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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 14 March 2019

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Trade and Investment: Switzerland

1. Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his Swiss counterpart on trade and investment. [909798]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): How are you, Mr Speaker? It has been so long.

I met with Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin during my visit to Switzerland in February. Together we signed the UK-Switzerland trade agreement. This was an important moment, ensuring continuity of a trading relationship worth over £32 billion in 2017.

Rehman Chishti: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Recently we had the brilliant ambassador for Switzerland, Ambassador Fasel, visit my constituency looking at the potential for greater trade opportunities between our great countries. Can the Secretary of State clarify this point? He talks about continuity and I welcome the agreement he has signed but, on post-Brexit trading opportunities, the United Kingdom has identified the United States, Australia, New Zealand and trans-Pacific as key priorities. Can he confirm that Switzerland—our bilateral trade totals over £34 billion—will always be a key priority, certainly in looking forward to enhancing sectors such as finance and IT?

Dr Fox: The countries my hon. Friend mentions are for new free trade agreements, whereas of course the agreement with Switzerland was a continuity agreement. In fact, it was an unusual agreement because, rather than being a single agreement to roll over, there were some 58 different ones. It was to the tremendous credit of the Swiss Government that they were able to carry out that work as expeditiously as they did and we owe them a great deal of gratitude.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does not the Secretary of State realise that the Swiss deal is a tiny deal—nothing wrong with it, but it is tiny? Could we have a list of all the trade deals he has secured across the piece because, as I have been tracking them, they are very small indeed? May I also tell the Secretary of State

that it was not his finest hour last night when he did not have the courage to take an intervention from the Father of the House?

Dr Fox: Sometimes one wonders how small people can actually become in this House of Commons. The Swiss deal is not small, it is not insignificant; it is worth over £32 billion a year. Switzerland is Britain's seventh biggest trading partner globally. The hon. Gentleman should know that.

Mr Speaker: I do not want to invest levity into these important proceedings, but equally one must not lose one's sense of humour. That £32 billion volume of trade with Switzerland is very important, but I always say the best thing about Switzerland is not its watches, its financial services or its chocolate; the best thing about Switzerland is Roger Federer.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I must say that I am tempted to answer questions this morning due to the constitutional innovation of Ministers no longer having to resign when they disagree with Government policy, but I will ask this one. Trade with Switzerland represents about 21% of all the trade of all the countries that have the continuity agreement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it shows the growing success of this programme and the importance of ensuring that we have those trade agreements in place in the event of a Brexit without a deal later this month?

Dr Fox: I half-expected to see my right hon. Friend on the Front Bench with us this morning given the turn of events, but he is absolutely right that this is an important agreement. Over 20% of all the trade done under EU trade agreements is represented by Switzerland.

Mr Speaker, it is unlike me to disagree with you, but I do wonder whether on the morning after Roger Federer has defeated Kyle Edmund it is not a touch unpatriotic to be quite so pro-Swiss.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State may have heard an exchange a couple of days ago in which my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats highlighted the fact that, in the existing EU-Swiss trade deal, 19 technical standards have been brought in in common, whereas under the current UK-Swiss trade deal, only five technical standards have been brought in in common. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact of that on UK business?

Dr Fox: There are a number of technical interactions and some small technical issues that we shall continue to talk to the Swiss Government about. Of course the trade agreement itself is, we hope, a precursor to a further bespoke agreement as we leave the EU.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): My understanding is that, of the 40 potential continuity agreements, five represent 76% of the total trade, of which Switzerland is one. Is not that a good omen for the remaining big four?

Dr Fox: Of course a number of those who are engaged in trade continuity discussions with the UK are waiting to see what we will do in terms of Britain's approach to

the EU. They will be much more likely to sign up to those agreements when this House of Commons is clear about what it is going to do.

Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector and Overseas Goods

2. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What assurances the Government have provided to the agricultural sector that UK markets will not be opened to goods produced overseas to lower environmental, sanitary and phytosanitary or animal welfare standards after the UK leaves the EU. [909799]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): I am grateful for the whip on Ministers having been imposed for as long as it was, otherwise I should not be standing here, but credit of course goes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands).

When we leave the EU, we will maintain our current domestic standards. We will keep our existing UK legislation, and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will convert EU law into UK law as it applies at the moment of exit. This includes the regulatory regimes for environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards. Without exception, of course, imports must continue to meet all relevant UK product rules and regulations, as they do today.

Mohammad Yasin: What assessment has the Department made of the impact of the tariff barriers introduced yesterday on the farming sector?

George Hollingbery: The tariff package announced yesterday is a balanced package. It is a temporary package. It is a response to the potential effects of leaving the EU without a deal. There are sectors that are vulnerable to competition from imports, are not as nimble as others and cannot change as quickly—farming is one of those. We believe that the balanced package we have put together will sufficiently protect farming interests in the UK.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If regulatory alignment with the EU is maintained in these goods, to what extent will that constrain our ambitions for wider trade deals?

George Hollingbery: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. Of course, if the Prime Minister's deal is passed through this House in its third iteration, it will provide for regulatory alignment not to continue and therefore we would be able to pursue trade deals internationally. Of course we can do so in any event, as not all trade deals are to do with goods.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): During the BSE crisis of the 1990s, the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001 and the scare of 2007, even some members of the European Union took advantage of these crises to ban British meat imports, even long after any risk had expired. If we leave with a bad deal, such as the one Parliament has now rejected twice, countries will not need an excuse to act with opportunistic protectionism in that way. So how will we make sure that our farmers are protected in the deals we strike in future?

George Hollingbery: Of course, the hon. Gentleman has a real constituency concern and interest in this. The simple fact is that the UK intends to operate within the World Trade Organisation and subscribe to the world's rules-based order on trade, and that gives us a great deal of protection. We are always able to bring disputes if we feel that WTO rules are being flouted inappropriately.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): In the United States, pork is produced using ractopamine, which causes heart disease, and it is not treated for trichinosis, which can lead to stomach upset. The US National Pork Producers Council wants its standards included in the US-UK trade deal, and it has the support of its Government in that demand. This threat to food safety is completely unacceptable, so will the Minister rule out any reduction in food standards in international trade agreements?

George Hollingbery: I repeat what we have said from this Dispatch Box and this Department many, many times: we absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that our food standards should be maintained. As for the requirements the US has laid out in its provisional negotiating strategy for its agreement with the UK, if he looks carefully at previous such agreements and previous such outline mandates from the US, he will find that they are almost exactly the same in every respect. That does not mean to say that they are delivered in that form.

Leaving the EU: Health Services and Legal Action

3. **Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to prevent potential legal action by companies overseas in relation to the provision of health services in any future trade deals after the UK leaves the EU. [909801]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Government are considering their future approach to investor state dispute settlement. Where included in a trade agreement, ISDS will not oblige the Government to open the NHS to further competition, and overseas companies will not be able to take legal action to force us to do so.

Sandy Martin: The Secretary of State did not rule out the use of legal action against other companies in this country, so what message would he give to all those idealistic people who voted to leave the EU because they thought that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership would open us up to hostile lawsuits from US companies? Does he think that now that the truth is out they ought to have a chance for another vote?

Dr Fox: I am not sure what the connection was between some of those points. Let me be clear that, through ISDS, investment claims can be made only in respect of established investments; the mechanism cannot be used in relation to an alleged failure to open up public services to a potential investor. It could not be much clearer that what was being put about was a complete myth.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): What guarantees can the Secretary of State give us that pharmaceutical companies will not relocate to the EU, meaning that in effect more and more of our drugs would be imported? Will he give a guarantee that that will not happen?

