hemel is the largest town in Hertfordshire, we go to Watford. Watford General Hospital is a Victorian building next to the football stadium, in the heart of Watford, which is very densely populated. Promises were made about how quickly the ambulances could get there and how good it would be. They have completely gone out of the window, particularly when Watford football club is playing at home. Even though I am not a Watford supporter, I do not want to criticise the football club in any way. Watford football club is there, and has been for a long time.

Now we are looking to the future, not so much for my generation but for the younger generation in this massively growing area of the country. What is the future of the acute provision and hospital provision in my constituency?

[Sir Mike Penning]

Historically, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust is a small trust that has not been well managed. I have lost count of the number of chief executives it has had during the time I have been MP for Hemel Hempstead. They come and go repeatedly. What always happens—every time—is that the trust gets into deficit, and it is then bailed out in some way. That happened when there were primary care trusts, and now it is being done with the clinical commissioning groups. The trust is in deficit and failing. I do not know how it managed to get something positive into the newspaper the other day, when yet again it is failing in four out of five categories.

That means my constituents are at risk. We rely on the CCG and the trust. I will come on to our involvement in that process in a second, but it appears that as an elected Member of Parliament I have absolutely no influence at all on the CCG's decisions, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust decisions or decisions about any other NHS provision in my area. Joe Public does not understand that there are a myriad pillars and silos inside the NHS. The public just sees the NHS, which people are rightly massively proud of; we all are, including me, and it is fantastic that we are putting more money into it. However, we have got more managers, finance directors and heads of nursing. Why on earth have we got all these people divided up inside the NHS? That is an important point I will come on to.

Part of the appraisals and discussions for the strategic outline case—the Minister will know what I mean by a SOC—was about making decisions on what acute hospital provision should be provided in my constituency. I went with constituents to see Mr Mackey, the head of NHS Improvement. I said to him, “What are the criteria here? Tell me, face to face, what are the criteria for the decision that the West Herts hospital trust is going to make about the future?” He said, quite categorically, that fundamentally different options must be put to us. I asked, “Including a greenfield site?” We have greenfield sites available. He said yes. I received a letter of confirmation that that was a requirement of any SOC that was put forward.

Moving forward to where we are now, we apparently cannot have a new greenfield hospital. Why? That is the question that every one of my constituents asks. It would not necessarily be in the middle of Hemel, St Albans or Watford, but somewhere where there is decent access and transport links for the whole community. We cannot have that. Why not? We are not allowed to borrow more than our income. Because we are a very small trust, the income happens to be £350 million. We cannot borrow more than that. Why? Why do my constituents suffer because we have a small, inefficient, badly managed acute trust?

If we amalgamated with another trust, the income stream would probably be about £500 million, or we could amalgamate with another acute trust and double the income to £700 million. All of a sudden, we get somewhere near the fictitious figure of £750 million, which keeps coming up for how much it would cost to build a new acute hospital. The figure of £750 million is why the trust is ruling out new build at the moment. I am not aware of any new hospitals in this country—leaving aside private finance initiative problems that we had in the past under the previous Administration—that cost

£750 million. Interestingly, one of my constituents recently emailed me about the new hospital in Birmingham, which was being built by Carillion—we all know about that problem—that is costing £300 to £350 million. The new hospital in Liverpool is costing about £350 million. These are brand new hospitals, which is exactly what I am asking for and certainly what my constituents are united in wanting.

Where has the figure of £750 million come from? It is being used as part of a narrative to block any new acute hospital in my constituency, which would also look after people in St Albans and Watford. In my area, we seem to be fixated on the idea that the only way to use that £350 million is, believe it or not, to plough it into the Victorian hospital in middle of Watford. There are supposed to be evaluation panels, with the community engaged.

The community evaluation panel sat, and some of the members said, “Could we not have on the list a new hospital on a greenfield site?” There was no request for a show of hands, or vote. It just went forward; but it appears it has been completely ignored. The boards of both the West Hertfordshire hospitals trust and the CCG have disregarded it. It is all too expensive. We know, however, that it is not too expensive. Other parts of the country have an open mind, not a closed mind. They are not the same people who closed our hospitals in the past, making the same decisions on the future of Watford hospital.

I have concerns for the people of Watford—the patients of Watford hospital—and the staff. I am concerned about stripping out and fundamentally refurbishing what is a predominantly Victorian hospital, which was massively refurbished in the 1960s and 1970s. How can a full acute hospital continue to operate while that is going on—with all the risks? I have recently written—my old ministerial role was in the relevant Department—to the head of the Health and Safety Executive, because we know there is asbestos in the building. It is fundamentally dangerous, and it is not just because of asbestos, although that is the most prominent issue, and something that can have a massive effect. A tiny fibre in the lung is a death sentence. We know it is there, but we do not understand why the figure of £750 million has been used, and why the figure of £350 million is trapping my constituents in a certain quality of care, simply because we happen to be small and badly managed—not just by the present management but over many years.

Why are we being penalised? That is how we feel, as a community, across political divides—across everything. Labour were massively involved with the problem long before we took over in Government. Why does not NHS England say: “This trust is failing again. It is not big enough. It cannot cope. Let us sort it, management-wise, and bring trusts together.” Then we would go over the £350 million income stream figure, up into the £500 millions. Strangely, £500 million was the figure for what has just been built in Leeds. It seems strange that for Hertfordshire's largest town, and one of its most historic towns, St Albans, which have massively growing populations, Watford is the option. I do not want to take anything away from Watford until there is a new build. I do not want to take anything from it that will undermine what it has—unlike what happened to us. However, perhaps the Minister would like to come to Watford when Watford football club is playing at home—or even just during the rush

hour. He will have a very different experience coming from Hemel or St Albans from the one he would have coming from any other part of Hertfordshire. It is chock-a-block.

I want to touch on a final thing before I hand over to the Minister, because I want him to have time to respond. I have already asked him not just to read out what has come from the trust. I know, having been a Minister, exactly what happens. An MP asks for a debate, the Department writes to the CCG, the CCG speaks to West Herts, and the speech is halfway written before the Minister has even got to Westminster. I ask him please to listen. We are passionate people and are not going to give up. Some people in the campaign group for the new hospital have been working on it year after year. I want to pay tribute to Zena Bullimore, who sadly passed away, and who was chairman of the hospital campaign, and to Edie and Ron Glatter—Professor Glatter. Even though they have been retired for some time, they are a driving force behind the campaign that I was part of long before I was elected. That is how far we go back.

I have some anecdotal evidence to show how wrong it is even to contemplate going further with Watford, instead of getting a hospital out of Watford in a suitable place. One of my constituents had a heart attack and the ambulance arrived in good time. The paramedics did a wonderful job and she was taken to Watford. The ambulance was turned away by the police from the fastest route to accident and emergency. The police had a cordon up so that the fans could use the streets, so it had to go another way, at which stage the non-local ambulance driver got lost. I went to see the officer in charge of the football match and said, “Did you turn the blue light ambulance away?” He said, “I can’t quite—”. I said, “Let’s do another one. Would you have turned away the blue light ambulance that was trying to get to the A&E because you had a cordon up?” He said, “Yes, I would.” I said to him, “If one of your officers had been assaulted and stabbed, would you have let the blue light ambulance in to pick him up?” “Yes, of course I would.” What is the difference between my constituents and the police? I want the police protected, and he would have been absolutely right to let the blue light in. However, the Department and NHS England seem to have tunnel vision about the situation.

I had a response in the last couple of days to a letter I sent to NHS Improvement—to Mr Stevens, actually—saying, “Would you please analyse this very in-depth document that goes into five pages, and give us your opinions?” I got, apart from the signature, one piece of A4 back, which in my opinion was written by the West Hertfordshire hospital trust. If it did not write it, it contains all the same language—probably the same language that is in the Minister’s notes. We have to open up to the fact that there must be accountability in the NHS. It is right that Ministers do not these days make decisions in the way they used to, but things have gone too far. There are people running CCGs who are not qualified to do so. I do not think that a GP is highly qualified to chair and run such a trust.

My acute trust has to make a fundamentally important decision, based on fact, but it is ignoring fact—not just public opinion or “This is the best place for it”, but fact. They keep going on about “You can’t afford it. It will be over £350 million. It will cost £750 million.” Frankly that is a pack of lies and we need to wake up. As I said

the other day among colleagues, “Wake up and smell the coffee.” The public will not put up with a second-rate management system in the NHS. It is affecting my constituents—and I class myself as a member of the public. I live in the middle of the town. I am not going to put up with a second-rate system of management, and incompetence in running a trust.

I shall probably ask to intervene on the Minister during his speech.

11.17 am

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and to respond to my right hon. Friend. I want to say at the outset that one thing we absolutely agree on is what he said in his opening remarks. He expressed, in bringing forward this important matter for debate on behalf of his constituents, recognition of and admiration for the frontline staff. Even though I do not know the frontline staff in his area, I know from my visits in my short time as Minister and from my constituency experience that the professional care they deliver is admirable and extraordinary. We should never forget the effort they put in, and my right hon. Friend is right to acknowledge that.

Before I address specifics, and before what I suspect will be an iterative debate, I want to deal with two fundamental points, which I know my right hon. Friend knows, but are worth putting on the record. First, any service change in the NHS must clearly be based on clear evidence. Secondly, before any substantive change is made, patients and the public should be consulted. My right hon. Friend raised two interesting subjects on which we could have a debate of an hour and a half, or probably even three hours. One was local accountability in the NHS, in its wider sense and form, and how he is accountable as the Member of Parliament. The other was funding criteria.

My right hon. Friend has, I think, addressed two other Ministers on his passion for the longstanding need to improve the quality of hospital infrastructure in west Hertfordshire. That has been a stated aim of the Hertfordshire and West Essex sustainability and transformation plan since its inception. I know it is engaging in the process of looking at how a redevelopment and redesign of the hospital provision in west Hertfordshire can be achieved, working alongside NHS England and NHS Improvement.

I recognise that my right hon. Friend has real concerns and real scepticism about the work of the CCG. I hope he will recognise the work that the sustainability and transformation partnership is involved in in the hospital development process, and the fact that the director of strategy took part in a process and evaluation meeting in February 2019, at which a shortlist of our options was discussed. The STP is also due to take part in the next evaluation event.

I understand what my right hon. Friend says about the capital. I hear his criticism and scepticism of the West Hertfordshire hospitals trust, but it has been taking the lead in developing the strategic outline case for change. I understand that it and NHS Improvement had dialogue, and feedback was provided on the strategic outline case for the acute hospital redesign submitted by the trust. I also understand, as he will, that the

[Stephen Hammond]

feedback made two key points: it was clear, first, about the need for funding, and secondly, that the overall public money for hospital redevelopment is relatively limited.

My right hon. Friend has raised the issue of the £350 million; he knows that the turnover figure is a key criterion and a key threshold for capital investment, and that any options that significantly exceed the £350 million capital cost have been excluded from the current shortlist. He is obviously aware of a £750 million figure being used locally, but I must confess I am not aware of that figure. I would be delighted to offer him a chance to sit down and try to work out with me where that figure came in—recognising, as he rightly points out, that it will not be a Minister who makes any decision. If it is helpful to him, I am happy to have that discussion.

Sir Mike Penning: I had that discussion with the Secretary of State, a couple of days after he was appointed. It is not just Ministers that I pick on—Secretaries of State get it in the ear as well. There are two points I would like to touch on. First, how can it be fair to a community that, if it is just based on the turnover of a trust and that trust happens to be a very small one, the provision we get locally is second class? We cannot even go to that territory. Secondly, on the £750 million, I will ask the Minister to step in, because that is the figure being used locally to rule out the greenfield site. There was an evaluation panel, and members of the panel asked for the greenfield site to be put in, and fundamentally, it appears to me, they have been completely ignored.

Stephen Hammond: I made the point a moment ago that, because the cost of that greenfield site exceeds the £350 million threshold, it has currently been dropped from the shortlist of options. My right hon. Friend repeats a point that he made during his speech, questioning the criteria; he will know that I have heard what he has said. As he has just informed me, he has made a representation to the Secretary of State about that figure, and I have offered to have a meeting with him so that we can both explore it.

I do not think that, in the relatively short time available, I should get into the debate about the loan criteria, as I said at the beginning. We can have that debate at some other stage if my right hon. Friend wishes to put it forward, but he knows that at the moment the key threshold for capital investment would be the turnover, and therefore options that significantly exceed a £350 million capital cost have been excluded. As part of the option appraisal process, senior leaders and clinicians, as well as expert analysts, were involved in information gathering to put together the option evaluation. He will know that that included demand and capacity analysis based on population, hospital activity and operational planning.

With regard to reviewing that process, my right hon. Friend, as he said, wrote to both NHS England and NHS Improvement concerning the approval process. As he referenced in his speech, he forwarded to them an email from Professor Ron Glatter of the New Hospital Campaign. I understand that in that email, the professor

requested a full statement of the outcomes of NHS Improvement's review of the trust's acute transformation strategic outline case.

In its answer, NHS Improvement has so far said that it has not started its formal review because the Treasury and the Department have not yet decided whether the proposal represents a scheme that can in principle be supported by central Government. I recognise the strength and effort of the campaigning for the new hospital option and I acknowledge the expert views that have been sought. While it is obviously not right for me to prejudge the answer from NHS Improvement, I know my right hon. Friend will recognise that I and the Department must take a wider view and that decisions made on capital funding must be the same for everyone across the country.

There has clearly been a huge amount of public engagement throughout the process, and I understand that further public engagement is planned for this month. Notwithstanding my right hon. Friend's scepticism, I understand that the results of those consultations, in terms of the preferred way forward, will be taken to the trust board and the CCG in June 2019.

I recognise my right hon. Friend's commitment to improving services; I assure him that the information provided by the New Hospital Campaign is being considered and will be considered as part of the review. As I said, it is not appropriate for Ministers to comment on specific decisions but, as he knows, the Government are determined to encourage innovation and to ensure that all patients have access to high-quality services. The updated proposal will clearly help to inform both the Department and the Treasury about capital allocations in the next spending review. I will not rehearse the arguments about the extra £33.9 billion of cash to support the NHS, or the additional capital and the bid we are putting forward in the comprehensive spending review.

Sir Mike Penning: If we accept that the rules at the moment are that any bid cannot be over the revenue income, which is the £350 million, can the Minister explain to me why, in Birmingham, the new build for 750,000 people cost between £300 million and £350 million, which we know because of the Carillion contract that collapsed, and the Royal Liverpool cost £335 million, yet we have been ruled out of having any new build on land that is actually owned by us—one of the sites is on Crown Estate land, public land—because it would exceed £350 million? I know he probably will not have the ability to answer that this second, but a letter in the next few weeks would be very helpful.

Stephen Hammond: As my right hon. Friend knows, all Ministers can make an attempt at an answer, but I am sure he would prefer a detailed answer. Therefore, I will make that detailed response to him, as he has asked, in a letter. I also know that he would like me to commit to the spending now, but he will know that I am unable to do so at this stage. I have listened carefully to his points about what might be the cost of the redevelopment that he believes should happen, and he will know that I have heard that. He will also know that I have heard the differences that he has pointed out between the supposed or quoted cost and the cost of build in other areas. He knows that I will have taken that on board.

At this stage, with just 30 seconds to go, I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing this matter to the Chamber and for making the case yet again for his constituents. He should know that the Minister and the Department have listened, and I will respond to him and have that meeting with him.

Sir Mike Penning *rose—*

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order; I do not think we have time, Sir Mike. There is no right to sum up in a half-hour debate.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Leaving the EU: Fishing

[MR GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered fishing and the UK leaving the EU.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I start by welcoming the Minister to his place. It is incredibly welcome that he is an east coast colleague, and so will understand the particular pressures on the fishing industry in that part of the world. I look forward to building a constructive relationship with him over the many years that I know he will be in post. Many Members will use their contributions to talk about the catching aspect of our fishing sector—both around the whole UK and in their local areas—with which they will be more familiar than me. I will focus on the impact of Brexit on the post-catching aspect of the sector.

The fishing sector has been the hallmark of Grimsby for generations, and factories such as Young's and Seachill are the largest source of employment for people in Grimsby. Traditional Grimsby smoked fish is perhaps the most recognisable symbol of quality in the fish world. If the Minister has not yet had the chance to try some, I urge him to visit my constituency and to come along to Alfred Enderby, which supplies Marco Pierre White's restaurants, and hopefully then he will understand exactly why it has such an excellent reputation.

However, the fish that feeds those factories and smoking houses no longer lands at the docks in Grimsby, and often not even in the UK. Instead, the fish processed in my constituency arrives at our factories from across northern Europe. The cod and haddock used by companies such as Young's and Seachill and enjoyed by many in the fish and chip shops up and down the country are caught in the likes of Norway and Iceland. They are then transferred across Europe, usually by lorry, moved on to a container ship and then put back on a lorry, eventually arriving at their destination. Those companies really worry about the effect of Brexit on their sector.

It is right that we talk about the sector as a whole, including processing. The Government document, "Seafood 2040: A strategic framework for England", looks at the whole sector, from catching the fish all the way through to its ending up on people's plates. The strategy covers the industry in its entirety, which is why it is relevant for me to raise these issues. Companies such as Young's and Seachill rely on seamless supply routes to ensure that the fish that they use arrives in as fresh a state as possible. Any delay in the transport of what is a highly perishable good will have a massive impact on both the quantity of spoiled fish and the quality of the end product in our supermarkets.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned, and is a powerful voice for, processors in her constituency. Could she give us some idea of how much of their supply those processors source from EU member states and how much is sourced from places such as Norway and Iceland, which are clearly third countries to the EU at the moment?

Melanie Onn: The hon. Lady is absolutely right: we source the majority of our product for processing from Iceland, Norway, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and so on. However, it is worth noting that those countries have European economic area and European Free Trade Agreement agreements with the EU. Our relationship with the EU will impact on those agreements. There is no way, so far as I can see, that we can supersede their existing relationships with the EU. The hon. Lady is shaking her head vigorously from a sedentary position. I am sure that she will address that point in her own comments when the time comes.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Does she share my concern about a no-deal scenario? The Welsh fish and sea fish sector exports 90% of what it produces, much of it to the EU, and is worth £25 million to Wales. Will she join me in calling on the Department to provide financial support in the event of a no-deal scenario?

Melanie Onn: The hon. Lady raises an important point, and £25 million is not an insignificant sum to Wales. We saw this morning the release of proposed tariff rates, which I will come on to later. Perhaps the Minister can offer some reassurance on that. Going ahead with no deal will have a dramatic impact on trading as we know and understand it, because all our systems are set up to work within the current framework. It is absolutely imperative that the Minister hears these issues raised by colleagues.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The hon. Lady will doubtless be aware that the tariff guidance published by the Government this morning lists a range of tariffs for imported fish. However, there will of course be zero tariffs between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. First, how workable does she think that scheme will be? Secondly, does she think that it will find favour with processors in her constituency?

Melanie Onn: Certainly, the information we received this morning presents a range of difficulties, as the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight. The difficulties of potentially having zero tariffs on imports coming from Ireland, through Northern Ireland and into the UK will have a dramatic impact on the whole sector's trade routes. I think the figure put on tariffs for import was 11.9%. I will ask for further information about that, because obviously we had that information only this morning.

It is quite concerning that that information has only been released today. It would have been preferable for these kind of details to be in the public domain at an earlier stage. All parliamentarians have been considering and voting on issues relating to leaving the EU and we are only now finding out some of these facts. That is not in the best interests of the industry and is certainly not in the best interests of people working in the industry in our constituencies around the country. Grimsby's fish processing sector needs assurances that, come what may, it can continue to enjoy its current seamless supply route. However, industry leaders in the area currently

express deep concern about the lack of clarity over how they expect the sector to operate in what could be a matter of weeks.

Currently, health certificates for fish imports from inside the EU or EFTA are only required for species that carry, or are at risk from, controlled diseases, but they are needed for all fish imported from outside the EU. Fish from EU and EFTA nations do not need to go through border checks when entering the UK. Imposing requirements on markets such as Norway and Iceland to provide health certificates for all the fish they export to us would lead to increased border checks on fish from those countries and could mean damaging delays to the delivery of fresh fish into the country. Will the Minister confirm that it is not the Government's intention to require all fish from markets such as Norway and Iceland to have health certificates once we leave the EU?

If we leave the EU without a deal, all fish exported to the EU will require export health certificates, but companies in my constituency have raised concerns that local environmental health officers simply do not have the resources to facilitate that significant increase in their workload. Can the Minister perhaps put companies' minds at ease by informing us of what steps the Government are taking to ensure that exporters will not be hindered by struggles to produce health certificates in the very unenviable situation that we leave without a deal?

If there are extra certificates, checks and tariffs, those will all be checked and carried out at our ports, and there are concerns among Grimsby companies that even with a deal, ports will experience a bottleneck post Brexit. We have heard about the plans for lorry parks in Dover, but there are also plans around the country for extra capacity to deal with delays in port areas, and the position is the same in north-east Lincolnshire.

Currently, fish arriving at ports in north-east Lincolnshire have been checked and certified in Iceland before being shipped to the UK. Fish arriving here can be seamlessly transferred because of the long-standing relationship between Grimsby and Iceland. There is enormous trust as a result of that relationship, which has existed for decades. It works, and nobody wants that to change. It means that the fish is moved seamlessly. There is no damage to the product. It comes in, and there is no risk of any kind of perishing of the product when it comes through, which of course would devalue it on the open market.

If the UK imposes its own customs checks on fish once we leave the EU, rather than accepting checks as it does now, that would severely impact the quality and quantity of usable fish that ends up in the UK market. Can the Minister therefore confirm that the Government will continue to accept checks from the likes of Iceland as valid and will not impose further checks at UK ports, which could have severe impacts on the viability of the fishing industry in the UK?

We know that additional funds have been directed towards UK ports. The Humber ports of Immingham, Grimsby, Hull and Goole will share £135,000. However, the "Seafood 2040" document highlights the fact that 72,000 tonnes of fish caught under UK licence are currently landed in ports outside the UK. That issue is partly about infrastructure at ports and partly about inadequate facilities. If the Government really recognise the potential for the future of the fishing industry—the potential to grow as we leave the EU—do they consider

that that investment of £135,000 between four different ports in the Humber area will be enough to enable them to cope with future demand? Will it make Grimsby fish stocks ready for the 21st century?

Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): May I congratulate those people in my hon. Friend's area who have secured some of that money for the ports, however inadequate it is. I point out to the Minister—I understand that this is a Department for Transport and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government matter—that of the £3 million in total that is being given to ports across the country, not a single penny is coming to any port in the north-east of England.

Melanie Onn: My right hon. Friend raises a serious issue. There must be equitable distribution of funds. If there is a genuine desire to support the industry, the infrastructure and the facilities must be there. To exclude one at the expense of another is not looking to the future. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to respond to my right hon. Friend's point in his closing comments.

The additional funding is of course welcome; nobody is going to say no to additional funding, but how it will be shared and distributed and where the priorities will lie are still a concern. When it comes to the spending, will it go to the company that runs the dock facilities, which will have all the responsibility of dealing with the customs checks and perhaps an increase in activity? If Dover is unable to cope, perhaps we will see an increase in freight coming up to our port. What will that mean for the fish stocks and for the auction site? Will it get a share of it? That is not clear. I would be interested to know whether the Minister has any thoughts on that, too.

The concerns are clearly not felt by the processing sector alone. According to the UK Seafood Industry Alliance, we export most of what we catch and we import most of what we eat, with 90% of the cod consumed in the UK coming from outside our borders, and species such as nephrops, which are quite unfamiliar to UK dinner tables, being among our most valuable seafood exports. If we leave without reciprocal and favourable trade arrangements with major importers and exporters, we could easily end up in a situation in which fishermen struggle to make vital profits on export species that are extremely valuable in foreign markets, while we see the cod and haddock in our chippies and supermarkets skyrocket in price as tariffs are slapped on our imports.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): Customers may not recognise nephrops, but they will certainly know what Whitby scampi or Young's scampi look like.

Melanie Onn: Yes. The Minister makes a key point. Perhaps there is less familiarity with some of the other species that we export, and export very valuably, to the EU markets.

Let me return to the point about tariffs, which we touched on. There was the publication this morning that referred to 11.9% on protected lines. That is the most preferred nation rate. It is what, in the event of no deal, we will be trading on. Can the Minister explain

that in greater detail? The information came out only this morning. I have gone to various sources, including the Library, to try to get more detail about exactly which species will be affected and how, but perhaps the Minister can put that on the record here today. If he cannot do so, will there be a ministerial written statement to explain the implications of the tariffs and what they mean for the UK sector?

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Lady will accept that the EU would be absolutely barking mad to embark on a tariff war on fishery and fishing products with the United Kingdom, given our dominance of the sea.

Melanie Onn: We are in a fortunate position, in that the Minister's predecessor set a very positive tone from the start of the negotiations to leave the EU. I expect that tone to continue under this Minister. He is a very reasonable gentleman, and I expect him to recognise, in the same interest of standing up for the UK fishing sector, that an unnecessarily aggressive approach is not one that he should take. I do not think that there is any desire on either side to start so-called tariff wars. There is a mutually beneficial industry. The common fisheries policy may continue to be a bone of contention, but in more recent years the relationship has improved, and the changes that have been made in the CFP have struck a good balance between the environment and the catching sector. I hope that that will continue, so I hope that the scenario that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) highlights and perhaps foresees does not come to pass. That would not be in anybody's best interests.

Mr Carmichael: I confess that I am not entirely sure what this means, but the list published by the Government this morning says that

"shrimps of the genus 'Penaeus' even smoked or whether in the shell or not—including shrimps in shell cooked by steaming or by boiling in water"

will be subject to a 12% tariff. If that is what we are levying as a tariff on imports, why would the EU not levy something similar on our exports to the EU?

Melanie Onn: The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about what would happen in the event of no deal. We know—we will be voting on this very subject later—that it is highly unlikely that there will be a majority for a no-deal outcome. For this sector, we should perhaps, in the course of the debate taking place in the main Chamber, go and make our voices heard and say exactly why that would be an incredibly unhelpful outcome.

Liz Saville Roberts: Does the hon. Lady share my concern, though, about the withdrawal agreement? The whelk market is worth £6.2 million a year to Wales. It is understood that even if we leave with the withdrawal agreement, there is currently no agreement with South Korea. At the moment, we trade with South Korea under an EU agreement. Processed seafoods, such as whelks, would be subject to a 20% tariff in South Korea if we traded under World Trade Organisation rules.

Melanie Onn: The hon. Lady leads me neatly to a point about international trade and the role of the Secretary of State for International Trade in securing

[Melanie Onn]

deals. As I see it—I am sure hon. Members on the Government Benches will leap to the defence of the Secretary of State—there has been such a strong desire to ratchet up the number of confirmed trade deals that, in some circumstances, they have been made at the expense of the fishing sector. The hon. Lady's point stands, but I would like to expand on the example of the Faroe Islands deal.

It is good that a deal has been done with the Faroe Islands. In the fishing sector, the Faroe Islands is a relative small exporter to this country, exporting about 35,000 tonnes, which is much less than Norway and Iceland. In previous fisheries debates, we have discussed the fact that the catching sector has been kept very separate from the trading element. At the time, we all agreed that it was probably a good thing not to combine the two, because it would get too complicated. In the case of the Faroe Islands, it seems the deal has been made at the expense of—

Mr Carmichael: Mackerel.

Melanie Onn: Mackerel, I am reliably informed by the right hon. Gentleman from a sedentary position. If that is the blueprint for future deals with Iceland and Norway, it will not serve our industry well. I wonder what conversations have taken place between the Department for International Trade and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on this specific issue. If there have not been detailed conversations, perhaps there could be such conversations in advance of signing up to any more deals, which otherwise will make it more difficult for companies that catch and trade in fish to continue their business. Companies that rely on importing say that we need to focus on deals with major suppliers, such as Norway, Iceland and Canada, if we are to have a seamless transition post Brexit.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Is the hon. Lady aware that in the trade deal between the UK and the US, fish and fish products are included with industrial goods? While agriculture is excluded and protected in that deal, bizarrely, fish is not.

Melanie Onn: That point has been discussed in previous debates on this matter. It complicates the issue of whether things are considered food or industrial goods, or whether they come under farming. Therefore, it is unclear which Department has responsibility for and understanding of the fishing industry, which is a complex industry, because it encompasses so many different elements, as we discussed.

Will the Minister confirm what discussions he or his Department—given his recent appointment—have had with the Department for International Trade about the importance of getting those deals with major suppliers over the line? Will he inform us of the status of the deals with Norway and Iceland, and whether we can expect favourable trade terms for fish when we leave the EU, regardless of the scenario in which we leave?

I know that people in the industry are very concerned at the amount of repetition that occurs in paperwork and fear that it will only get worse post Brexit. Are there any plans to simplify the often arduous paperwork?

Currently, there are no digital solutions in place that I am aware of to reduce the burden of the bureaucracy on people throughout the sector.

Finally, regarding the future of the fishing sector, I know that people in Grimsby would be delighted to see the rebirth of its traditional fishing industry, to sit alongside the new, emerging sector in offshore wind energy. There remain issues around training, awareness and skills. Even in the industry as it stands, we have not managed to get those things right as a country. I hope the Minister will put all his efforts into ensuring that we have the best possible industry in future.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): We have about half an hour before I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, leaving about five and a half to six minutes for each speaker. I do not want to impose a time limit.

2.55 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), my colleague in the all-party parliamentary fisheries group, on securing this debate. My constituency of Banff and Buchan is estimated to have been the most pro-Brexit constituency in Scotland—in fact, it was the only constituency in Scotland that voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. That is unsurprising in the context of this debate, given that it is home to two of Europe's largest fishing ports. Peterhead is the largest white fish port in Europe and Fraserburgh is the largest for shellfish.

Fishermen across the UK have endured 45 years of their industry being run down through being a member of the EU and the common fisheries policy. They voted to take us out of the EU and the CFP. For years, they have compared their industry, declining under the CFP, to the Norwegian and Icelandic fishing industries, and even to that of the Faroese, all of which have flourished. Opposition to the CFP is a major reason why those countries have refused to join the EU.

It is clear that we can forge a better way as an independent coastal state with our own fisheries policy, but it is important that we get this right. We must ensure that we leave the CFP and take back control of our waters no later than the end of 2020. The UK Government have committed to that repeatedly. I hope that my amendment to the Fisheries Bill currently going through Parliament, ensuring that we do become an independent coastal state by the end of 2020, will reinforce that commitment and reassure fishermen across the country.

Likewise, it is vital that any future relationship with the EU does not compromise our status as an independent coastal state in exchange for some other priority, which would be a betrayal of the fishing communities. I have repeatedly said that I could not support any future arrangement that does not advance the interests of fishermen in general, and Scottish fishermen and those in my constituency in particular.

The Government have repeatedly committed to lead us out of the CFP, to become an independent coastal state. When that is achieved we can control the access to our waters for all foreign fishing vessels and secure a greater supply of fish for our industry, without compromising on sustainability. That rebuilding process will require more than those measures alone.

Decades of decline in the industry, coupled with the appeal of the oil and gas industry in north-east Scotland, have made it particularly difficult for the industry to attract local labour to crew fishing vessels, leaving us heavily reliant on attracting foreign crew. In Scotland, approximately 400 fishing crew come from the EU and twice that number come from places outside the EU, such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Ghana.

The industry has already made moves to return to reliance on local workers in the future, and is willing to work with the UK Government to achieve that, but for the time being it expects to continue having to employ significant numbers of foreign crew, especially from non-EEA countries. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby will appreciate, that applies to the seafood processing industry, which is heavily reliant on foreign labour.

Across the fisheries sector, the increased supply that Brexit promises will exacerbate the need for foreign staff in the short term. It would be tragic for British fisheries to be liberated from the CFP, only to be held back by labour shortages. I have been consistent in calling on the UK Government to ensure that their future immigration policy is fair for the entire UK fisheries sector.

Dr Whitford: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that inshore on the east coast, and particularly on the west coast, where all fishing is inshore because of the Hebrides and the Outer Hebrides, we have an even greater problem in getting visas for non-EEA fishermen? We require a fishing or seafarers visa. At least a lot of fishing in the north-east is outside the inshore limit.

David Duguid: I agree with the hon. Lady. It is a cross-party concern: the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) and I have repeatedly approached the Immigration Minister on that basis.

I was going to encourage the Minister to engage with the industry, but I found out recently—I think he announced it yesterday—that he is going to visit my constituency to discuss the investment opportunities in the sector. That is most welcome. It is not enough to suddenly have access to more of our own fish in our own waters; we need to expand our capacity to catch, land and process our seafood, and we need to expand that capacity rapidly—perhaps more rapidly than business will be able to do naturally. We must ensure that our fish and seafood produce can be easily exported to markets around the world.

Mr Carmichael: When the hon. Gentleman shows the Minister the investment opportunities in his constituency, he should probably also take him to local veterinary practices, which are now being sounded out about their ability to produce export health certificates in the highlands and islands and Aberdeenshire. In a no-deal Brexit, the Scottish Government expect that somewhere in the region of 150,000 certificates will be required in Scotland, but local authorities do not have the capacity to deal with that 3,000% increase. They are looking to vets to fill the gap.

David Duguid: The right hon. Gentleman makes a couple of interesting points. One reason why I supported the withdrawal agreement last night was that it would have helped to alleviate that. The need for additional environmental health inspectors has been repeatedly raised with me by the fishing industry in my constituency. They are employed through the local council but no funding has been received from the Scottish Government for them, although I understand that English councils have received about £56 million overall for EU exit preparations.

I am conscious of time, so I will finish. As I said, we must ensure that our fish and seafood produce can be easily exported to markets. These are turbulent times for Brexit and for the country more generally, but we must never forget the hope that led many of our coastal communities to vote to leave the EU and the CFP. We can vindicate that hope, and I believe that the Government are committed to doing so, but delivering on that commitment will not be straightforward. It will require a cross-industry and cross-Government vision of our islands becoming the world-class global centre of excellence that they can be in the fisheries sector.

3.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak on this matter, Mr Stringer. I do not think a fishing debate has taken place during my time in Westminster that I have not participated in. People may say, “Well, he participates in most debates”, but that is by the way. The predecessor of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) was the instigator of many fishing debates and it was always a pleasure to work with him, as it is to work alongside the hon. Lady now.

It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), with whom I see eye to eye on many fishing issues. He highlighted the issue of the Filipino fishermen, who we have spoken to the Minister about. The Minister knows the story only too well, because the four parties involved have made cross-party representations to him to try to bring about changes. We are fortunate to have the Minister in his place and I look forward to working with him. I also thank the former Minister, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), for his contribution, because he was definitely a friend of the fishermen as well.

The Minister was a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which did an inquiry into fishing, so he knows the issues. He also had an opportunity to visit my constituency, especially the village port of Portavogie. He sampled and enjoyed the wonderful Portavogie prawns and scampi, so when I say they are the best in the world, he knows that they clearly are.

The other issue that came up in the visit to the village port of Portavogie was the boats and the fact that many of them were old—we talked about it yesterday, as the Minister will recall. We need reinvestment in the fishing fleets in Portavogie, and in Ardglass and Kilkeel. In this House, I represent the fishermen and fishing sector in Portavogie, but I also have the opportunity and privilege of representing the fishermen in Ardglass and Kilkeel, given that the hon. Member for South Down (Chris Hazzard) unfortunately does not feel that it is his duty

[Jim Shannon]

as a Member of Parliament to come to the House and represent the fishing sector. That is a story for another day, although it is true and factually correct.

The difficulties with fishing post Brexit could be no different from today, but I am quite confident about the future and I believe that the situation will improve. The fishing sector in my village of Portavogie is confident about where it will go and what it will do. The investment and the money that the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority has spent in Portavogie harbour is significant and welcome. We are also pleased that significant multimillion-pound projects are planned for Kilkeel post Brexit.

On a slightly different issue, I mention to the Minister the issue of the eel fishery, which we looked at in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I am mindful of the time, so with that introductory comment, I will quickly comment on one issue.

The hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) and I brought the issue of the voisinage agreement to the Minister's attention. He responded to me in a letter after I applied for an urgent question, which the process of the House unfortunately did not allow to happen. I put on the record my annoyance on behalf of the fishing sector. We talk about post Brexit, but here is an example of what could happen to us.

The voisinage agreement means that Irish fishermen can fish in our waters close to the shore, and enables us to do the same, but a court case brought by Irish fish producers down south legally restricted the option and possibility of our fishermen—British fishermen—fishing in their waters. Under that legal agreement, they seized two fishing boats from Kilkeel and arrested the crew. At that point, some sanity crept into the process at long last. The Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation and the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation released a statement, but in fairness, the judge in the court down south realised that the matter could be dealt with in only one way, and released them. That increased our angst about it, however.

For our fishermen who have fished under the voisinage agreement, and for the future of fishing, that is a warning signal that we cannot afford to ignore when we move out of the EU and into better times. We have continued to allow Irish boats access to our fisheries as part of our gentlemen's agreement and as a nod to good working relations, and the behaviour of the British Government, the Minister and the Minister before him has been above reproach, yet that was the Irish Government's response to our decent hard-working fishermen. They need to be reminded of the harsh truth; I am sure the hon. Member for South East Cornwall will do likewise.

I am conscious of the time, so I will skip forward to the other issue. I welcomed the immediate statements from the Irish Government; it appeared that they had realised that their aggressive approach and the arrest of our fishermen was not in the spirit of co-operation or neighbourliness. Despite the commitments made by the Irish Prime Minister and deputy Prime Minister, however, who indicated that in the light of the situation, they would table legislation in the Irish Parliament to resolve the matter, I have seen little or no evidence of that so far. Again, I ask the Minister to update us on where the

Irish Government are on that. Our fishermen need assurances that the Government will hold the Republic of Ireland to their commitment to pass legislation to resolve the voisinage agreement in the immediate term.

The previous Minister told us that he was committed to doing that at a meeting that my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) and I held with the two fishing producers organisations in December last year. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs addressed a group of industry representatives in London stating that he and the Home Secretary were working to ensure that there would be a route for non-EEA fishermen into the industry post Brexit. I mentioned that earlier, and I mention it again. There seems to be some welcome news coming. Indeed, it is an essential component to any fishing policy.

I finish by making something abundantly clear: the post-Brexit fishing potential is enormous. It can bring great dividends. We must make the most of it, and stop kowtowing to those who have no respect or regard for us. They are taking care of their own and now, I believe, it is the Minister's job to take care of us.

3.10 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Leaving the common fisheries policy provides so many opportunities for the UK fishing industry. Article 62 of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea states that any surplus, and only the surplus, that UK vessels are unable to take from UK waters needs to be made available to other nations, and the UN fish stocks agreement protects shared stocks that transit between each country's waters.