Dr Fox: It would be absolutely ridiculous of any Minister to try to tell businesses what they can and cannot do. I can tell the hon. Gentleman, though, that last year foreign direct investment into the United Kingdom rose by 20%; in continental Europe, it fell by 73%. The hon. Gentleman should draw his own conclusions.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): In the recent debate on international trade, I cited two examples of the Canadian Government's having to withdraw public health measures after legal challenges by businesses under the terms of the North American free trade agreement. When the Secretary of State is considering health protections in future UK FTAs, will he ensure that they go wider than direct NHS provision and encompass wider public health policy?

Dr Fox: We will look to replicate the success we have already had in bilateral investment treaties. UK investors have successfully brought around 70 cases against other Governments. No private company has ever brought a successful case against the United Kingdom in respect of our bilateral investment treaties.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): The British public are clear that they do not want our national health service to be bargained away as part of trade negotiations, and they do not want foreign companies to have the right to sue our Government for decisions taken in the interests of public health, yet that is exactly what could happen if we accept ISDS and the negative-list approaches in the future agreements that the Government are proposing. Will the Secretary of State now rule out agreeing to a single clause of a single trade deal that could threaten our NHS?

Dr Fox: There are days when I genuinely have to thank God that the Labour party is the Opposition and not the Government of this country. We have £1.3 trillion of outward stock invested, including things like pension funds that British people will depend on for their prosperity. Were we to abandon the concept of investor-state dispute resolutions, what would happen to the protections for our investment overseas? The Labour party needs to start to think about the wider interests of this country.

Future Trade Deals: NHS and Other Public Services

4. **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that the delivery of (a) NHS and (b) other public services are excluded from future trade deals. [909802]

7. **Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that contracts for the delivery of (a) NHS and (b) other public services will be excluded from future trade deals. [909805]

9. **Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that contracts for the delivery of (a) NHS and (b) other public services will be excluded from future trade deals. [909810]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): Existing EU trade agreements, such as the EU-Canada

comprehensive economic and trade agreement and the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement, contain provisions that ensure that it remains for the United Kingdom to decide how our public services are run. As we leave the EU, the Government will ensure that all future trade agreements continue to protect the UK's right to regulate public services.

Ronnie Cowan: Technically, there is little that MPs and the public can do to prevent the Government from signing trade deals that could negatively impact on the NHS. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he will expand the transparency and scrutiny mechanisms that pertain to any future trade deals?

Dr Fox: I recommend the Government's Command Paper on this issue, which we published last week. It sets out the scrutiny plans that will provide greater scrutiny in this country than most of our fellow countries in the European Union have.

Anneliese Dodds: Conservative Ministers chose to include the NHS in their approach to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which could have made it impossible to bring privatised NHS services back in-house. The Secretary of State will know that privatisation is proceeding apace in the NHS—it certainly is in my constituency, in our cancer-scanning services—so will he give us a cast-iron legal guarantee? That is what we will need to show that his Government are committed to excluding the NHS from future trade deals.

Dr Fox: Where do I start? First, this Government did not negotiate TTIP; the European Union negotiated it on behalf of this country, so it was not for the United Kingdom to determine the mandate. None the less, the hon. Lady should look at the agreements that are already out there. For example, article 9.2 of CETA talks about the exclusion of “services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority”.

It is quite clear from what the Government included in the CETA ratification that we intend to make provision to ensure that Governments have the right to regulate public services. I think that is a good idea, so I cannot understand why the Labour party voted against it.

Jo Platt: The Secretary of State has publicly stated that he supports CETA as a model for future trade agreements—an agreement that prevents future Governments from tackling the failed privatisation agenda in both our health and transport services. Does he agree that trade agreements cannot be allowed to constrain future policy decisions?