Leaving the CFP means an opportunity to boost our fishing industry, rather than allowing other member states to simply come in and take fish from UK waters, as is the case when the French take 80% of the cod from waters off the south-west coast—we will be able to take that with our fleet. That has the potential to benefit the UK economy: we will no longer be just giving away this very valuable UK asset to other nations to profit from, with no benefit at all to the Exchequer.

I pay tribute to the Minister's predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—he did a really good job—and I welcome the Minister to his place. I cannot think of a better person to represent the fishermen for whom I care so much.

Leaving the CFP gives us the potential to implement measures that will attract young blood into the fishing industry. The industry has been in decline for the last 40 years, and we have the potential to grow it. I pay tribute to my joint co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on fisheries, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), who I know really cares about the processing sector. I also pay tribute to her predecessor, who I knew for many years and who I worked with on the Save Britain's Fish campaign, since he was—

Melanie Onn: A lad!

Mrs Murray: Absolutely. Austin Mitchell was a great man, and the fishing industry cared so much for him.

Melanie Onn: He is still alive!

Mrs Murray: Yes, but he is not an MP any more. Sorry—I should have said he was a great MP!

Processors source much of the fish used in their factories from outside the EU—from Iceland and Norway, in particular. As an independent coastal state, we can set up deals with those nations. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby mentioned the European economic area. I may be wrong, and the Minister may correct me, but as I understand it, protocol 9 of the EEA agreement refers to no tariffs between EU and EEA nations, but does not prevent the European Free Trade Association—the three nations that sign up to the EEA—from signing bilateral agreements, either collectively or independently. I genuinely believe that there is an opportunity for the United Kingdom to sign trade deals that could benefit our processing sector with those nations.

I also believe that our membership of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission provides us with a very real opportunity to speak to other nations that are not part of the European Union club. We have been hampered by our membership of the European Union for the past 40 years. I also understand that the EEA agreement excludes fisheries and agriculture, apart from some areas of compliance with regard to fisheries products. Could the Minister confirm that?

Finally, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). It is time for the UK to take action under the voisinage agreement to stop the Republic of Ireland from imposing what I would describe as a hard border between the six-mile limit off the Republic of Ireland and that in UK waters off the coast of Northern Ireland. I hope the Minister can give us that assurance today.

3.16 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and to welcome the new Minister to his place. I thank his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), for his sterling efforts over the past few years. I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) on securing this debate. Her timing is particularly auspicious.

Although the final form that Brexit will take is uncertain at present, I believe that, generally, the Government and Parliament have used the period from 23 June 2016 up to now to good effect—focusing on the UK fishing industry and gradually putting in place a policy framework that will revive the industry.

To revitalise the industry in Lowestoft and along the East Anglian coast, which is now a very pale shadow of its former self, we need to address three challenges. First, local fishermen must be given the opportunity to catch enough fish to earn a fair living and to supply local markets, processors and mongers. Secondly, we must put in place a sustainable fisheries management system. Thirdly, we must ensure that the benefits of properly managed fisheries go to local people, local communities and local businesses.

My view is that, although there is still much work to do, we are gradually moving in the right direction and making progress. The cornerstone for the revival of UK fisheries is taking back control of our waters so that we decide who fishes there and on what terms. The Prime Minister has come under much pressure in negotiations

to compromise on that undertaking. She has not done so and, whatever happens in the next few months, it is vital that we do not give ground on that point.

Mr Carmichael: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister has compromised on this—she compromised when she said she would put fisheries into the transitional arrangement period.

Peter Aldous: From my perspective, the Prime Minister has come under a lot of pressure from the French and the Dutch, and she has not given way in a meaningful sense.

Despite the fact that I tabled a large number of amendments to the Fisheries Bill when it was in Committee, it is generally a good document and Ministers and officials are to be commended for drafting it to such good effect under such time pressure. That said, it does need some changes. I have tabled an amendment to promote the fairer distribution of fishing opportunities, and we need to consider strengthening what is known as the economic link. Furthermore, although the Government have laid down a statutory instrument to outlaw electro-pulse fishing, there is a worry that loopholes are being left open. I wrote to the previous Minister detailing those concerns and, if they cannot be addressed, we may need to consider outlawing that abhorrent and completely unsustainable practice through provisions in the Bill.

To make the most of the opportunity to ensure that Lowestoft and other East Anglian fishing communities reap the Brexit dividend, the industry in East Anglia, under the leadership of June Mummary and Paul Lines, has formed the Renaissance of East Anglian Fishing. With the assistance of Waveney District Council, a grant has been obtained from the Marine Management Organisation to develop a long-term strategy for the East Anglian fishing industry. Additional financial support has been provided by the east Suffolk councils, Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council and Seafish. The work, which is being carried out by Vivid Economics, is now under way. It looks at the current state of the industry and will come up with a strategy for its revitalisation all the way from the net to the plate. I anticipate that it will highlight where investment is needed in port infrastructure, skills and supply chain building, and I expect that we will be making submissions to the Chancellor's autumn Budget.

The project is exciting and could prove to be a blueprint that could be replicated around the coast. I invite the Minister to visit us in Lowestoft to find out more about it.

3.20 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. It is always an honour to follow the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who is well known for his knowledge of these matters. As he knows, I have family connections to Lowestoft, and it is good to hear him.

The Minister was a member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs and had the honour of visiting Northern Ireland on many occasions during that time. He of course visited Portavogie and other ports, and met fishermen there; he was a keen Committee

[*Ian Paisley*]

member. We prepared a report on fisheries in Northern Ireland, and the conclusions and recommendations were welcomed by the fishing industry there, as he will know. Unfortunately, however, the Committee and industry have still not received a substantive response to the report from the Government. Now that the Minister is effectively a poacher turned gamekeeper, perhaps when he is in the Department he could rustle up a powerful and positive response to it, to ensure that the industry and indeed the Committee is better informed about Government thinking on the key issues we identified. The report recorded the enormous potential that Brexit offers the industry in Northern Ireland. The common fisheries policy has had a detrimental impact there, and we want to rectify that—something that the industry looks forward to.

The United Kingdom has previously stated its intention of leaving procedures for importing seafood unchanged. Today that has been reinforced by the Government's announcement of no tariffs on produce entering Northern Ireland from the Republic. Clearly that must be reciprocated by Dublin and the EU. Otherwise, as I said in an intervention, it is the Republic of Ireland that stands to lose more in a tariff war with the rest of the United Kingdom, given its dependence on British sea waters. No one wants that; we want to be good neighbours to the Republic of Ireland, and we have been good neighbours. However, it is important that people recognise that the hard border in Northern Ireland is actually a hard sea border, where the fishermen of the Republic of Ireland have denied access to our fishermen. That has to be rectified. I wait with interest to see whether an amendment going through the Irish Parliament in Dublin will rectify the situation and ensure that the reciprocal voisinage agreement once again operates fairly for our fishermen in Northern Ireland.

Our report came out in December, at which time the Minister for Immigration would have been aware of the issues that affect the Minister's constituency in this regard. The Minister met fishing representatives in Northern Ireland, and heard that among the issues that affect them is the fact that Whitby Seafoods, based in his constituency and employing 250 people in Kilkeel in Northern Ireland, needs to maintain supplies of raw material to its factories. Without crews, one of the trawlers is clearly going to stop operating. Over two years and longer, there has been no resolution, although, interestingly, owners will shortly pay Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs tax for their crew who are not from the European economic area. That seems a little ironic given what a grey area the question of status in the United Kingdom is.

We look forward to those issues being resolved by a Minister who had his hands on the issues while in other service. I hope that the concerns of people who raise the harvest from the sea will be identified appropriately and resolved to our satisfaction.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I call Philippa Whitford. I will call the SNP spokesperson at 3.30 pm.

3.25 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The Scottish industry dominates because of the sheer scale of its share of water around Scotland. As the hon.

Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) said, the industry is overwhelmingly based at Peterhead. However, there is a significant difference between the industry on the east and west coasts. In the east there is inshore fishing, but deep sea fishing predominates. That brings up the issue of visas, which I mentioned earlier. Non-EEA crew can get transit visas and join a ship. That is not available on the west coast or to inshore fishing.

David Duguid: On a point of clarification, the hon. Lady is obviously correct to comment on the vastness of the waters, and the fact that the Scottish area is huge—and that there is an emphasis on deep sea fishing in Peterhead, as well as Fraserburgh and Lerwick in Shetland. However, there are a lot of smaller-scale fishermen from those ports who fish on the west coast.

Dr Whitford: I did say that there is inshore fishing. On the west coast it is predominantly inshore fishing. In Troon in my constituency, we have the south-west Scotland fish market. It is very much a matter of small boats, and of nephrops, lobster and langoustine. Eighty-five per cent. of that harvest is sent to the EU. People make statements about all fishermen supporting leave, but that is not the case. The Clyde Fishermen's Association and the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Association have withdrawn from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation because they felt that the only view ever put forward was for leave, as if fishermen were unanimous.

I understand that there are major issues with the common fisheries policy, but lots of issues that have been blamed on it are nothing to do with it. One is the fact that 80% of all the boats in Scotland share 1% of quota. The rest has largely been dominated by a handful of companies. In England the figure is 77% sharing 3% of quota. A lot of change would have to happen in the UK to make sure that the industry has quota. Norway has been mentioned. Why not look at having community quota, so that quota remains where it should be and is not transferred, as happens in Scotland—bought up and transferred from the west coast to the east? When we talk about opportunities for coastal communities, that must include the harbour, market and processors. The processors employ more people and generate higher gross value added than the fishermen. We must look at the whole supply chain. We do not feel that that is happening.

The right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell) mentioned that there was no funding for ports in north-east England. No Brexit preparation funding has come to ports in Scotland. I am not sure of the situation in Northern Ireland. Up and down the west coast, we cannot get crew and have boats tied up, so the industry is on its knees. That is not to do with the common fisheries policy; it has to do with decisions made here.

As I have said, most of our produce from south-west Scotland goes to Europe. As was mentioned, under WTO there would be a 12% tariff, but fishing is excluded from the customs union, even within the withdrawal deal. We have a particular problem because of the Irish backstop. Northern Ireland fishermen could fish right in close to our waters, land fish and send it through southern Ireland at 0% tariff, whereas the more that was processed, the higher the tariff would be. Scottish salmon

dominates the smoked salmon market in Europe. It is one of the biggest food exports of the UK. It beats Norwegian salmon, which carries a 13% tariff. We will lose our aquaculture advantage, and Scottish smoked salmon could also end up with a 13% tariff. The idea that this is all easy and will be beneficial to fishermen is simply not true.

3.29 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I welcome the Minister to his place. I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) on securing this debate, which gives Members another opportunity to raise their concerns about the effect that Brexit will have on their fishing industries. I say "industries" because it is important to recognise the great differences that lie underneath the catch-all term "fishing industry", and all too often only the voices and opinions of the big players are heard or considered newsworthy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) rightly said, in Scotland about three quarters of our active fishing vessels fish primarily in inshore waters, which are defined as those up to 12 nautical miles from shore. As Member of Parliament for Argyll and Bute, I am well aware of the importance of the fishing sector to the economic wellbeing of my constituency. As well as having an inshore fishing fleet, Argyll and Bute produces and exports enormous quantities of shellfish and has a hugely valuable Scottish salmon industry. Although those industries may do different things, they are linked by a couple of vital threads. First, they need to be able to recruit the right people to crew their boats and process their catch, and secondly they need guaranteed, fast and unimpeded access to markets. I believe that Brexit, in whatever form it eventually takes, threatens all that, and I do not think that that feeling of trepidation about what lies ahead is confined to the west coast of Scotland or the inshore fleet.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Brendan O'Hara: I will make some progress for now. In a debate last November I quoted from an article in the *Financial Times* by Mure Dickie who, during a visit to Peterhead, spoke to at least one fish wholesaler based there who believed that they had been sold down the river once again.

Mrs Murray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Brendan O'Hara: Let me finish my point. Interestingly, a couple of weeks ago, the *Financial Times* asked Mure Dickie to visit the west coast of Scotland to see how the promise of the bright new post-Brexit world was going down with fishing communities in Argyll and Bute. What he found bore a striking similarity to what he had encountered in north-east Scotland. When asked about the "sea of opportunity" that was promised to fishing communities during the referendum, Kenny MacNab from Tarbert, who chairs the Clyde Fishermen's Association, replied:

"It's only a sea of opportunity for a few. It's not a sea of opportunity for the west coast inshore fleet".

Just down the road in Campbeltown, long-time skipper Andrew Harrison said:

"We haven't got the fishing opportunities to gain out of Brexit. We've got a hell of a lot more to lose".

For fishing communities—from large producers in north-east Scotland to the inshore fleet on the west coast—the promised sunlit uplands of a painless extraction from the European Union, in which the UK will dictate who can fish in our waters and exactly how much they can take, while still receiving tariff-free access to the European Union, have been replaced by cold reality. Their sense of betrayal is palpable. That is not what people were promised; that is not what was written on the side of a bus.

Mrs Murray: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm what he appears to be saying, which is that Scottish National party policy is to remain in the common fisheries policy?

Brendan O'Hara: I am referring back to the debate we had last November, and indeed before then; we have had this verbal ping-pong before, and I will not be taken down that blind alley again. *[Interruption.]* I will make some progress.

I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous); like it or not, the EU has already linked gaining access to UK waters with access to markets. That suggests that any increase in quota for UK boats could come at the price of new trade barriers. That is an inescapable fact; that is what the EU is going for. Let us be honest: United Kingdom Governments do not have the best track record in defending the interests of the fishing industry when it is expedient for them not to do so.

In 2016, fishing, aquaculture and fish processing combined generated just short of £1 billion to the Scottish economy, and employed 15,000 people. In 2017, Scottish vessels landed just short of 0.5 million tonnes of sea fish and shellfish. However, it is one thing to catch and land fish, but quite another if there is no market to sell it in. Right now, we have a mature, stable and growing market. Fifteen days from now, who knows what we will have? That is causing grave concern in the Scottish fishing industry.

The European Union is by far the most important export market for Scottish seafood; in 2017, 189,000 tonnes of Scottish seafood, with a value in excess of £700 million, was exported to the EU. Fishermen in my constituency have perfected the art of getting langoustine, lobster or prawns out of the water and on to tables in some of the best restaurants in Europe in a matter of hours. That does not happen by chance. That has taken 40 years of dedicated hard work, and we will not stand by and watch it be thrown away by this Government's incompetence, intransigence, and ideologically motivated red lines. As members of the European Union, we enjoy tariff-free access to 27 member states. No Brexit deal out there could be better for our exporters than the one we already have as full members of the European Union.

Dr Whitford: Does my hon. Friend see the danger in the fact that if fish processors on the continent require fish, they can invite fish catch landing at zero tariff? That could take fish from the North sea to the continent, which would mean that processors, harbours, and the rest of the supply chain here would not get to handle it.

Brendan O'Hara: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I will touch briefly on fishing tariffs. We all feared that catastrophic tariffs would accompany a no-deal Brexit, and at 7 o'clock this morning we found out just how catastrophic they would be. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) pointed out, the suggested tariffs are colossal and include a 7.5% tariff on monkfish, 15% on frozen fish, 12% on shrimp, 12% on nephrops, and 24% on tuna. I do not share the optimism of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) that the EU will not at the very least reciprocate when it comes to those tariffs. Those figures are potentially ruinous for the industry and will cost thousands of jobs in areas of the country that can least afford to lose them. I hope that every MP who cares for the future of this industry will join me in the Lobby tonight to ensure that no deal is taken off the table.

This debate is not solely about the tariff regime; a lot of other issues are deeply concerning. Last month I hosted a fishing summit; 60 skippers from all over the west coast of Scotland and beyond came to meet the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy in the Scottish Government. Had anyone else bothered to turn up, they would have heard concerns about the loss of the European maritime and fisheries fund, how the quota has operated historically, and how the crippling cost of buying or renting quota is blocking new entrants to the industry.

In conclusion, for more than two years the UK Government and Westminster have offered Scotland, its people and its businesses nothing more than crippling uncertainty, and there is no prospect of that ending soon. More and more people are coming to the conclusion that only independence as a member of the European Union will save Scotland and its peoples. I look forward to the day when we can work with our neighbours and friends in Europe, collectively and collaboratively, on a fishing policy that benefits us and our neighbours.

3.39 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) on securing the debate. Her timing could not have been better, because this debate gives the Minister an opportunity to let us know what he thinks about fishing and to clarify some of the remarks on his website, which I hope he will do shortly.

This debate has also been a chance for Members to ask where the Fisheries Bill is, because as we approach the end of this parliamentary Session we want to know where it is, when it will make a return, and whether it will be carried over to the next Session or whether it will fall, meaning that the process would have to start all over again. I realise that the Minister's views may be subtly different from those of his predecessor, and I would be grateful if he clarified that when he gets to his feet. Nevertheless, I welcome him to his post, as I did in yesterday's debate about farming; then, I welcomed him as the new farming Minister and now I welcome him as the new fisheries Minister. He has quite a portfolio of challenges ahead of him and Labour Members wish him well, because it is really important that fisheries policy is got right.

I will spend the brief time I have today talking about what fishing should look like after Brexit. There is an opportunity to recast fishing policy and to address the genuine concerns that have been raised about the common fisheries policy; like my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby, I am no fan of the CFP. However, concerns have been raised about the additional powers that the Government are considering, how they will be used and whether the Government are using the powers they already have to make the lives of fishers better.

It is worth saying that the Labour party does not oppose the Fisheries Bill. However, like the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who mirrors lots of my views about fisheries, there are still improvements that should be made to it. In particular, we need to consider how the Fisheries Bill can create truly sustainable fisheries. Our fishing needs to be sustainable, both environmentally and economically. In the past, those two elements have been seen as being opposed to each other, when in fact they are the same thing. If we do not have a sustainable fisheries policy, we will not have the fish, which means we will not have the fishing fleet, the processors and the industry, which would further affect our coastal communities.

That is why sustainability needs to be at the heart of the Fisheries Bill. The Minister's predecessor was not so generous as to accept an amendment from the Opposition that sought to change the name of the Fisheries Bill to the "Sustainable Fisheries Bill". Nevertheless, I would like to see the new Minister to put sustainability throughout the Bill. We need to ensure that, regarding what comes after Brexit, the Fisheries Bill considers how we can regenerate our coastal communities, gives a fairer deal to our small fleets in particular, ensures a high level of marine safety by UK boats and—importantly—by foreign boats in our waters, promotes fishing co-operatives, and deals with the grand rhetoric and huge promises that the Secretary of State and others in Government have made about what fishing can get out of Brexit, because, as has already been mentioned, there have been concerns about the betrayal of fishers.

I encourage the new Minister to be cautious about making any grand promises, because, as we have heard about fishing in the transition period, promises that have been made to the industry and repeated time and again have not been delivered. I therefore invite him to be cautious about some of the words that he uses, to make sure that there are no additional betrayals or disruption.

The Labour party believes there is an opportunity to use the Fisheries Bill and post-Brexit fishing to consider redistribution of quotas. It is really important to consider how we can support the small-scale fleets in particular in post-Brexit fishing. There is an opportunity, with the powers that the Minister already has under the CFP, to consider reallocation of quotas and whether our quota system is the right one.

The Minister, writing on his own website, has come out in support of effort-based regimes regarding quota allocation. Many of us in this House hoped that that had been put behind us, so I would be grateful if he clarified his view on effort-based regimes, especially as they were not front and centre in the Fisheries Bill. As we go forward, it is important that the promise to coastal communities that Brexit will deliver more jobs and more fish is delivered, and it can be delivered

through fair distribution, within the CFP and outside it. That needs to be written throughout the Fisheries Bill.

Another issue that we discussed in the Fisheries Bill Committee was marine safety. Brexit must be used as an opportunity to increase marine safety, for not only for UK boats but foreign boats. At that time, the Minister's predecessor did not want to consider a suggestion from the Opposition to require foreign boats to have the same high environmental standards and marine safety standards as UK boats. However, there are great opportunities to adopt more widely what is already going on.

I invite the Minister to consider the lifejacket scheme being pioneered by Labour-run Plymouth City Council. This scheme has been developed with the industry to provide new lifejackets to fishers—let us face it: fishers do not always wear the lifejackets that we know they should wear—to ensure that the buckle does not get in the way of their work, and, importantly, that there is a personal locator beacon on every single lifejacket, so that if a fisher falls overboard or comes into contact with seawater, the PLB activates and the “search” is taken out of the search and rescue operation. Although responsibility for this scheme is shared with the Department for Transport, developing it further is something that the Minister could achieve a quick win on.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very well aware that I have a personal interest in safety at sea. Does he welcome the fact, as I do, that in the last Budget the Government made quite a considerable sum of money available for safety equipment for fishermen?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Lady, who has a neighbouring constituency to mine, for that intervention. It is good that we have two MPs from the far south-west championing fisheries in this debate. However, I would like to know what that money is being spent on, because I am cautious about press releases and announcements, and I want to see action, including action to spread the best practice of that lifejacket scheme to every single one of our fishing communities. That could be really strong action.

I agree with the hon. Member for Waveney, who made some compelling points about strengthening the economic link; we know that for every one job at sea, there are 10 jobs at home in fish processing. However, the Fisheries Bill does not strengthen that link; it is nowhere near strong enough in that regard. I therefore invite the Minister to consider how we can strengthen that economic link. Labour's proposal to ensure that at least 50% of all fish caught under a UK licence is landed in a UK port could be a huge step forward in that respect.

I also press the Minister to do more to support the development of fishing co-operatives, in both the catching sector and the processing sector. Fishing co-operatives are a real success story; from the south-west of England to Scotland, they have prospered largely without Government support. Their potential for expansion, with a fairer share of wealth and power in our coastal communities, is vast.

I hope that the Minister will carefully consider ways to encourage the establishment of more co-operatives, and that he will work with Labour and Co-operative MPs to help double the size of the co-operative sector

in fishing. There is a real opportunity to keep the money that is generated by fishing in those coastal communities by building more co-operatives.

Finally, because I realise my time is running out, I repeat that I share the concerns of my “double” from across the aisle—the hon. Member for Waveney—about electric pulse beam fishing. I know that we had a brief conversation about that in the margins of yesterday's debate on farming, but I put on the record the Opposition's real concern about electric pulse beam fishing. It is a cruel method of fishing. As a nation, we should be proud to say that we will not allow it in our waters. I know that the Minister is taking steps to look again at the licences of UK boats engaged in electric pulse beam fishing, but the statutory instrument that was tabled by his predecessor would allow 5% of the UK fleet—around 200 boats—to use this cruel method of fishing, which is simply not good enough. We should ban electric pulse beam fishing and allow it only under scientific derivations when there is a clear scientific case for it, and we should not use the case for science—as some of our Dutch friends do—to create commercial fisheries that use electric pulse beam fishing.

There is a huge opportunity to make sure that our coastal communities receive the investment they need, because in many cases those communities have been hit hardest by the austerity of the last nine years, and if we are to realise the promises made during the leave campaign, and since the referendum, about the benefits that can derive from a revised fisheries policy, we need the Minister not only to ensure that the regulations and laws that come after Brexit work, but to use the powers that he already has to ensure a fairer distribution of quota and more investment in our coastal communities.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, may I ask him to leave a minute or 90 seconds at the end of his remarks for the proposer of the debate to wind up?

3.48 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): Thank you very much for that, Mr Stringer, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Greater Grimsby (Melanie Onn), who is my relatively near neighbour on the other side of the Humber, for securing this important debate.

As a former shipping Minister, I know Grimsby very well. Indeed, I recall that, years ago, when I first entered Parliament, there was the annual fishing debate, when Austin Mitchell and I would often engage in speeches. By the way, I am very pleased to know that he is still alive, but he will be very pleased when the UK finally leaves the European Union, as will the many people in Greater Grimsby who voted to leave.

I begin my first debate as fisheries Minister by paying tribute to our fishermen, who regularly risk their lives to provide healthy, sustainable and nutritious food in what is still one of the most dangerous jobs in this country. My thoughts are with the fishermen who have suffered loss and injury and with their families, and I thank those in the rescue services for their bravery and dedication. Before I turn to the notes I have prepared, I will comment on some of the points that have been made during the debate, which are probably more important. I particularly want to address the hon. Lady's point about tariffs, and the situation in Northern Ireland.

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

Leaving the EU with a negotiated deal remains the best outcome for the UK, and I am disappointed that so many people in this room, particularly those on the Opposition Benches, did not vote last night to leave the European Union on 29 March. Doing so would have moved us on from many of the concerns that Members expressed about a no-deal Brexit.

Liz Saville Roberts: I know that many fishermen are watching this debate. Will the Minister tell fishermen in Wales who export processed whelks to South Korea what their future will be under the withdrawal agreement? I emphasise to the Minister that the highest percentage of small vessels in the United Kingdom are Welsh vessels. Ninety per cent. of Welsh vessels are under 10 metres, and many of their owners make their money out of this sort of industry. The withdrawal agreement could be devastating for them—I declare an interest, because my daughter is the part owner of exactly one of those vessels. Will the Minister commit to providing financial support to fishermen who trade under non-EU free trade agreements in this current situation of uncertainty?

Mr Goodwill: South Korea, as we know, is not in the European Union, and therefore Brexit will not have an impact on that industry. However, the hon. Lady may rest assured that we are planning for all scenarios, as any responsible Government would, including leaving without a deal.

Today, the Government have published information about essential policies that would need to be in place if the UK were to leave the EU without a deal on 29 March. In that scenario, the Government would implement a temporary tariff regime that would apply for 12 months. Under that regime, the majority of imports would be tariff free, including the majority of fish imports. There would be exceptions for some fish products, primarily tuna and warm-water shrimps and prawns. For those products, preferential access to the UK market is important for developing countries.

In a no-deal scenario, the Government are committed to entering into urgent discussions with the EU, including Ireland, to jointly agree long-term measures to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. On a temporary basis, the Government would not introduce any new checks or controls on goods crossing from Ireland to Northern Ireland. However, fish from outside the EU would need to enter Northern Ireland through a designated entry point.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In recent weeks, I have been corresponding with Iceland's ambassador to the UK, who is particularly concerned about whether the tariff advantages that Iceland receives under EEA arrangements will continue. Can the Minister confirm that that will be the case?

Mr Goodwill: I think I will be spending quite a lot of time in Oslo, Reykjavik and the Faroe Islands, which will be our new allies in this area, particularly at the annual Fisheries Council. We will attend those negotiations as an independent coastal state like Norway, making those important decisions.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), the Opposition spokesman, talked about effort-based regimes. The points I made came at the height of the discard crisis, when there was a particularly emotive story on local BBC television about perfectly good fish being thrown into the sea because the fishers had found some larger-quota fish. We are moving into a new era, and the landing obligation solves many of the problems that the quotas created, but our White Paper noted that effort-based regimes attract mixed views. We may consider a pilot, but we need to ensure that fishing is sustainable and that we do not encourage a race to fish.

The right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell) made a point about investment in ports; as a former ports Minister, I refute his allegations. Ports up and down the country, including in the north-east—private ports, trust ports such as the one in Newcastle, and local authority ports—are making massive investments. In Whitby, £7.6 million is being invested in pier repairs. Sirius Minerals is investing massive amounts of money as part of a £4 billion project to deliver polyhalite fertiliser through the port of Tees, using many of the facilities that British Steel used. On 26 February this year, Hartlepool council announced a big investment development order through which many opportunities will come to Hartlepool, including offshore wind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) repeated his invitation to visit Peterhead, which I hope to do very soon.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I want to correct the record. Opposition Members said that there had been no investment in the fishing industry, but last year's UK Government Budget delivered millions in technology and methodology funding. That will ensure that we not only regain control of our waters when we leave the CFP, but give our fishermen the chance to innovate within the industry.

Brendan O'Hara: On a point of order, Mr Stringer. The hon. Lady claims that people on the Opposition Benches said certain things, but she was not in her place for most of the debate. I am flabbergasted as to how she could have come to that conclusion having not been in her place.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): That is not a point of order.

Mr Goodwill: If anyone wants evidence of investment and confidence in the Scottish fishing industry, they should visit Parkol Marine Engineering in Whitby, which builds fishing boats. It has an order book stretching almost into the middle of next decade, with Scottish fishermen from Shetland and elsewhere buying state-of-the-art boats because of the confidence they have in the fishing industry. Massive investment has gone into Fraserburgh and Peterhead, and I have also heard of amazing plans for future investment in Peterhead's fishing industry.

David Duguid: I hope the Minister will forgive me for potentially being helpful to Scottish National party Members, but does he agree with the Scottish Government's

report from last summer, which stated that Brexit could generate up to £540 million for the fishing industry and 5,000 jobs?

Mr Goodwill: That is exactly right. It is nice to hear some optimism from the Government Benches, in stark contrast to the SNP, which is fast becoming a one-trick pony. It has had one referendum, which it lost, but it seems to think that the answer to everything is an independent Scotland. The people of Scotland made their view quite clear in that referendum, and the SNP should respect it, in the same way that the people of the United Kingdom respect the result of the referendum on leaving the European Union.

It is a fact that the majority of people working in the fishing industry voted to leave, and many did so because those in that industry who survived the common fisheries policy still bear its scars. It is also true that we have asymmetric access to the market: an average of 760,000 tonnes of fish was caught by foreign EU vessels in our waters between 2012 and 2014, compared with only 90,000 tonnes the other way around.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Does the Minister agree that it is not just UK fishing businesses that will benefit from increased catches, but the UK Exchequer?

Mr Goodwill: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We touched briefly on visas, and as a former immigration Minister I know about the problems with Filipinos working on vessels because of the way the 12-mile limit works, particularly in Ulster and the west of Scotland. I am sure that the new Immigration Minister will have conversations with right hon. and hon. Members on that topic. Of course, as my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) said, we need to get young blood into the industry. We need to train our own people, and have newer ships in places such as Portavogie.

I know of the recent concerns about the Irish suspension of the voisinage agreement, which has been mentioned, and the impoundment of two Ulster boats. That was the result of a legal challenge, not of any action by the Irish Government; I am pleased that the Irish Government have committed to resolving that issue, and we will monitor any moves closely. When I was a transport Minister in the European Council, Mr Varadkar was my opposite number. I know that he is a man of great integrity, and we should take the Irish Government at their word that they are going to fix that problem.

I understand the concerns that have been raised about pulse trawling. The statutory instrument laid before the House on 13 January will provide continuity for the fishing industry by ensuring that EU law on technical conservation is operable in the UK. That will mean that vessels will no longer be able to conduct pulse trawling in UK waters.

I had better allow the hon. Lady who secured the debate to make a few concluding points. If I have not covered every point, I will be happy to write to right hon. and hon. Members.

3.59 pm

Melanie Onn: I have to say that I am sorry about the tone that the Minister took in his remarks, particularly about the withdrawal agreement. He said that he knows my constituency very well, but he does not know it that well. It is Great Grimsby; getting its name right would be a good start.

I worry about the flippant tone that he has taken about non-EU nations and the impact on the industry of leaving, even with a deal. That is not going to help the Welsh industry, as the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) pointed out, so I hope that the Minister will take that point seriously. Why will the Minister not set up a DEFRA marine safety hub in my constituency, to support the industry in Grimsby and secure its future?

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Child Trust Funds

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Child Trust Funds.

It is very nice to see you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. I am pleased to have secured this debate on child trust funds—a landmark Labour policy set up by Gordon Brown in 2005 to give every young person a financial asset.

Child trust funds were closed to new accounts by the coalition Government in 2011. When Gordon Brown launched them in 2005, he said:

“Our aim is a Britain of ambition and aspiration where not just some but all children have the best possible start in life. The Child Trust Fund is designed to ensure every child has assets and wealth and that no child is left out.”

Unfortunately, it seems that lots of children are being left out. Child trust funds provided a tax-free savings account, with Government contributions to children born between 1 September 2002 and 2 January 2011. Under the scheme, the child is allowed to manage the account when they become 16, but can withdraw money only when they reach 18 years of age. The funds will mature on 1 September 2020.

The scheme was designed to provide a financial cushion for young people as they entered adult life, while building their skills and confidence in money management. As I said, child trust funds were closed to new accounts in 2011, but they remain live and continue to gain value through market growth and family contributions. Today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the continuation of their tax-free status. There are now 6 million such accounts, worth an astonishing £9.3 billion in total, but shockingly the Government have lost more than 1 million of the account holders; their accounts are worth £1.5 billion. What a blunder! The Government have failed to run the scheme properly.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does she share my concern that, when I have tabled written parliamentary questions asking for the number of lost accounts by social class or nation and region, the Minister does not know? He also does not know how much he has allocated in additional resources. Does that not show a lack of political will to identify that, and to get the money to the poorest children in the country?

Helen Goodman: Absolutely. I did not know about my hon. Friend's parliamentary questions, but I find that astonishing. The figures that I will present come from the Share Foundation.

There are now 6 million accounts worth £9.3 billion, but 6% of the accounts held by children in the top 15% of the income distribution have been lost. In total, those have a value of £213 million. Some 14% of accounts in middle-income families—where Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs cannot link them up with the family—have a value of £540 million. There is no contact information for four in 10 of the children from

families on child tax credits—the worst-off, struggling families, in the lowest 15% of the income distribution. The Share Foundation tells me that, on top of that, another 40% have been contacted but have not responded.

There are therefore between 400,000 and 800,000 children with accounts valued at £1,600—a lost value of £710 million, or even £1.4 billion. That is completely disgraceful. Losing £1,000 may not seem like a lot to a Treasury Minister, on a salary of £100,000 a year, but to most families in my constituency it is a fortune that could pay a young person's rent as a student for several months, or for a course, or for driving lessons.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I have to declare an interest: both my children received child trust funds when they were born. That started the pathway for us to save for them for when they are 18. It is a terrible scandal. The Government should recompense all the families who missed out, and look at the accrued interest and compensate them fully for everything that they have lost.

Helen Goodman: The money is in the accounts but the families have not accessed them and do not know about them, so what the Government need to do is link them up. The Chancellor had an opportunity in his spring statement this afternoon, but he failed to take it. The whole purpose of the scheme was redistributive. The wealthiest children were given a Government contribution of £250 at the outset and middle-income children were given £500, but poorer children and children with disabilities got more. They got it in two chunks that totalled an average of £920.

Chris Ruane: I thank my hon. Friend for being so generous. Why does she think that she can get that information from the Share Foundation, but I am unable to get the information from the Department?

Helen Goodman: I simply think that the Treasury has taken its eye off the ball completely on this matter. It thinks that it can contract the administration out to a small, well-intentioned charity that is doing its best, but it is fundamentally a Government responsibility, and Government Ministers must take their share of the responsibility.

As I was saying, children from wealthy families started off with £250. Children from poor families started off with £920. However, the valuation of the accounts now shows that that position has completely reversed. The accounts of the wealthiest children are now worth, on average, £4,000, but the accounts of the children from the poorest families are worth £1,600. That is partly because wealthy families were able to keep topping them up, which poor families cannot afford to do. Wealthy families have also been managing them more actively.

In essence, the Government have overturned the whole purpose of the scheme. Moreover, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) said, the Government seem to be hiding the funds from those for whom they are intended. Information is printed in tiny typeface on the letter that goes to 16-year-olds giving them their national insurance number. All it says is: “When you turn 16, take control of your child trust

fund. Ask your parents for more information. Go to www.gov.uk/child-trust-funds". If someone does not know that they have a child trust fund, or what a child trust fund is, they will not notice or follow that. It ought to say: "You have an asset. It is probably £1,000. If you want to get hold of it, you need to do this." It should be in big red typeface, like the national insurance number itself, on the letter that is sent out.

Furthermore, most young people, once they have clicked through to the Government website, will not be able to access the fund, even if they follow the instructions in the letter that they get with their national insurance number, because the Government website requires them to have a Government gateway user ID—I do not know whether you are familiar with those, Sir Christopher. It means that, as well as their national insurance number, young people need a passport, a P60 or a payslip. Obviously, 16-year-olds are at school; they do not have P60s and payslips. We are particularly concerned about people in low-income families. Many of them do not have passports, which are very expensive. More to the point, young people are not really very financially sophisticated: 62% of 14 to 17-year-olds cannot read a payslip, while only 52% of seven to 17-year-olds say that they have received any financial education in school, at home or in other settings.

The Government contracted out the administration of the scheme to the Share Foundation, a charity that has been administering it for the 45,000 children in care and which has managed to track down 60% of them via local authority records. That is very commendable, but I put it to the Minister that it is completely irresponsible to contract out the administration of a database of 6 million people to a voluntary sector organisation for a fee of £300,000 a year and expect 1.5 million people to be tracked down on a voluntary basis.

HMRC writes to every mother whose child is soon to be 18, stating that entitlement to child benefit is about to end. I suggest that that is the perfect opportunity to signpost them to the child trust fund. Mothers could be told, "Your child benefit is coming to an end, but your child will then be entitled to this money." I hope that the Minister will take that idea away and implement it with HMRC, which is a department under the Treasury's responsibility.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of the possibility that accounts that have not been activated may be deemed dormant and may therefore be subject to the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008? Does she agree that that is an issue?

Helen Goodman: That is exactly right. If the account is dormant for 15 years, the person will no longer be able to access it.

The results of a YouGov survey, published at lunchtime today, underscore the lack of signposting:

"One in six parents of children aged 8 to 16 were not aware of Child Trust Funds... This figure rises to one in five (21%) among families who were receiving child tax credit at the time"—

families that would thus have been eligible for the larger voucher from the Government.

This is a scandalous and secret maladministration of public money on a vast scale. Unless the 1 million children and young people are tracked down and the £1.5 billion is given to those for whom it was set aside,

that money will go back to the Treasury, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) said, to be redistributed by a bureaucrat. That would be a terrible waste—not just of the money, but of the life chances of the young people for whom it was intended.

4.12 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this debate; I recognise that she has taken a keen interest in the issue and has been a doughty campaigner on matters of childcare and child poverty, following her 11 months as a Minister in the last Labour Government. I also acknowledge and will try to address the points made by other hon. Members.

The Government share the commitment of hon. Members of all parties to supporting people to save at every stage of life, irrespective of income or background. Financial inclusion is one of my key priorities as Economic Secretary, and in the past year I have met many organisations and experts in the field. I strongly believe that learning financial skills at a young age equips young people to make better decisions when they are older, so I am pleased to have this opportunity to set out the Government's view.

The Government introduced junior individual savings accounts in place of child trust funds in November 2011, providing continued tax incentives to encourage families to put money away for their children's future. Under legislation introduced in 2015, existing child trust fund accounts can be transferred into a junior ISA, providing families with the flexibility to choose the right option for their child. The Government also sought to make specific provision for children in care; as the hon. Lady pointed out, we contracted the Share Foundation to work with local authorities to open a junior ISA account on behalf of looked-after children.