Dr Fox: I do not know where that briefing came from, but the hon. Lady should ask for her money back. There is nothing in CETA that stops the Government regulating their own public services; that is specifically what the exclusion is for. It is in the interests of the country that we get Government regulation of our own public services so that we can have proper scrutiny, including through this House, and that is what is included in the agreement.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Last year I saw at first hand how the New Zealand Parliament handles the scrutiny of trade agreements to ensure that they deliver for the country's economy and protect key public services.

What learnings and reassurances is my right hon. Friend taking from the experience of the New Zealand Parliament in scrutinising trade deals and ensuring that they deliver their promised benefits?

Dr Fox: We have looked widely at what other countries are doing, particularly when they have similar legislatures and legal systems, but what we have set out in the Command Paper is a bespoke arrangement for the United Kingdom. For example, our consultation period is longer than the European Union's because we thought that it was right to have increased scrutiny in the UK. It is a UK policy, made for the UK.

Leaving the EU: Interim Trade Tariffs

5. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What plans he has to publish proposals on interim trade tariffs after the UK leaves the EU. [909803]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): The Government announced details of the temporary tariff yesterday in a written statement to the House. This is a balanced tariff policy that aims to minimise costs to businesses and mitigate price impacts on consumers, while also supporting UK producers as far as possible.

Tim Loughton: Now that the details have been published at last, I noticed that slippers are going to be charged at 17% less under these tariffs. Given the disorientation of some ministerial colleagues last night, perhaps a few might like to invest in a pair and retire early. On a more important point, can we get away from the obscene nonsense whereby, in the past, we have given international aid money to countries such as Ethiopia to encourage cocoa farmers to produce agricultural products—quite rightly—only for the EU obscenely to charge them tariffs of 30% when they try to sell the products of their hard labour back to us?

George Hollingbery: My hon. Friend is right. The temporary arrangements that we are putting in place recognise that there are developing countries that we have long supported and have agreements with, and which require tariff-free access to our markets to ensure that they can sustain themselves through trade. Sections within the proposal keep tariffs on certain lines to allow those countries preferential access to the UK market to their advantage.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The National Farmers Union is profoundly concerned that it has only two weeks to prepare for the new tariff regime, particularly in view of the fact that cereals and egg producers will have no protection whatever. What discussions has the Minister had with the appropriate Ministers in other Departments to ensure support and compensation for those farmers?

George Hollingbery: Of course, the farming community is protected by a commitment to the payments they were expecting through to 2020. As the hon. Gentleman will know and would expect, we consulted widely with colleagues across Government, so this is a collectively agreed decision. We have placed tariffs on quite a large number of vulnerable agricultural products, and we hope that the mix is the right decision not just for producers, but for consumers.

I remind the House that, for people in the bottom 10 percentage points of income in this country, food is a very real cost every single day; some 20% of their weekly income is spent on food. If we allowed inflation to roar away on products of this sort, people at that end of the income scale would find it very hard to feed themselves, and we believe that we have to mitigate that situation for them, as well as for farmers' incomes.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Hundreds of my constituents work in the fish processing industry in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area, and the supply of fish from Iceland is essential to them. Can the Minister give an assurance that no decisions on tariffs will be detrimental to those supplies?

George Hollingbery: There are two points on this. First, we have transitioned the free trade agreements the EU has with the Faroes—something that Opposition Members have derided us for as to the scale of the deal. To certain communities, particularly in my hon. Friend's part of the world, these fish products are extremely important to keep people in work and keep people in the country. Secondly, we are having extensive discussions with the European Free Trade Association countries and European economic area countries about transitioning the free trade deal, and we would hope to be able to get some news on this to the House in due course.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Only yesterday, trade arrangements were announced between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and they give us some concessions. However, the Ulster Farmers Union has indicated that it has some concerns over the arrangements that have been made. What discussions has the Minister had with the Ulster Farmers Union in Northern Ireland to discuss this?

George Hollingbery: The hon. Gentleman identifies an extremely important issue. I am not going to sidestep the question—I will give him an answer—but of course in the end this is a matter for the Department for Exiting the European Union and, indeed, for the Government more widely. There is no doubt that the choices that have been made for the position on the border in Northern Ireland were made against an extraordinarily difficult backdrop. There were no easy decisions. The decision we have made is temporary. We believe that it is World Trade Organisation-compliant. We recognise that there are real difficulties. I spoke to representatives of the agricultural community in Northern Ireland only yesterday and explained this. While very disturbed by what was going to happen, they understood why the decision had been taken.

Topical Questions

T1. [909813] **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): My Department is responsible for foreign and outward direct investment, establishing an independent trade policy, and export promotion. Following this session, I will be signing the trade continuity agreement between the UK and the Pacific Islands in the event of no deal.

This is part of our commitment to reducing poverty through trade, and it will ensure continued supply of key consumer products.

Will Quince: There is a lot of scaremongering on this issue that is concerning a number of my constituents, so will the Secretary of State set out what steps the Government are taking to ensure that contracts for the delivery of NHS services will be excluded from future trade deals?

Dr Fox: As I have already said, the Government will ensure that all future trade agreements continue to protect the United Kingdom's right to regulate public services. It could not be simpler. Any attempts to distort that basic message are political propaganda and they are untrue.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): One of our most distinguished former diplomats, the noble Lord Kerr, spoke last week, during the passage of the Trade Bill in another place, of the value of having a mandate as a negotiator. He said:

“Having negotiated against Americans, I know that it greatly strengthens their hand to be able to say, ‘Here is the proof that I cannot give you what you want, because Congress would turn it down’.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 March 2019; Vol. 796, c. 671.]

Recently the US trade representative published the negotiating mandate for a US-UK trade deal—no concern about commercial confidentiality here, just openly and transparently setting out all the objectives they have for penetrating UK markets, with American healthcare and agribusiness to the fore. In the same week, the Secretary of State published his Command Paper. It is against mandates. Indeed, the Government tried unsuccessfully to defeat Lord Kerr and others who supported Lord Balmacara's amendment. What does the Secretary of State know about negotiations that Lord Kerr does not, and will the Government try to reverse their lordships' decision when the Bill returns to the Commons?

Dr Fox: The Trade Bill was and is about trade continuity, including trade agreements and including the Trade Remedies Authority. It has been used, I am afraid, in the other place to hold debates on future trade agreements that will come in due course here. There is of course a difference between setting out negotiating objectives, which the United States did, and a mandate, which is how the negotiators actually go about it. It seems that the hon. Gentleman has not grasped that point yet.

T2. [909814] **David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that the enormous investment in Britain by the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund shows that, with or without a deal, this country is one of the best places in the world to do business? If he does agree, will he draw this to the attention of some of his colleagues in the Cabinet?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right; the world's largest sovereign wealth fund has said that it will continue its investment here. The latest figures from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development show that the UK strengthened its position last year as the

No. 1 foreign direct investment destination in Europe. The hundreds of thousands of jobs and higher wages that result would be threatened by the Labour party if it got the chance to jack up corporation tax rates and put in place other business-unfriendly policies. That would reverse the investment that has brought so much good to this country since Labour left in 2010.

T3. [909815] **Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab):** UK food businesses such as Devro plc in my constituency benefit from free trade with the EU and its free trade agreements with third countries. Can the Secretary of State confirm how long it will take his Department to negotiate new agreements with these third countries, and will they be on the same terms as those we currently enjoy through our EU membership?

Dr Fox: The Government's policy is that we do not have to have these rollover agreements because we want to get an agreement through the House so that we can continue with the Prime Minister's plan. If the hon. Gentleman wants to help the businesses that he mentions, he can vote for the Prime Minister's agreement at the next opportunity.