The Government currently pay £200 into the accounts of children who have been in care for at least one year. The Department for Education has provided the Share Foundation with funding totalling £531,624 for that administration, and 120,000 payments of £200 have been made to children in care since 2012. We want those children to leave care with money to their name and the means to continue saving as they become independent. I should stress that junior ISAs are just one element of our work to promote financial education among young people. We want all children to enter the world of work understanding the importance of budgeting and saving, so financial literacy is now taught as part of the citizenship curriculum for 11 to 16-year-olds.

Let me turn to the so-called lost child trust funds, which were the core of the hon. Lady's speech. There are many complex and overlapping reasons for the lack of engagement, but the Government are working with industry to actively seek holders of the accounts. Child trust fund providers are required to send regular statements to the child's last known address and are taking steps to trace those who have moved. They have a statutory obligation to send such statements on the child's seventh, 10th and 15th birthday, but in line with Financial Conduct Authority guidance, most do so annually.

[John Glen]

The national insurance notification letter that HMRC sends to all 16-year-olds has recently been amended to include details about how child trust funds can be located; the hon. Lady referred to the size and colour of the font used, which is clearly a matter that I can take on board and examine. I also draw hon. Members' attention to HMRC's online tracing tool, which is available via gov.uk. Of course, people can still contact HMRC by telephone or post if they so choose.

Chris Ruane: May I put to the Minister the same question that I put to my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman)? The Share Foundation was able to give her statistics on the distribution among socioeconomic groups, but when I tabled questions to the Treasury asking for exactly the same information, it was not available. When I asked for estimates by nation and region, that information was not available. When I asked what additional resources had been allocated to assist in locating child trust fund accounts, that information was not available either. Can the Minister supply it today?

John Glen: I am grateful for that question about the regional and income breakdown of the distribution of child trust funds. Such information is published by HMRC and discriminates by region and county and by whether additional contributions were made; no income distribution data is collected by HMRC. I am happy to look into the matter further; if I can give the hon. Gentleman any more information, I will write to him.

Looking to the future, approximately 6 million child trust funds have not yet been transferred to junior ISAs. The first of those accounts will mature next September, and a further 55,000 will mature every month thereafter until 2029. What young people choose to do with their money is ultimately a matter for them, but we want them to engage in the process so that they can make the best decision for their individual circumstances.

Helen Goodman: As I have explained to the Minister, the problem is that people cannot use the Government website to access their accounts if they do not have a payslip, a P60 or a passport. Will the Minister address that point? Hundreds of thousands of young people will be in that situation.

John Glen: The key question is how an individual child knows what they have. The hon. Lady's allegation is that this money is lost, but it is not lost; it is just that the individuals have not come to the point at which they can engage with it, which will happen at age 16 when they get a letter with their national insurance number. At 16, they are allowed to make decisions about their investment choices for that fund, and at 18 they can access it. They get the letter, along with their national insurance information, at 16, the age when they can start making individual decisions about that money. I think it has been suggested that the Share Foundation should interrogate data from the Department for Work and Pensions, cross-reference it with HMRC's, and somehow write to these individuals—

Helen Goodman: That is not what I said.

John Glen: Well, that point has been made in other forums. I am just trying to respond completely to the points that have been raised generally.

Tonia Antoniazzi: What plans does the Minister have to encourage eligible parents, and children when they turn 16, to access this money? Is it not the responsibility of the Government to do some kind of public awareness campaign to say, "Hey, look—here's your investment that the Government made for you. This is how you access it." Let us make this a can-do exercise.

John Glen: The key point is that children have access to this money when they are 18, but can influence decisions about it from the age of 16, when they are paying tax and have a national insurance number. They will gain that access mechanism when they secure their national insurance number. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland made a point about how this issue should be depicted on the form when 16-year-olds get their NI number, but that number provides the key to unlock awareness of, and access to, the fund that has been invested for them.

Helen Goodman: I do not like to denigrate my former profession, but I do not think the Minister has been very well briefed. According to the Share Foundation, the lost accounts of the most wealthy number 54,000, the middle income 560,000, and the poorest 444,000. Those are not families in which the child is already 16 to 18; it includes all families. It means that the addressee has gone away. We do not know whether the address we have got is the right address for that group of people.

John Glen: The point I am making is that all individuals, no matter what their background is, will gain access to the funds at the point when they can gain their national insurance number, by reference to the letter that has been provided. I have had extensive conversations with my officials, and I note the hon. Lady's reference to bureaucrats. She worked for over 20 years at the Treasury—I have the highest regard for it and the accuracy of the material it has given me.

No funds or accounts have been lost. All child trust funds have been managed by child trust fund providers—either by the original provider with which the account was set up, or by a subsequent provider to which the funds have been transferred. There are 69 providers currently managing child trust funds, and the Share Foundation's analysis appears to be based on accounts held with just one provider: the Share Centre, which represents only 1.5% of the number of accounts. The hon. Lady might want to contradict that by extrapolating the data to all of them, but the Government are working together with the industry to encourage child trust fund holders to re-engage with their accounts.

As I said, we have developed an online tracing mechanism and recently amended the national insurance notification letter to 16-year-olds to include a reference to child trust funds. That happened in January in order to take into account the points raised. Any account holders who are unable to retrieve their account details online are encouraged to contact HMRC directly.

Helen Goodman: I have just explained to the Minister that to get through to the website, people must have other documents that—by definition—16-year-olds do not and cannot have. The system is not working. The Minister needs to rethink how the website works!

John Glen: I do not think that the hon. Lady's raising her voice in an aggressive manner is going to help anyone. I have just set out the Government's position and explained the detail of the provision. The hon. Lady has extrapolated some figures from one piece of analysis by one of the providers, which is not a reliable way of carrying on. I have told her about the action we took in January.

The issue is not just about the online portal, but about being able to call up HMRC. Last year's Budget included a commitment to consult on draft regulations that will ensure that investments currently held in child trust fund accounts can retain their tax-free status after maturity. The consultation will take place later this spring, when the Government will lay regulations before the House, well in advance of the first accounts maturing in September 2020.

In summary, both junior ISAs and child trust funds allow parents and guardians to save on behalf of their children, tax free. People have the option to convert their child trust fund into a junior ISA, and we are working with providers to reunite dormant accounts with their intended owners. However, all remaining child trust funds will continue to enjoy tax-free status, even after they mature. The amount that young people can save in child trust funds and junior ISAs will increase by the rate of inflation in April—it is currently £4,260 a year.

Chris Ruane: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland that the system is not working. As a way out, would the Minister consider meeting people who have sufficient knowledge—I would include my hon. Friend—or perhaps citizens advice bureaux, the Share Foundation and a panel of parents, so that some answers can be given to the questions that have been raised?

John Glen: On behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who is the Minister

responsible for this area and is currently before a Select Committee, I would be very happy to offer a meeting with hon. Members to discuss this matter further. It is his responsibility, and I am sure he would be very happy to attend.

We have made efforts to provide young people with savings to draw on as they reach adulthood, and we hope this encourages further saving at every stage of life. The points made by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland on access have been comprehensively addressed by the Government's sending a letter to 16-year-olds.

Helen Goodman: They have not!

John Glen: I understand that the hon. Lady is not satisfied with my response. Meeting with the Minister would probably be the best way forward.

Helen Goodman: Will the Minister take on board my suggestion of writing to the recipient of the child benefit when the person turns 18? The Government writes to every mother across the entire nation, and that would be an opportunity to catch them in the net.

John Glen: The key point here is: when does somebody have access to make investment decisions as a young person? It is when they turn 16, and then they can access it when they are 18. Trying to overlap the letter with the mother when actually it is about the beneficiary, who is the child, is not the route to go down.

Helen Goodman *indicated dissent.*

John Glen: The best way forward would be for the hon. Lady, who is clearly shaking her head and dissatisfied, to meet my colleague from the Department for Education. Hopefully, that will provide her with the answers she needs.

Question put and agreed to.

Disability Assessment Services

4.27 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered improvements to disability assessment services.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I am grateful to have the opportunity to debate this important topic. People with disabilities and ill health are often confronted with barriers at every turn. I believe it is the role of Government to remove these barriers as often as possible. Everyone deserves the same opportunities to achieve their potential, and I am proud that we are ensuring that the issue is high on the Government's agenda. The support available through the benefits system is there to take some of the strain off people who are living through often unimaginable day-to-day challenges. However, I am sure that, like me, colleagues have heard from constituents at times when they have needed help and found it difficult to navigate the system.

A very dear friend of mine and colleague from the business world, Andrew Knowlman, sadly lost his courageous fight with motor neurone disease late last year. He used his time and experience of the disease to campaign to ensure that I clearly understood the physical challenges it brought him, and the challenges he faced in trying to access the support available through the Department for Work and Pensions. One of the most significant issues that he brought to my attention was the repeated requests he received to attend work capability assessments.

This point is echoed by my constituent Lee Millard, who has been diagnosed with the same condition. Lee and his wife Jean have been campaigning to make a difference for those affected by the disease. When we met, Lee explained how stressful the reassessment process can be for claimants of the employment and support allowance, which is now moving across to universal credit, and personal independence payments—particularly when we consider that conditions such as motor neurone disease are degenerative, and the person who is affected is all too aware that they will not improve. He said that the whole process can feel very much like a “waste of precious time.”

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that disability assessors should rely more on the opinion of medical experts, particularly when judging mental health and invisible disabilities?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, that is absolutely vital. One of the learnings from the system is that it needs to make sure that those assessments are available in time. I will go on to talk about that.

In a bid to tackle this problem, the Department stopped requiring people with the most severe and lifelong conditions to undertake assessments from September 2017. However, some of my constituents told me that that is not their experience, and that they are still being asked to go for assessments. The Minister kindly clarified that for those receiving ESA and universal credit before 29 September 2017, the severe conditions criteria will take effect at their next work capability assessment, so it could be that my constituents had one after that date, but will not have another.

I welcome the move, which is being encouraged, to enable decisions to be made without face-to-face assessments, through health questionnaires and evidence collected from GPs and specialist health professionals. On a similar note, I am pleased that people receiving the highest level of PIP will receive an ongoing award, with only a light-touch review after 10 years. That is another progressive step to ensure that those who most need support receive it hassle-free.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Some of my constituents have found the PIP assessment process and the work capability assessment deeply traumatic and very flustering, and they often get confused. Does my hon. Friend agree that allowing assessments to be recorded—especially video-recorded—will give people confidence that they are getting a fair assessment, and that the assessors are being monitored and must come up to a high standard?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, I do. Technology in general is enabling us to put better processes in place. Recording will not be appropriate for some people, but it is important to use technology in the right circumstances.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I declare an interest: my wife is disabled. I am interested in the assessment that takes place when somebody moves from the disability living allowance to PIP. From my constituency surgeries, I have noticed that that the mobility element for DLA is somewhat lower than for PIP. Does the hon. Lady think that that pattern is more widespread throughout the UK? Is there something here that is not right? Leaving out my wife, I have dealt with cases of people who have lost out on the initial assessment. The sentiment about continuing assessment is absolutely correct, and I support that.

Gillian Keegan: I am not in a position to see an overall pattern—perhaps the Minister does, because she sees what is going on across the country—but many of us have heard about issues relating to mobility and Motability.

Last week, the Secretary of State announced that people over state pension age will no longer have to go through PIP reassessments. That is part of her ambition to ensure that disabled claimants do not feel like they are on trial. These changes have been rightly welcomed in the press and, I am sure, by many Members in this Chamber.

These improvements are good news for claimants. However, one of the most common times when I receive a request for help from a constituent claiming disability benefits is when they do not agree with the outcome of their assessment. Recent figures from my area—Chichester—show that the overturn rates at tribunal are 71% and 81% for ESA and PIP respectively. It is my understanding that that is largely due to medical evidence not being available in good time, and being available only at tribunal. Those levels are clearly unacceptable. It is very stressful for people to go through the initial assessments, the reassessments and a tribunal. I would be grateful if the Minister could let us know what more work is being done to improve the system. Are there any plans to consider the timescales within which we ask GPs and medical professionals to give information about claimants, to ensure it is in time for assessments?

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We have all seen that the appeal rates are unusually high. What, in the hon. Lady's experience, is the time it takes to get to an appeal? In my part of the world, it is 40-plus weeks, which for some of these people is a ridiculous amount of time to wait.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, it can be quite a long time. We have heard that people can wait for three or four months. That uncertainty means that it is very difficult for a person to plan, as they do not know how much support they will receive.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech and is putting into words what a lot of us experience in our constituencies. In my area, it takes 48 weeks for an appeal to be heard, and people usually have to sign on for universal credit, rather than ESA. They have to undergo conditionality, even though in 71% or 72% of cases in my area, at the end of the process it is found that they are not able to work. They are being pushed into that by a system that does not take into account their disability. Does the hon. Lady agree that that desperately needs looking at? People have to wait a year or more to get assessed properly.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, I do, but we need to solve the root cause of the problem, so that we do not have these high tribunal rates. If we do not have them, we will not have the waiting times. That is the best way to ensure that the system has a low failure rate.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She is being very generous with her time. Is she as concerned as me about a report in the GP journal *Pulse* last week that said that the transformation of the new health assessment system could lead to unfettered access to medical records via the GP? We should surely speak up against that. Medical records are personal data; that is an absolute human right.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, although we need to balance that with having enough medical data to make the assessments in the first place. I have not seen that report. I do not know whether the Minister has, and whether she can take that into account in her speech.

I am glad to hear that, following the recent Government announcements, we are moving our benefits system into the 20th century by integrating multiple data sets into one system, although I take the hon. Lady's point that we must ensure that they are very well protected. That will streamline the assessment process and make submitting a claim much more user-friendly, particularly for people transitioning between benefits. Plans to test a single health assessment for all disability benefits will mean less form-filling, and will reduce face-to-face assessments, cutting red tape and the inconvenience it causes. My constituents who need support often have highly complex needs, so I hope the changes will save them time and stress. It is important that we listen to our constituents and put them in the driving seat of reforms. I hope the Department will do that.

An issue that has been highlighted to me is people's reluctance to attend assessments. We must do more to ensure people feel comfortable with and trust the process.

It is key that we ensure that people know that in every case they are being assessed by a qualified doctor, nurse or healthcare professional—often somebody who works in the NHS—who has undergone additional training to carry out assessments. I did not realise that every single assessment is carried out by a qualified medical assessor. Many members of the public do not realise that. They think it is some third-party company, but often nurses work for those companies. We need to do more to make sure that people are aware of that, so they feel more comfort and trust.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that the questions in the assessment process are not too intrusive, so people do not feel that their integrity or dignity has been taken away from them? They should feel comfortable taking part in the process.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, absolutely. We should not only look at who is carrying out the assessments, but open up where they can take place. Perhaps we can have a wider range of premises where assessments can be carried out, including places that are more familiar to and convenient for claimants, such as local authority buildings, NHS sites or even jobcentres. I would be interested to hear whether the Minister has any plans to do that.

In recent years, disability employment has risen, and now over half of disabled people are in work. Nine per cent. more disabled women and over 6% more disabled men are in work than in 2013. That is testament to the programmes that support people with disabilities into the workplace. I am pleased to hear that the Secretary of State outlined her ambition to build on that record, as every person with a disability or learning difficulty deserves the same opportunities to go to work and build a career. Programmes such as the personal support package have been crucial to that; they provide tailored employment support that recognises the individuality of people's conditions. Much of that work is done through the jobcentre. In Chichester, we have a great team with some real success stories because of the support available through the programme.

Our Jobcentre Plus makes good use of the community partners and small employment advisers. Chichester has a low unemployment rate of 1.7%, so local businesses look to use all the available talent and need more local people in the workplace. I am glad that the small employment advisers are able to bring people with long-term health conditions and disabilities together with businesses to help them find a decent job.

Work coaches and disability employment advisers use all the tools at their disposal to help build skills, and to help disabled claimants prepare for the workplace. They do that not only through national programmes, such as the Work and Health programme, but local initiatives, such as WorkAid, which is run by the Aldingbourne Trust. It is great to hear the success stories of constituents who have managed to move into work, and that is made possible by the tireless effort of the jobcentre staff, who make those initiatives a success on the ground. I am sure that we all have many examples of that.

Getting a good job has a powerful impact. Last year, I met a constituent whose son is on the autism spectrum—there is a big problem getting people with autism into the

[Gillian Keegan]

workplace; much more needs to be done on that. She told me that he rarely utters a word and is uncomfortable around people. She is determined to help her son, and managed to get him work experience at a games software development firm. That was transformative; for the first time in a long time, he began to speak.

Getting a foot on the career ladder is challenging irrespective of disability; sometimes, extra-special effort must be made to find opportunities, particularly for work experience. I am very pleased that the jobcentre is offering careers advice to disabled students in schools, because building confidence in disabled kids as early as when they are 12 is critical to making them feel that they have all the opportunities that everybody else has. This is just the start; there are exciting pilots up and down the country, such as Tri-Work, which offers work experience to children in years 10 and 11, and programmes that support internships for school-leavers. I want every disabled child to be excited and have a wide range of options in the workplace, so we need to ensure that such initiatives are available throughout the country. The schemes are empowering young children, but they must be available to all who need them.

The Disability Confident scheme is another successful programme, which now has almost 10,000 signatories. One participating employer is Chichester District Council, which works hard to make sure that its work environment is accessible, and has made workplace adjustments—for example, providing ramps, lifts, and an emergency evacuation chair. Perhaps more importantly, on top of that, the council has a welcoming workplace culture, actively helps applicants to apply, and will always interview disabled applicants when they have fulfilled the basic role requirements. That additional support removes the barriers to the workplace for disabled people and gives them confidence to start their journeys into new jobs.

We all know from our constituents that the system is not perfect, but I am pleased that the Government and the Secretary of State are listening to constituents' voices and reforming it. There needs to be less stress, wasted time, and red tape all round; we need a more welcoming environment that makes people feel that they can trust the system, not that they are on trial.

I am proud of this Government's record in supporting disabled people into work. There is still a long road ahead to ensure that all disabled people who can and want to work get the support that they need and the opportunities that they deserve.

4.44 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) on securing the debate. Like many other Members, I am sure, I felt compelled to speak because of the number of constituents who have come to me with harrowing stories of their experiences, and with a clear message that improvements to disability assessment services are very much needed.

In my constituency, we have seen a variety of issues recently, including cases of incorrect information being recorded; there have been statements saying that physical assessments were carried out when they were not, and

that a constituent could go out alone when the assessor was actually told in the interview that they could not. In one case, the information was so incorrect that it was assumed that the assessment report had been mixed up with that for another case. My constituent Amy was recorded as walking despite being wheelchair-bound, which must surely have been apparent at the assessment. When a complaint was raised, the DWP noted that that could be a "misleading statement", but worryingly, Capita, which has consistently failed to meet its target for an acceptable standard of assessment, responded that there was no evidence that the statement made by the assessor had been misreported. I find that unbelievable.

Last-minute cancellations are a problem. We have heard from constituents whose assessments were cancelled on the day that they were due to take place. Even worse, in some cases, the constituents were actually at the assessment centre when their appointment was cancelled. Yet perversely, if a constituent is unable to attend their assessment, they are penalised. When one of my constituents rang up two days before her assessment to give notice that she would not be well enough to attend, she was told that it was too late for the assessment to be rescheduled, and that she would be recorded as a no-show. Those are double standards of the highest order.

Constituents who have attended assessments have raised with me the concern that their assessor carried out the assessment very quickly, and did not listen to their answers. Others were concerned that the assessment was not carried out safely. For example, a constituent with a slipped disk was asked to complete the physical part of the assessment without anything to support her, despite informing the assessor that she would need to hold on to something. Why are my constituents being put at risk in that way?

Another major concern is the refusal to conduct home assessments, despite medical evidence that they are necessary. That is a concern shared by organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Support, which has found that home visits can often be difficult to obtain, and that the option of a home visit is not widely communicated.

Jamie Stone: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about home visits. Does he agree that the problem is compounded by the fact that some people have to travel very large distances for those assessments? That is an issue facing some of my constituents. It would be so much easier if they could be done at home.

Justin Madders: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman's constituency must be rather more rural than mine, but for anyone who has a disability, travelling distances of any order is challenge. Home assessments need to be much more widely promoted.

Andrea Jenkyns: I was recently contacted by a constituent who won her battle against cancer. That should have been a moment of celebration, but she is worried about her impending disability assessment. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the parity of esteem between mental and physical health should be reflected in disability assessments?

Justin Madders: I agree; I will address that shortly. I will not take any more interventions, because a number of hon. Members wish to speak.

My constituents feel let down by the complaints process. They do not feel that it is fit for purpose. Many of their legitimate complaints are just passed back to the DWP, so those undertaking the assessments face little accountability. Does the Minister monitor the number of complaints against particular providers, and if so, can she tell us who the worst offenders are and what will be done about them?

As the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) mentioned, another common issue is that assessments do not take into account the effect of mental health conditions, or acknowledge that many physical conditions can fluctuate daily. Certainly, the assessments that I have seen have focused on what people say about their good days—or moments—as the baseline for a typical day. There appears to be an almost institutional incapability of appreciating that just because people with fluctuating conditions have times when they are doing better, that does not mean that that is their condition all the time. There are occasions when they do need real assistance.

I am sorry to say that some private providers show no prospect of making any real improvements to disability assessment services, which are inaccurate, ineffective and unfair, and need to be brought back in house. It is a damning indictment of the system's failings that the DWP does not even bother to turn up to about 80% of the appeal hearings against the assessments.

The message that I bring from my constituents to those who undertake the assessments—perhaps the Minister can consider this—is that they should be carried out with the idea that we should treat others as we wish to be treated. Show respect, show empathy and show compassion. That is what our constituents deserve.

4.49 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, Sir Christopher, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) on securing it. I know that the Minister, who is almost a constituency neighbour, is fully engaged in the issue, and we should be in no doubt about how committed she is to finding a way through.

Vicky Ford: Would my hon. Friend like to take this opportunity to put firmly on the record what a brilliant Minister and champion for disabled people she is?

Derek Thomas: I am sorry that I did not make it quite as plain as my hon. Friend did, but that was the point that I was trying to make.

I am fortunate that in my office I have a member of staff who used to work in the DWP, before I pinched him. He has taken this issue seriously, and we work hard and often successfully to support people who find themselves challenging, and struggling because of, PIP decisions. My office has seen numerous cases of the DWP accepting a poor medical report containing obvious errors and incorrect recommendations from medical services. If those reports had been returned at an earlier stage, decisions would have been overturned immediately.

We have also seen numerous cases in which the mandatory reconsideration has rubber-stamped the original decision, failing to reflect in any detail what the constituent has said or to refer to any new evidence provided, and in

which the DWP has failed to send new medical evidence for a medical opinion—I mentioned that earlier—to contact the constituent to find out more, or to consider further evidence when it is provided. Therefore, once a mandatory reconsideration is done, it must go to appeal. I know that is often very much the responsibility of work coaches and individual jobcentres, but there is a need for leadership in addressing the problem.

Resolving any disputes without the need for an appeal will help to ensure that people receive the right decision earlier in the process. Avoiding a tribunal saves money and time for everyone concerned. I am reluctant to mention the Minister's constituency and county, but the tribunal statistics for the Truro tribunal centre in this financial year show that 351 PIP appeals have been cleared, with the DWP's decision upheld on only 32 occasions. We have heard other tribunal statistics this afternoon, but in Cornwall 90% of tribunal appeals are won. That must be addressed; we need to look at what is going on in Cornwall.

A constituent of mine was awarded no PIP at all, but on appeal was awarded higher mobility and daily living components within minutes of attending the tribunal. I dropped off my member of staff as I went to another meeting on the way up to London, and he texted me within 15 minutes to say we had won—it was almost immediate, because the minute the tribunal started my constituent was awarded the higher allowance.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Like the hon. Gentleman and his office, we have had cases—in particular those related to PIP and other benefits—where it has been questionable whether people will get their benefits through examination. I know that the Secretary of State is looking at that, but it also strikes me that the companies who do the assessments are not well managed and, more importantly, their staff are not trained properly. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Derek Thomas: That is fair. I sit on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions with other colleagues in the Chamber, and we hear such examples all the time.

I met the individual I am talking about and I could see clearly that he should have been getting the higher mobility component. An assessor who had asked the right questions and inquired after the person's clear and obvious physical difficulties would have discovered their whole life was adapted to be independent, and a tribunal would absolutely have been avoided.

On a few occasions, medical services for PIP assessments have stated that tribunals are not as "restricted as we are", when justifying the fact that tribunals are often successful for the claimant. Our understanding, however, is that they all follow the same legislation and the same medical handbook, so it can only be down to poor information gathering, poor questioning and poor decision making.

The Minister knows about what I will mention now, and I am sure that she shares my concern. If the DWP did not rubber-stamp mandatory reconsiderations, as it does, people in Cornwall would not be left in desperation, causing them to turn to organisations such as Benefit Resolutions, which charges clients £100 before it even looks at the cases. Then, from some of our most vulnerable people, it takes 15% of tribunal winnings in commission. It no longer attends tribunals, and it uses aggressive

[Derek Thomas]

tactics with the DWP, other offices and its clients. Going by the results claimed on its website, Benefit Resolutions has taken almost £200,000 from the most vulnerable people in Cornwall over the past four years. There have been numerous complaints about its conduct throughout Cornwall, and the previous charity related to it, which was called Bufferzone, was closed down following an investigation by the Charity Commission.

I take the opportunity to remind people that the many free-to-use services include Citizens Advice, Counselling and Benefit Support, disAbility Cornwall and MPs' offices. I have serious questions about the work and moral justification of companies such as Benefit Resolutions. I would always encourage people to make contact with the organisations that I have referred to. However, the truth remains that Benefit Resolutions and companies like it exist only as a result of incompetent and poor service provided by the system.

To conclude, I will read from a letter that has been submitted as a formal complaint to the DUP, I mean the DWP—probably not the DUP, though they might do a better job—which clearly sets out the case being made this afternoon:

“Last week I had a PIP assessment which lasted an hour and a half. They ask you really hard questions like do you think about committing suicide, and you have to go over again and again how your disability or illness has affected your life.

I understand they have to assess people and I am grateful there is somewhere that we can ask for help in this country, but the system is failing and more importantly it is hurting people... This was my third assessment in three years. It was gruelling and left me completely distraught afterwards. Having to face how much my life has changed and how little I can do now in comparison to before is very difficult. Watching the person who is sitting in on your assessment with you get visibly upset by the process is heart-breaking.

I have probably over 20 supporting letters from doctors, neurologists, colorectal surgeons and healthcare professionals. These letters state that I am not going to get better. That things are likely to deteriorate for me. Not fun reading. I hand them all over willingly.

A week later I got a phone call saying that I would have to be reassessed again. The healthcare professional had not gathered enough evidence. They were at my house for an hour and a half asking me question after question. I have support from all my doctors. How could they not have enough evidence? They could not answer that question. My father asked for management to call back the next day. They did not, and have not fulfilled that request. Instead I was booked in the next day for another assessment. Not just a few extra questions. I have to go through the whole thing again.”

Thank you, Sir Christopher.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): I will call the wind-ups at 10 past 5 o'clock, which means that we have about 12 minutes and four or five people wanting to speak.

4.58 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Thank you, Sir Christopher. I will be as brief as possible.

Support for those living with a disability is a mark of a civilised society but, as we have heard, the process that too many seeking support have to go through is often found to be daunting. That is certainly the case in my constituency. The rate of successful mandatory reconsiderations and appeals demonstrates that the process is fundamentally

flawed. Evidence-based reviews conducted on behalf of the DWP have identified a pervasive culture of mistrust around PIP and ESA processes. That is simply not good enough.

There is no place in a welfare system for private companies, because that immediately introduces the profit motive. Looking after and supporting our sick and disabled should not be influenced by how much profit a private contractor can make. The Scottish Government will therefore remove the use of private companies for assessments.

We all have cases of constituents who have had an unfavourable decision made about them because information on them has been inaccurately recorded. Unbelievably, for example, someone with a heart condition has been assessed by a mental health professional, or vice versa. How does that promote faith in the assessment system? We need an overhaul of the system, a true recognition of the fact that life costs more for someone who lives with a disability. That is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact. For that reason, in Scotland the bedroom tax has been fully mitigated by the SNP Scottish Government, because we know that people who live with a disability are disproportionately affected by the tax.

The PIP evidence-gathering process should be streamlined—that is the way forward. The stress and bureaucracy that claimants are put through, which I see every day in my constituency, are unacceptable. They cause real harm to people who are already struggling every day with serious and debilitating conditions. The system must take more account of the often very vulnerable people with whom it deals, and be redesigned accordingly. Otherwise, when our constituents need support, they will continue to face cruel and unnecessary barriers. Scotland is building a social security system that is fair to all. I urge the Minister to look critically at the system in place and do what she can to improve it for the people who use it.

5 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) for securing this debate. As MPs, we have all handled cases where errors have been made with disability assessments; that was the case before the introduction of universal credit and the personal independence payment. Sadly, no doubt it will continue to be the case as the system is further refined and improved. I do not say that to lessen the impact of the distressing cases we have all assisted with or read about, but to illustrate that individual mistakes do not alone indicate a fundamentally flawed system, just that the system has to improve.

I certainly had concerns previously that there was a lack of common sense and flexibility in the assessment process for those with longer-term disabilities. I know many in this House felt the same. Health conditions can change and hopefully improve over time, so there will always be a need for occasional assessments to establish the correct level of support, but one must recognise that for some conditions sadly there is no improvement or recovery. However, I am pleased that of late there has been a greater focus on flexibility in the assessment process, whereby those with the most serious conditions can now have their evidence reviewed by a DWP case manager without the need for a face-to-face and repeated assessment. I very much welcome that change.

The help to claim service in tandem with Citizens Advice, which was mentioned earlier, is free to the user and is to be launched next month. It is designed to help the most vulnerable claimants with their applications, whether through a home visit, over the telephone or online. It will assist universal credit claimants with their award until the first accurate full payment is received. I very much welcome the Government's recent improvements to the PIP process and the measured approach with which the universal credit system itself is being implemented nationally. However, there is no room for complacency. I hope the Minister and the Department will develop a policy of continuous improvement, ensuring that client trust is established—particularly with clients with a disability.

5.2 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) on bringing forward this debate. It is an important issue; I told her I would make it my business to be here at the right time.

I have made my reputation as a councillor, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and an MP based on my constituency work, which I am very proud of. I used to fill out the disability living allowance application forms myself, and attend appeals for constituents. I do not have the time to do that now because I am over here most of the time, but also because the number of applications and the help needed have increased so much. I have a full-time staff member who is allocated to PIPs and benefits, although I still carry out that work whenever I can when I am at home.

Benefits is the biggest issue in my office, but the question is not why so many people are claiming—I have always had large numbers in my area who are disabled and who claim. People are so desperate for help and they deserve help and attention. The Minister is always very responsive to anything I ask her—I thank her for that. I have seen people with serious illnesses being turned down for PIP.

I have a constituent with a long list of ailments who is at pains always to be dressed well, be washed and look the part. That is only possible because his ex-wife comes every day to make sure he gets out of bed and is washed and dressed. He was turned down. Like the example the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) gave, he went to an appeal and was not even called in, because the panel looked at the notes and said, "You know something? This man should get it," and he got it in 15 minutes. Why did that happen? When someone goes out to assess someone and looks at their circumstances, they will say, "He looks terribly well," or, "She's dressed well and her hair is combed. She's okay, she has no illness." But they need help.

I have said this to the Minister in correspondence and I will underline it: one must question how much a physiotherapist knows about the intricacies of ulcerative colitis and the side effects of the medicine. How much does a paramedic know about the restriction on the movement of someone with multiple sclerosis? Someone with expertise needs to assess the circumstances, and GP notes should follow that up. Four out of 10 PIP candidates do not appeal as they cannot handle the stress. Do we really believe that half of the people who are claiming do not deserve it? I do not. As far as I am concerned, those people are telling the truth and they should not be looked upon as liars.

There must be a written review. We must start again for the sake of those people who are living beneath the poverty line, because they do not possess the mental fortitude to fight for what they are entitled to. Today, other hon. Members and I fight on their behalf and ask for fairness, a level playing field and an assumption that not all people are telling lies.

5.5 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) on securing this debate.

I welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement of the change in the assessment process. Face-to-face assessments cause anxiety and distress among our constituents. It is paramount to safeguard the most vulnerable in society from undergoing assessment when their conditions are unlikely to have changed from their previous visit. As a constituency MP, I am often able to obtain the agreement of the DWP for paper-based reports that remove the need for face-to-face assessments, or at least the agreement to a home consultation, but it can be a real uphill battle to do so.

Those suffering from conditions such as MS, myalgic encephalomyelitis, severe autism and Asperger's, agoraphobia and a range of mental health disorders should not be required to submit a new claim every two years. Those suffering from mental health conditions do not find it easy to obtain the required evidence, particularly if that person has no engagement with medical professionals due to their condition. The recent announcement will alleviate those concerns for some claimants. I quickly draw hon. Members' attention to the great report by the Scottish Association for Mental Health, which is the Scottish equivalent of the charity Mind. It is a sensible report that states clearly that the assessment process does not adequately gauge the impact of mental health or other fluctuating conditions, because it focuses primarily on physical impairment.

The decision to integrate assessment services into one body is welcome news; it will streamline services and allow those applying for ESA, universal credit and PIP to undergo just one assessment rather than two. Although the benefits assess two different matters, the information obtained from one assessment can be used to determine both benefit outcomes.

Like all hon. Members, I have met several constituents who have stressed their anxiety at undergoing assessments because they do not trust the system. Many constituents have been reassessed for ESA and PIP every couple of years and do not get the time to focus on improving their well-being without the threat looming over them of going back for another assessment and potentially losing some or all their benefit. Ultimately, as many Members have stressed, the issue is a lack of trust and faith in the system. Is it any wonder, given the number of low or nil awards given incorrectly, not properly picking up hidden and non-physical disabilities and forcing people to battle the system that should be supporting them?

Like many MPs, my office offers full advocacy support for welfare claimants, from the initial application and accompanying to the assessment centre, to doing appeals and representation at tribunals. Our record of success is well over 80%, which is partly due to my amazing caseworker, Jamie. But that is ridiculous, because we

[*Paul Masterton*]

should be getting those decisions right first time, to increase the faith and trust of vulnerable people in the assessment process. By introducing the changes the Government have outlined, we are taking a huge step to begin to rebuild that trust with those living with disabilities.

5.8 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I echo much of what has been said across the House. I am glad that Members on the Government side are taking an interest. I would love for some of them to take up the vacancies on the Work and Pensions Committee, where we look in detail at these issues.

I have met and heard from many constituents, particularly those with mental health problems, who suffer from the whole round of assessments. They are often on both ESA and PIP, so they have assessments roughly every year. Once they get a letter about an assessment, they have to fill in a form and seek medical letters to substantiate their claim. Many medical professionals are refusing to write those letters, because the DWP ask for such detailed information and they cannot possibly give the time to provide that. If they do, they charge for the letters—often £25 or £30.

As Members across the House have said, there is great reluctance to perform home visits—particularly in my very rural area where they can take longer, but also where it takes much longer for constituents to travel to appointments. Often, they simply cannot. One constituent told me about dragging her disabled daughter, who was ill and in pain, out of bed to go to her assessment because she was told she had to. Another's GP refused to give evidence for any more assessments about home visits.

Yes, people get their taxi fare paid for them, but they have to pay up front. That often costs £100, which some people simply cannot afford. The Minister promised the Work and Pensions Committee that work capability assessments would be video-recorded, but now people are being asked to provide their own recording equipment. Again, that is an issue of affordability.

As the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) said, the process has an impact on claimants' mental health. They go to an assessment; they wait for the result; they put in for a mandatory reconsideration, which often is turned down point-blank, and they then have to wait for an appeal. That is an incredibly stressful process, during which the claimant has to sign on for universal credit and go through the process of being assessed for work and claimant conditionality, under threat of sanctions.

I spoke to the Minister last week about a constituent of mine who died on his first day back at work. I spoke to his wife, who was absolutely clear that her husband had been forced into returning to work by DWP's refusal to take doctors' evidence. It said it knew best because he had passed a work capability assessment. That should no longer happen. Doctors should not receive letters saying they must not give people fit notes because they have passed a work capability assessment. That sends people further into mental health despair and, in some cases, towards suicide. I really hope the Minister looks at this issue.

5.11 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I appreciate that we only had an hour for this debate; I am only sorry that some hon. Members who made a number of interventions were not able to stay to hear the Minister sum up. I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George), whom I commend for her work on the Work and Pensions Committee. I thank the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) for securing the debate. I share her belief that we need a system that works better for everyone, especially those with disabilities.

The process for claiming personal independence payment or employment and support allowance is not easy or straightforward. As we have heard, claimants fill in extensive forms detailing how their condition affects their daily life and send them off to the Department for Work and Pensions. For some people, that, along with medical evidence, is enough to merit an award. However, more often than not, people are required to attend a face-to-face assessment carried out by one of three contracted assessment providers. The healthcare professional employed by the contractor reports back to the Department, and a decision maker makes a decision about the claimant's entitlement.

Last Friday, I was invited to witness a personal independence payment assessment, which was conducted by an actor and a health professional. It took an hour and a half. I imagine that was the gold standard for conducting such an assessment. I am sure everyone in the Chamber would agree that the experience of most of our constituents—granted, we see the worst examples—is that assessments are never conducted quite as efficiently or in as gold-standard a way, so I think that exercise was slightly contrived. It was worthwhile to see how the process should operate, but we have all argued time and again how it should operate; the reality is that it does not operate in that way. In reality, assessments are stressful, and many people are forced to go through the mandatory reconsideration process and the conclusions of a decision maker, which ultimately is unfair.

I only have a few minutes to sum up, but I pay credit to the hon. Member for Chichester for rightly highlighting the experience of her constituents, and to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for St Ives (Derek Thomas), for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton). I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the work of the Scottish Association for Mental Health. The Government have to do more to recognise mental health in the assessment process.

I read recently that the Department for Work and Pensions will introduce a further step in the appeals process called the continuous online resolution system, which will involve an online review by a tribunal panel. If my understanding is correct, that means people will have to endure a claim, potentially a mandatory reconsideration, and an online text-box tribunal before they can get an oral appeal. The success rate for written appeals is dramatically lower than that for oral hearings, so does the Minister accept that that step may serve

only to introduce another needless level of bureaucracy to claimants' appeals, and that it may not achieve the ends she hopes it might?

The high number of mandatory reconsiderations and the fact that, as the hon. Member for Chichester outlined, 71% of decisions are overturned shows that there are already flaws in the system. I would like the Minister to do more to address those current flaws before taking on the process of streamlining and bringing all these benefits together. I genuinely worry that that would cause many of those who need financial support—particularly those who are disabled—not to get that support, and that such an integrated assessment service would penalise disabled people who need the full range of benefits. I would hate to see that happen.

It is not right or fair for any individual, whether they are disabled or suffering from mental ill health or a long-term debilitating health condition, to be put through such an arduous process. These people are not criminals—they are people who demand and need support from the social security system, which was designed to support them. I hope the Minister takes the time to answer my questions.

5.15 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) on bringing forward this debate. She made some really valid points. She is absolutely right that it is up to the Government to remove some of the barriers that disabled people face to ensure that they can live independently and participate fully in society. I welcome the move to stop assessments for personal independence payment for pensioners, but we need to go further to ensure that those who do not need reassessment do not have to continue to go through the arduous assessment process.

We heard from Members across the Chamber about the fundamental flaws in the assessment framework for disabled people. We heard about the time that many ill and disabled people have to wait for an assessment. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) highlighted that in her area people have to wait up to 48 weeks before they get to an appeal. We heard countless accounts of what happens at assessments and of poor decision making. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) shared his constituent's experience of being given two days' notice but still being recorded as a no-show, yet assessment providers can cancel at the last minute. We need to eliminate such double standards. The hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) pointed out some of the poor decision making that happens after assessments and highlighted the rubber stamping of decisions at mandatory reconsideration stage. That step was put in place to ensure that we got decisions right earlier, so it is really important that that issue is picked up.

Since 2013, more than 700,000 ill and disabled people have been forced to challenge decisions at appeal following poor decision making after their assessment. Last week, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions admitted that disabled people feel "put on trial" by these assessments. By her own admission, we need not just small-scale improvements of the assessment framework, but a wholesale overhaul of the system, which has created a hostile environment for disabled people.

Every week, I hear from constituents and from disabled people across the country who have been pushed to despair as a result of the failing assessment framework. I was contacted by a lady called Susan, who has Crohn's disease. She is on DLA and has a Motability vehicle. Following her assessment, in which she did not score any points for her mobility, she lost her car, which she described as her one bit of independence. I share her experience with the House because it is not isolated; I hear these heart-wrenching accounts all the time.

Some 72% of PIP decisions are overturned at appeal, and more than 100,000 disabled people have been wrongly deprived of PIP. We heard that more than 4,500 disabled people were wrongly denied PIP when they transferred from DLA. Most shockingly, 17,000 people died before their PIP decision was reached. In the last three months, nearly three quarters of people who appealed their work capability assessment decision were successful.

We know the system is flawed and is not working. That is why it is worrying that we are looking at combining all these assessments. We cannot combine them when we know there is bad decision making and the assessment framework is flawed, so I ask the Minister: why not listen to people like Susan, and look at conducting a wholesale review and overhaul of the system?

Ruth George: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Marsha De Cordova: I will not; I do not have time, frankly.

The Government announced last week that they would extend the contract of the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments, better known as Maximus, to carry out work capability assessments. Nothing could be worse for any disabled person to hear. Since 2014, an estimated £595 million has been paid to Maximus to carry out assessments and in total £1 billion has been paid out to private contractors. These companies have repeatedly failed the DWP's standards, so does the Minister agree that rather than extending the contract, it is time to bring these assessments back in-house? Will she confirm that the details of the new contract will be made available to Members?

It appears that I have only 20 seconds left, which is shocking, so let me be clear: we need a radical overhaul of the assessment framework before any moves are taken to combine the assessments. We need an assessment framework that will take into account disabled people's lived experiences and treat all disabled people with the dignity and respect they deserve.

5.20 pm

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I am grateful for the number of Members from across the House and all parts of the country who have come together for the debate. There is a compelling debate going on in the main Chamber, yet many Members chose to prioritise this debate, which is to the great credit of everybody who has participated.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) for her passionate, eloquent and well-informed contribution. She was joined by many colleagues who shared examples of the poor treatment that their constituents had faced in going through the

[Sarah Newton]

assessment services. That is exactly why we made the announcements last week about the transformation of the way that we undertake assessments.

Our approach has been one of wholesale continuous improvement—to the personal independence payment since it was introduced, but also to the work capability assessment, since it was introduced by the Labour Government back in 2008. There have been numerous independent reviews, the Select Committee did an excellent inquiry and the Department has embraced and implemented a great number of recommendations. We are committed to continuous improvement, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) asked us to be. I thoroughly agree with him and want to reiterate what he said: we should treat others as we would like to be treated. Everyone should be treated with respect and dignity, and I can assure him and my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester, who also raised that point, that there is no complacency at all; there is an utter commitment to improvement.

Patricia Gibson: Will the Minister give way?

Sarah Newton: I will not; I have little time, and I was asked many questions. If I do not manage to cover all the questions that Members asked, I will of course write to them. It is great that we often have debates in this Chamber on this subject. I am sure there will be other opportunities to ask questions, perhaps in oral questions to the DWP on Monday.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester asked some questions that I particularly want to answer. She made a good point about how people feel when they go to an assessment, as well as about the location, how people look and what clothes they wear. People forget that the assessors are fully qualified healthcare professionals; they are the same people they might see if they went to A&E on a Saturday night. As part of our transformed service, we are looking carefully at where we can co-locate services. That could be in NHS or local authority facilities, but they need to be in a place where people will feel more comfortable.

We are seriously looking at how the people undertaking the assessments appear, and at ensuring that their certificates showing that they are fully qualified healthcare professionals are available, so that people have the same confidence when going to their assessment as they do when going to see their GP. Most people have a high degree of trust in their GP, and that is helpful, because that is the point that I want to get to. Repeatedly, GPs and healthcare professionals have told us that they do not want to be the gatekeepers of the benefits system, as that would get in the way of their patient-doctor, or patient-healthcare professional, relationship. We will need to have healthcare professionals undertake assessments, but they need to be separate from NHS services.

We are working closely with the medical profession to make sure that we have as close a relationship as possible, and to obtain information as swiftly as possible. I want to offer reassurance to the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) about how we will go about getting medical information in our new transformed service. It will be with patient consent. We will not break into NHS or GP computer systems and extract data somehow. The information will be obtained with the consent of the patient.

I want to reiterate a commitment that I made at the Dispatch Box, when I answered the urgent question about the new transformed service. I want to make sure that disabled people co-design the service with us. We are starting soon on stakeholder engagement to enable that. We will work with the medical professionals—as I said, we will do a lot of work with them over the summer on this—stakeholders and disabled people. We want to improve people's confidence and trust in the system, and make it properly accessible.

There were a whole range of really good points raised by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for High Peak (Ruth George), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), and my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), pointing to changes that they would like to see in the training of the healthcare professionals undertaking the assessments. I reassure hon. Members that a whole series of stakeholders—charities or people who work alongside those with particular health conditions—have met those undertaking health assessments to ensure that the guidance given to them is up to date and properly takes into consideration variability in conditions, and to ensure that those assessing people with rare conditions that we do not often come across are aware of that condition and its impact on a person's ability to live their daily life in the way that we would like them to.

I assure all hon. Members that we give physical and mental health parity of esteem. Many of our healthcare assessors, as well as our frontline staff in the DWP, are undergoing good mental health awareness training, and they all have access to specialists whom they can call on. Through lots of small improvement to assessments, we are beginning to see real changes.

We spend a lot of time working with our colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to ensure that people can access tribunals in a more timely way. The delays are unacceptable. There has been recruitment of a lot of staff, and there is a new online resolution service for PIP, which was piloted and received good feedback from claimants. It will not replace people's opportunity to have a face-to-face tribunal service, but some people might choose to go that way.

We are looking at improving our mandatory reconsideration process. It is not fair to say that it is a rubber-stamping process—around 20% of decisions are changed at mandatory reconsideration—but we are learning from the work we are doing with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to ensure that we can get more information, including medical information, from the claimant at the mandatory reconsideration stage, so that more decisions can be changed then, without having to go on to appeals.

However, the most important thing is to get more decisions right the first time, and to enable conversation, so that people are confident enough to give us all the information we need when we need it, and that we get that. We are working on that at pace.

In terms of the transformed service, it has been necessary to extend the existing contracts for both PIP and the work capability assessment, so that we have a

secure and stable way of assessing the benefits. Developing the new transformed service will take a huge amount of work. We are creating a new digital platform, which we will co-design with disabled people. It will take this year to get that right; only then can we start to introduce the new service.

In the short time I have left, I return to the good point that my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives made about organisations such as the Benefits Resolutions service, formerly known as Bufferzone. I would love to work with him on what we can do to regulate those offering support to people going through the tribunal service. I agree with him; what he described is totally unacceptable. I would also like to work with my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) and look at the report he mentioned to see what we can do to ensure that improvements are made.

I thank all hon. Members very much indeed; I am absolutely determined, as they all are, to improve these services and ensure that they are the best they can be.

5.29 pm

Gillian Keegan: I thank the Minister very much, mostly for listening and taking into account all the points raised today. I thank you, Chair, for your excellent chairmanship, which got us through this debate in an hour, and I thank all hon. Members for their participation. It is clear that we all have similar desires and concerns: we want to ensure that the system continuously improves, treats people with respect and in the way that we would all like to be treated, and, perhaps most importantly, helps people to live a fulfilling life, so that they can make the most of their many talents. I thank everyone for participating, and I look forward to seeing the transformation of the service.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered improvements to disability assessment services.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 13 March 2019

TREASURY

Spring Statement 2019

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

Today I have delivered the spring statement to the House of Commons. This written ministerial statement provides more detail on some of the announcements in the spring statement, and sets out details of other forthcoming Government policies.

Public spending

Public value framework—later this year we will conduct a spending review that will focus on public value outcomes. Today, the Government will publish a revised version of the public value framework along with accompanying guidance on how to use it most effectively. The revised framework reflects the learning from our public value pilot programme.

National leadership centre—the new national leadership centre, which will support senior leaders from across public services in England, will welcome its first cohort in September. The Government have committed £21 million to the centre.

Infrastructure

Today I can also make the following announcements that will help to deliver the physical and digital infrastructure the UK needs:

Borderlands growth deal—up to £260 million for this innovative deal to strengthen the deep ties that bind these communities within the United Kingdom. On top of the £102 million announced recently for the Carlisle southern link road from the housing infrastructure fund, this means up to £362 million of UK Government investment into the borderlands area.

Transforming cities fund—£60 million of investment in 10 cities across England, from the fund announced at Budget 2017. This will fund 30 new schemes such as bus station upgrades, new cycle lanes and road improvements, supporting the wider programmes being delivered by city regions as part of the industrial strategy. The 10 cities were selected for the competitive fund in September 2018, and are as follows:

Derby and Nottingham	£7.2 million	Southampton	£5.7 million
Leicester	£7.8 million	North East CA	£10 million
Portsmouth	£4 million	Norwich	£6.1 million
Sheffield City Region	£4.2 million	Plymouth	£7.6 million
West Yorkshire CA	£2.2 million	Stoke-on-Trent	£5.6 million

Local full fibre networks: wave 3 allocations—£53 million of funding, for nine local areas who have successfully bid since Budget, from the third wave of the local full fibre networks challenge fund—enabling next-generation full fibre connections to key public buildings, and nearby homes and businesses. The locations of the nine local areas are as follows:

Colchester	£3.5 million	Rutland	£2 million
Isle of Wight	£0.8 million	Shetland Islands	£2 million
Norfolk	£8 million	South Essex	£4.5 million
North Wales	£8 million	Stoke-on-Trent	£9.2 million
Northern Ireland	£15 million		

Toton development vehicle—Sir John Peace will oversee the development of proposals for a new delivery vehicle at Toton, which will include considering the case for a development corporation.

Apprenticeship levy—Budget 2018 announced that the co-investment rate will be halved from 10% to 5%, and the amount employers can transfer to their supply chains would increase to 25%. These changes will now take effect from April 2019.

In the coming months, the Government will publish:

Planning for future high streets—a consultation exploring potential changes to help local areas make better use of planning tools to support their local high streets, including through compulsory purchase orders, local development orders, and other innovative planning measures.

Future of mobility: urban strategy—a publication setting out the Government's approach to putting the UK at the forefront of mobility, and responding to the significant changes taking place in transport technology—such as the growth in electric vehicles, the development of self-driving vehicles and advances in data and internet connectivity.

Living standards

National living wage (NLW)—the Government can confirm the Low Pay Commission's remit for 2019, and later this year we will set a new remit beyond 2020. We have today published the terms of reference for Professor Arindrajit Dube's review of the latest international evidence on minimum wages. This review will report to HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. As these terms set out, Professor Dube will engage closely with the Low Pay Commission, drawing on its expertise and deep knowledge of the UK's labour market.

Openness and competitiveness

It is vital that the UK remains an open and competitive place to do business. To support this ambition, today I can announce:

Financial services legislation—following consultation later this year, the Government will legislate as necessary to ensure that in the immediate period after we leave the EU, the UK can maintain world-leading financial services regulatory standards, remain open to international markets, and realise new trading opportunities.

Future financial services regulatory framework—ahead of the summer, the Government will set out their approach to consulting on how to ensure our financial services regulatory framework adapts to our new constitutional position outside the European Union. This includes the need to ensure financial stability is delivered through an effective regulatory framework, with the responsiveness necessary for a dynamic and open financial services sector and an appropriate level of democratic accountability.

Access to finance and EU exit—the Government stand ready to deliver their commitment in all circumstances to provide additional funding to the British Business Bank for venture and growth capital, as we leave the European Union and our relationship with the European investment fund changes.

Scientists and researchers—from autumn 2019, PhD-level occupations will be exempt from the tier 2 (general) cap, and at the same time the Government will update the immigration rules on 180-day absences so that researchers conducting fieldwork overseas are not penalised if they apply to settle in the UK.

New UK export finance (UKEF) general export facility—UKEF will introduce a new general export facility to provide more flexible short-term support to UK exporters. UKEF will make the new product available over the coming months and will publish further details once they become available.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) research on the impacts of regulation on competition—the CMA is announcing today that, subject to an orderly exit from the European Union and therefore resources, it will carry out a review to assess how regulation affects competition in the UK business environment.

Today the Government will publish:

Offshore oil and gas decommissioning industry—a call for evidence, as announced at Budget 2018, seeking to identify what more should be done to strengthen Scotland and the rest of the UK's position as a global hub for safe, environmentally-friendly decommissioning that meets the Oil and Gas Authority's ambitious cost reduction targets.

In the coming months, the Government will publish:

International education strategy—a strategy, to be launched by the Departments for Education and for International Trade, which will help to strengthen our position at the forefront of global education.

International research and innovation strategy—a strategy setting out the Government's ambition to ensure the UK retains its place as a global partner of choice for science and innovation collaboration. As a first step in implementing this, the Government have launched an independent review to assess and make recommendations on our future frameworks for international collaboration.

UKEF consultation on changes to foreign content rules—a consultation on proposed changes to the rules in relation to foreign content in export transactions where UKEF support is provided.

Science and technology

Today, I am allocating over £200 million in cutting-edge infrastructure to support our world-leading scientists, innovators and industry. These investments, which underpin the Government's ambition to raise economy-wide investment in R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027 and drive progress against the grand challenges, such as healthy ageing and the AI and data revolution, include:

Photonics—allocating £81 million to a national extreme photonics application centre in Oxfordshire. This centre will help researchers and industry better understand the composition of new materials and how they behave in different conditions.

Bioinformatics—investing £45 million in a critical upgrade to data storage cloud computing infrastructure

at the European Bioinformatics Institute in Cambridgeshire, to support researchers using big data to drive genetic research.

Supercomputers: Archer funding—allocating £79 million to a new UK supercomputer (ARCHER 2) which will replace the current national high-performance computing platform (ARCHER), providing researchers with a fivefold increase in computing capacity.

Joint European Torus (JET) funding (fusion)—setting aside up to £60 million to confirm funding is guaranteed for the facility over 2019-20.

Housing

At autumn Budget 2017, the Government set out a comprehensive package of new policies, including at least £44 billion of financial support over a five-year period, to raise housing supply by the end of this Parliament to its highest level since 1970 and put us on track to reach 300,000 a year on average. To move us towards that target, today the Government can announce further progress on planning reform, as set out in more detail in the accompanying written ministerial statement laid by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. In the coming months, the Government will:

Independent report on build-out rates—introduce additional planning guidance to support housing diversification on large sites. Sir Oliver Letwin concluded that greater differentiation in the types and tenures of housing delivered on large sites would increase build-out rates.

Response to consultation on planning reform—introduce a package of reforms including allowing greater change of use between premises, and a new permitted development right to allow upwards extension of existing buildings to create new homes.

Accelerated planning Green Paper—publish a Green Paper setting out proposals on how greater capacity and capability, performance management and procedural improvements can accelerate the end-to-end planning process.

Clean growth

The Government are determined that we will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. The UK leads the world in tackling climate change and delivering clean growth, preserving the planet for future generations. In the coming months the Government will set out further detail on the following:

Review on the economics of biodiversity—a new global review, led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, to assess the economic value of biodiversity and to identify actions that will simultaneously enhance biodiversity and deliver economic prosperity. The review will report in 2020, ahead of the 15th meeting of the conference of the parties to the convention on biodiversity in Beijing in October that year.

Future homes standard—a future homes standard, to be introduced by 2025, future-proofing new build homes with low-carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency. The new standard will build on the Prime Minister's industrial strategy grand challenge mission to at least halve the energy use of new buildings by 2030.

Greening the gas grid—accelerating the decarbonisation of our gas supplies by increasing the proportion of green gas in the grid. To meet our climate targets, we need to reduce our dependence on burning natural gas to heat our homes. The Government will consult on the appropriate mechanism to deliver this commitment later this year.

In the coming months, the Government will publish:

Biodiversity and conservation in overseas territories—a call for evidence inviting creative ideas from stakeholders on how the Government can safeguard the biodiversity found in the overseas territories.

Red diesel: response to call for evidence—a summary of responses to the May 2018 call for evidence on red diesel and air quality.

Public finances

Debt management report 2019-20 and NS&I financing remit 2019-20—today, the Government publish the financing remit for 2019-20, which sets out the planned financing that will be raised by the Debt Management Office through issuing gilts and via NS&I's retail financing products.

Retail prices index

House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee report on the retail prices index (RPI)—the Economic Affairs Committee made several recommendations both to the Government and the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA). The Government are considering the report, and the complex issues it raises. The Government are discussing the relevant issues with the UKSA and will respond to the Committee's report in April.

Tax avoidance, evasion and non-compliance

Since 2010, the Government have secured and protected over £200 billion of tax that would otherwise have gone unpaid, introduced over 100 measures to reduce avoidance, evasion and other forms of non-compliance, and continued to support taxpayers to get their tax right. Today the Government will publish:

“Tackling tax avoidance, evasion and other forms of non-compliance”—a policy paper setting out the Government's achievements.

Offshore tax compliance strategy: “No Safe Havens 2019”—a policy paper setting out the direction for HMRC's updated strategy for offshore tax compliance, bringing together the Government's response to all forms of offshore non-compliance. This reflects the substantial progress that the UK has made since the last strategy was published in 2014 and complements the paper on avoidance and evasion activity to date.

In the coming months the Government will publish:

Preventing abuse of the R&D tax relief for small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—a consultation on the measure announced at Budget 2018, as part of the package on tax avoidance. This consultation will focus on how the measure will be applied, to minimise any impact on genuine businesses.

Insurance premium tax operational review—a call for evidence on where improvements can be made to ensure that insurance premium tax operates fairly and efficiently.

VAT administration in the Isle of Man—HM Treasury's findings and recommendations to ensure the right VAT continues to be paid and collected in the Isle of Man.

Following the Paradise papers allegations, the Isle of Man Government invited HM Treasury to review its VAT administration processes for the importation of aircraft and yachts.

Maintaining the tax system

Making tax digital (MTD)—mandatory digital record keeping for VAT for businesses over the VAT threshold (with turnover over £85,000) comes into force from 1 April. This is an important first step in this modernisation of the tax system to which the Government remain committed. The Government can confirm a light touch approach to penalties in the first year of implementation. Where businesses are doing their best to comply, no filing or record keeping penalties will be issued. The focus will be on supporting businesses to transition and the Government will therefore not be mandating MTD for any new taxes or businesses in 2020.

Today the Government will publish:

Structures and buildings allowance—draft legislation, published for comment, on introducing a new, permanent allowance for investments in non-residential structures and buildings to create a more competitive tax regime for businesses—as announced at Budget 2018. The Government intend to lay this legislation early this summer.

Aggregates levy review—a discussion paper launching a review of the aggregates levy, including the terms of reference, information on timing and scope of the review as well as membership of an expert working group.

In the coming months the Government will publish:

Offshore receipts in respect of intangible property—draft regulations to ensure the provisions apply as intended, and draft guidance relating to the practical application of the measure.

Hybrid and other mismatches—draft regulations to update the definition of regulatory capital instruments that are entitled to an exemption within the hybrid mismatch rules.

General anti-abuse rule (GAAR) amendments—a technical note alongside draft legislation on minor procedural and technical changes to the GAAR legislation to ensure that it works as intended.

National insurance contributions (NICs) employment allowance draft regulations—a document inviting technical comments on the draft regulations implementing the reform, as announced at Budget 2018, of the NICs employment allowance to restrict it to businesses with an employer NICs bill below £100,000.

Child trust funds (CTF): consultation on maturing CTFs—draft regulations to ensure that CTF accounts can retain their tax-free status after maturity.

VAT simplification and the public sector—a policy paper exploring a potential reform to VAT refund rules for central Government, with the aim of reducing administrative burdens and improving public sector productivity.

VAT partial exemption and capital goods scheme: simplification—a call for evidence on potential simplification and improvement of the VAT partial exemption regime and the capital goods scheme—ensuring they are as simple and efficient for taxpayers as possible. This follows on from the recommendations of the Office of Tax Simplification, which has looked in detail at our VAT system and possible areas for improvement.

Worldwide harmonised light vehicles test procedure (WLTP) and vehicle taxes—a Government response following the review into the impact of the WLTP on vehicle excise duty and company car tax.

Consultation on the use of diesel by private pleasure craft—a consultation seeking evidence on the likely impact of the Government's proposal to require diesel-powered private pleasure craft to only use full duty paid heavy oil (white diesel) for propulsion, replacing the existing system where private pleasure craft use marked gas oil (red diesel) but pay the white diesel rate of fuel duty.

Review of time limits—a report, as required by section 95 of Finance Act 2019, comparing the time limits for the recovery of lost tax involving an offshore matter, with other time limits, including those provided for by schedules 11 and 12 to the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017. In the report the Government will set out the rationale for the charge on disguised remuneration (DR) loans legislated in Finance (No. 2) Act 2017 and its impacts. The report will be laid by 30 March 2019.

Social investment tax relief (SITR)—a call for evidence on the use of the SITR scheme to date, including why it has been used less than anticipated and what impact it has had on access to finance for social enterprises.

Enterprise investment scheme (EIS) approved funds guidelines—draft guidelines for comment alongside draft legislation. The document will contain guidelines stating HMRC's proposed policy and practice for approving funds. The legislation will include powers for HMRC to set appropriate conditions and approve funds.

CGT private residence relief—a consultation on the changes announced at Budget 2018 to lettings relief and the final period exemption, which extend private residence relief in capital gains tax.

We will also publish summaries of responses to the following documents, launched at recent fiscal events:

Structures and buildings allowance—a technical note on the introduction of this allowance.

“Protecting your taxes in insolvency”—a consultation launched in February 2019, following the announcement at Budget 2018 to make HMRC a secondary preferential creditor for certain tax debts paid by employees and customers on the insolvency of a business.

“Corporate Capital Loss Restriction”—a consultation on a change announced at autumn Budget 2018 to restrict, from 1 April 2020, the amount of carried-forward capital losses a company can offset to no more than 50% of the chargeable gains arising in a later accounting period.

“Stamp Taxes on Shares Consideration Rules”—a consultation on aligning the consideration rules of stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax and introducing a general market value rule for transfers between connected persons.

“Digital Services Tax”—a consultation on the detailed design and implementation of the digital services tax that will take effect from 1 April 2020.

“Amendments to tax returns”—a call for evidence on simplifying the process of amending a tax return.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning: Build-out Rates and Permitted Development

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): At autumn Budget 2017 the Government announced an independent review, chaired by Sir Oliver Letwin, to examine the significant gap between housing completions and the amount of land allocated or permissioned, and make recommendations for closing it. I sincerely thank Sir Oliver and his panel for their hard work over the 12 months that followed.

Sir Oliver's draft analysis, published in June 2018, took an in-depth look at the rate of housing delivery on a number of large sites in high pressure areas around the country. He concluded that the binding constraint on house building rates once implementable planning permission had been granted was the “absorption rate”—meaning that homes are built at the rate at which house builders believe they can be sold at their target prices. Importantly, the review found no evidence that speculative land banking is part of the business model for major house builders. I note that there has been widespread acceptance of Sir Oliver's analysis across the sector and a consensus has emerged that it is the market absorption rate that determines the rate at which developers build out large sites.

Sir Oliver's final report, published alongside autumn Budget last year, concluded that greater differentiation in the types, tenures and design of housing delivered on large sites would increase the market absorption rates of new homes.

I welcome Sir Oliver's support for greater emphasis on housing diversification within the planning system. The revised national planning policy framework has already embedded a requirement for a greater mix of housing; it explicitly requires a mix of size, type and tenure of housing that reflects the diverse needs of local communities. My Department is also committed to improving the design of new development. The purpose of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission is to tackle the challenge of poor-quality design and build of homes and places, and I look forward to its final report later this year. My Department also has a number of funding programmes specifically designed to support a more diversified housing market, such as the home building fund.

As confirmed in the spring statement, my Department will shortly publish additional planning guidance on housing diversification—to further encourage large sites to support a diverse range of housing needs, and help them build out more quickly.

I note Sir Oliver's recommendations that authorities should further capture land value uplift by insisting on specific levels of greater housing diversification—and also note that many in the housing building industry are sceptical of this approach. I agree with the principle that the costs of increased housing diversification should be funded through reductions in residual land values. The Government are committed to improving the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms of land value capture, making them more certain and transparent for

all developments. My focus is on evolving the existing system of developer contributions to make them more transparent, efficient and accountable and my Department is gathering evidence to explore the case for further reform.

I will keep the need for further interventions to support housing diversification and faster build out, including amendments to primary legislation, under review. My Department will also work closely with Homes England to identify suitable sites and will look for opportunities to support local authorities to further diversify their large sites. Once again, I am very grateful to Sir Oliver and his panel for their important analysis and recommendations, and for their hard work over the course of the review.

My priority now is to ensure faster decision making within the planning system. My Department will publish an accelerated planning Green Paper later this year that will discuss how greater capacity and capability, performance management and procedural improvements can accelerate the end-to-end planning process. This paper will also draw on the Rosewell review, which made recommendations to reduce the time taken to conclude planning appeal inquiries, while maintaining the quality of decisions. I will also consider the case for further reforms to the compulsory purchase regime, in line with our manifesto commitment.

Permitted development rights

The consultation, “Planning Reform: Supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes” closed on 14 January 2019. As confirmed in the spring statement it is our intention to bring forward a range of reforms. To support the high street we intend to introduce additional flexibilities for businesses. This will be to amend the shops use class to ensure it captures current and future retail models, which will include clarification on the ability of (A) use classes to diversify and incorporate ancillary uses without undermining the amenity of the area, to introduce a new permitted development right to allow shops (A1), financial and professional services (A2), hot food takeaways (A5), betting shops, payday loan shops and launderettes to change use to an office (B1) and to allow hot food takeaways (A5) to change to residential use (C3). Additionally, to give businesses sufficient time to test the market with innovative business ideas we will extend the existing right that allows the temporary change of use of buildings from two to three years and enable more community uses to take advantage of this temporary right, enabling such premises to more easily locate on the high street. I will also shortly publish “Better Planning for High Streets”. This will set out tools to support local planning authorities in reshaping their high streets to create prosperous communities, particularly through the use of compulsory purchase, local development orders and other innovative tools.

We will take forward a permitted development right to extend upwards certain existing buildings in commercial and residential use to deliver additional homes, engaging with interested parties on design and technical details. We would want any right to deliver new homes to respect the design of the existing streetscape, while ensuring that the amenity of neighbours is considered. We will also make permanent the time-limited right to build larger single storey rear extensions to dwelling houses and to introduce a proportionate fee. I do not intend to extend the time-limited right for change of

use from storage to residential. This right will lapse on 10 June 2019. Alongside this I intend to review permitted development rights for conversion of buildings to residential use in respect of the quality standard of homes delivered. We will continue to consider the design of a permitted development right to allow commercial buildings to be demolished and replaced with homes. We will also develop a “future homes standard” for all new homes through a consultation in 2019 with a view, subject to consultation, to introducing the standard by 2025.

Finally, we intend to remove the permitted development right and associated advertising deemed consent in respect of new telephone kiosks, reflecting that mobile technology has changed the way people access telephone services since the right was introduced in 1985; amend the existing right to install off-street electric vehicle charging points to allow for taller charging upstands to address advances in rapid charging technology; and will look to bring forward a draft listed building consent order which will grant a general listed building consent for works to listed waterway structures owned, controlled or managed by the Canal and River Trust.

I intend to implement an immediate package of permitted development right measures in the spring, with the more complex matters, including on upward extensions, covered in a further package of regulations in the autumn.

[HCWS1408]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Leaving the European Union: Temporary Tariff Regime

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Government wish to inform the House about plans to implement a temporary tariff regime in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal on 29 March 2019. The Government will bring forward the necessary secondary legislation in the light of the votes in Parliament this week.

The temporary tariff would apply equally to all countries where the UK does not have a trade agreement or other preferential agreement in place. In the event of no deal, this would include the EU.

The temporary tariff will apply for up to 12 months. At the end of the temporary period, the Government will introduce a long-term tariff regime. This will be developed over the course of the coming months following a full public consultation process.

The Government faced a choice:

We could maintain our current external tariff regime and apply it to the EU, imposing new tariffs on EU imports and driving up prices for consumers and disrupting business supply chains.

We could maintain the open trade that we have with the EU, but we would then have to extend this to the rest of the world. This would minimise disruption to EU trade but would fully open the UK to competition from other countries.

The Government do not believe either of these options on its own is the right approach. Instead, the temporary tariff would take a balanced approach to support the UK economy as a whole. It would maintain open trade on the majority of UK imports, to support consumers and business supply chains, but retain necessary tariff protection for particular sectors of the UK economy.

Under the temporary tariff, 87% of total imports to the UK by value would be eligible for tariff-free access.

The Government recognise the importance of retaining necessary tariff protection for some sectors of the UK economy. Therefore, tariffs would apply on 13% of total UK imports:

in some agricultural sectors which have been historically protected from non-EU producers through high EU tariffs. Producers in these sectors would face significant adjustment costs should these be immediately liberalised. Therefore, for beef, sheep meat, poultry, pigmeat, butter and some cheeses a mixture of tariffs and quotas will be used, with the aim of being broadly neutral in their impact on production and consumption patterns.

in sectors where tariffs help provide support for UK producers against unfair trading practices. This includes products such as certain ceramics, fertiliser and refinery products.

a set of goods, including bananas, raw cane sugar, and certain kinds of fish, where preferential access to the UK market is important for developing countries.

a number of finished vehicles will retain their tariff in order to support this sector and in the light of global market conditions.

Information on specific tariff rates that would apply under the temporary tariff has been made available through the Government website.

In developing the temporary tariff, the Government have given regard to the five principles set out in the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018:

- the interests of consumers in the UK;
- the interests of producers in the UK;
- the desire to maintain and promote external trade of the UK;
- the desire to maintain and promote productivity in the UK;
- the extent to which goods are subject to competition.

Throughout the temporary period, the Government would also consider exceptional changes where clear evidence is provided by stakeholders against the criteria set out in the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018 and would provide a mechanism to hear business and consumer feedback.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the written ministerial statement laid in parallel on the Northern Ireland border.

[HCWS1405]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Leaving the European Union: Northern Ireland Border

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): The unique social, political and economic circumstances of Northern Ireland must be reflected in any arrangements that apply in a no-deal scenario.

This Government are committed to the Belfast agreement and to doing everything in our power to ensure no return to a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Today we are confirming a strictly unilateral, temporary approach to checks, processes and tariffs in Northern Ireland. This would apply if the UK leaves the EU without a deal on 29 March.

The UK Government would not introduce any new checks or controls on goods at the land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, including no customs requirements for nearly all goods.

The UK temporary import tariff announced today would therefore not apply to goods crossing from Ireland into Northern Ireland.

We would only apply a small number of measures strictly necessary to comply with international legal obligations, protect the biosecurity of the island of Ireland, or to avoid the highest risks to Northern Ireland businesses—but these measures would not require checks at the border.

Because these are unilateral measures, they only mitigate the impacts from exit that are within the UK Government's control. These measures do not set out the position in respect of tariffs or processes to be applied to goods moving from Northern Ireland to Ireland.

We recognise that Northern Ireland's businesses will have concerns about the impact that this approach would have on their competitiveness. That is why we remain determined to secure a deal and an orderly exit from the EU.

A negotiated settlement is the only means of sustainably guaranteeing no hard border and protecting businesses in Northern Ireland. This is why we are, first and foremost, still committed to leaving the EU with a deal. In a no-deal scenario, the UK Government are committed to entering into discussions urgently with the European Commission and the Irish Government to jointly agree long-term measures to avoid a hard border.

We also recognise that there are challenges and risks for maintaining control of our borders, monitoring the flow of goods into the UK, and the challenge posed by organised criminals seeking to exploit any new system. That is why we are clear that this approach will only be strictly temporary.

The specific changes proposed are set out below:

Compliance with international legal obligations

To fulfil essential international obligations, there would be new requirements for importers and exporters to declare trade with the EU on a very limited set of goods.

These are the only new processes which would be introduced in order to meet the UK's international legal obligations. There are no other products that would require new checks or processes.

Specifically:

Electronic notifications would be required for trade in dangerous chemicals, ozone depleting substances and F-gases;

Belfast International airport would be the designated point of entry for endangered species and rough diamonds entering Northern Ireland;

Dual-use or torture goods would require a licence for exports to the EU.

Protecting the biosecurity of the island of Ireland

To protect human, animal, and plant health, animals and animal products from countries outside the EU would need to enter Northern Ireland through a border inspection post and regulated plant material from outside the EU would require certification and risk-based checks at trader premises.

High-risk plant material entering Northern Ireland from the EU would require electronic pre-notification, replacing the current EU plant passport scheme.

Avoiding the highest risks to Northern Ireland businesses

To prevent unfair treatment of Northern Ireland businesses, goods arriving from Ireland would still be subject to the appropriate VAT and excise duty as today and the UK

Government would continue to collect these taxes on Irish goods in future. VAT registered businesses would continue to account for VAT on their normal VAT returns.

Small businesses trading across the border, not currently VAT registered, would be able to report VAT online periodically, without any new processes at the border.

Irish businesses sending parcels to Northern Ireland would need to register with HMRC in order to ensure VAT was paid on these goods—but anyone in Northern Ireland receiving a gift sent from Ireland would not pay VAT.

As in Great Britain, businesses currently registered on the EU excise system would register on a UK equivalent.

These measures would not require checks at the land border.

Dependent on the outcome of the votes this week, we may then bring forward a package of secondary legislation to implement these arrangements which Parliament must approve for these temporary arrangements to come into force.

[HCWS1406]

Petitions

Wednesday 13 March 2019

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

The Petition of Giovanni Di Stefano

The petition of Giovanni Di Stefano,

Declares that the petitioner is currently held in custody at HMP Highpoint, Stradishall, Suffolk, CB8 9YG and is a national of the Republic of Italy and born on the 1 day of July 1955 in Petrella Tifernina, Campobaso, 86024 Italy. The petitioner is serving a sentence imposed by Southwark Crown Court of 14 years by HHJ McCreath on 27 March 2013. The petitioner is a foreign national prisoner subject to deportation the order of which was served on 27 June 2013. Parliament enacted the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 specifically with S. 34(5) amending the Criminal Justice Act 2003 by inserting S.259A. The purpose Parliament enacted this Act and section was to permit foreign national prisoners and others who had served half the requisite custodial period of any sentence to be removed from this jurisdiction provided that those could satisfy the Secretary of State for Justice that they had “settled intentions” of not returning by residing in the country to which they are removed. Section 259A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 would come into force on such a day as the Secretary of State may by Order appoint. It is now 11 years since the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 has been enacted. The Secretary of State for Justice has yet to commence this section of sovereign statute that Parliament enacted.

The petitioner thus humbly requests that the House of Commons does press the Secretary of State for Justice to forthwith commence this section which would immediately ease the burden on a much overcrowded prison estate allowing the Home Office to remove all those immediately who gave their settled intention to reside outside this jurisdiction and those who could satisfy the Statute. There is no valid reason why after 11 years the Secretary of State has not commenced this section.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Sir Roger Gale.*]

[P002439]

Zebra Crossing on the Green, Writtle

The Petition of Ms Clare Biggs

Declare that a zebra crossing should be installed on The Green, Writtle; further that increased traffic using The Green and the speed at which some of it is travelling means that it is increasingly difficult for villagers to cross the road safely, particularly the most vulnerable: young children, the elderly and disabled; further that the current traffic islands are too slim to accommodate pushchairs, wheelchairs and bicycles and do not provide a safe crossing point; and further notes a petition on this same subject has received over 800 signatures.

The petitioner therefore requests the House of Commons to urge the Government to install a zebra crossing on The Green, Writtle.

And the petitioner remains, etc.—[*Presented by Mrs Kemi Badenoch.*]

[P002440]

Byfleet and West Byfleet’s remaining Green Belt

The petition of residents of Woking

Declares that no land should be removed from the Green Belt for development unless there are very special circumstances and all other options including brownfield sites have been exhausted; further that it is also imperative that no major developments are approved in Byfleet until the proposed Flood Alleviation Plan is implemented; further that the Office for National Statistics has recently revised its household projection to show that less new housing is needed than previously thought; and further that this petition refers to the Site Allocations Development Plan document, approved by Woking Borough Council on 18 October 2018, which has questionable long-term forecasts and does not include recent developments.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government not to remove any land from the Green Belt for development unless there are very special circumstances and all other options including brownfield sites have been exhausted.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Mr Jonathan Lord.*]

[P002441]

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**not later than
Wednesday 20 March 2019**

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