T8. [909820] **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** An area of international trade that is often overlooked is tourism, and of course, inbound tourism is export earnings. What discussions is the Department having with other Departments to boost our tourism industry, for example on visas?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is right. Tourism is a great example—I use the word “great” advisedly. The GREAT brand is used across the whole of UK Government. It is that rarest of things—a joined-up government policy that actually works. It has added huge value to our tourism sector. In 2017 we saw record numbers of visitors to the UK, and a contribution to the UK economy of £24 billion.

T4. [909816] **Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP):** Given the inevitable downturn that will come from any kind of Brexit that we end up with, what consideration has the Minister given to the introduction of free ports to boost economic activity in areas of low economic performance just now?

Dr Fox: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the interest that he has shown in this issue. The experience of other countries in using the ability of free ports to increase economic activity is valuable and something that the Government are considering in an optimistic and positive way.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): UK Export Finance does some excellent work, but some of its funding capacity goes unused. What can be done to change that to raise British exports?

Dr Fox: We have signed a memorandum of understanding with the five biggest banks so that they can encourage businesses to utilise UK Export Finance. One of the main areas where it is under-utilised is small businesses, but the positive side is that last year more

than 70% of the agreements signed by UKEF were with small businesses. That is a trend that we would like to see continue.

T5. [909817] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): More than 20,000 people, including many of my constituents, have signed the Fairtrade Fortnight petition calling on the Government to lead action on exploitative rates of pay in the hugely valuable international cocoa trade. Will the Government take up that challenge?

Dr Fox: I take the opportunity to praise the work of the Fairtrade organisation, which is so well led and co-ordinated by my very good friend Lord Price. It is essential that we look at these issues because free trade is not a free-for-all. There need to be rules around it and there needs to be fair trade. The Government will look sympathetically at what the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Following the visit of the Taiwanese representative and the Philippines ambassador, does my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the announcement that the Qatari ambassador, together with a trade delegation, will visit Southend on 25 March as we move towards city status, to explore the opportunities of trade and business investment as we leave the EU?

Graham Stuart: I welcome the announcement by Qatar's ambassador to the UK, His Excellency Mr Yousef Al Khater, and his accompanying delegation of a visit to Southend. I am pleased to say that the UK is one of Qatar's major investment destinations globally, with more than £35 billion already invested in the UK.

T6. [909818] **Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): If the United States lifts its suspension of title III of the Helms-Burton legislation, which gives US citizens the right to sue foreign companies for using Cuban nationalised properties, British businesses that trade with Cuba will suffer damaging consequences. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with our international partners to co-ordinate a response to the proposed changes in US extraterritorial policies that will have an impact on businesses trading with Cuba?

Dr Fox: This is an issue that the Government take seriously because we want to ensure that British companies have the right to trade where we think it is appropriate and where the British Government's foreign policy indicates that. I have had and will continue to have discussions with my American counterparts on that issue.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Given the announcement on tariffs, what progress is being made regarding the steel industry in relation to the trade defence instruments in place at European level being transferred across to UK level at the point of departure?

Dr Fox: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman missed the statement we had in the House on this, but I made it very clear that those arrangements would be rolled over. It will not be the Government's intention in any way, shape or form to leave our businesses less protected than they are today, which is why those trade remedies will continue.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Shared Parental Leave Uptake

1. **Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): What recent estimate she has made of the uptake of shared parental leave. [909783]

12. **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the uptake of shared parental leave. [909795]

13. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent estimate she has made of the uptake of shared parental leave. [909796]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): In 2018, we ran a successful £1.5 million campaign to promote awareness and take-up of shared parental leave. Last month, we launched a further campaign to maintain the high level of awareness achieved. We are currently evaluating the scheme, looking at take-up and the barriers to take-up, and we expect to publish the findings later this year.

Douglas Chapman: I thank the Minister for that response. Since becoming an MP, I have taken a real interest in the close links between Scotland and the Nordic countries. At the Nordic Co-operation conference this week, the Swedish Government said that they wanted to re-emphasise their commitment to sharing care, saying that parental leave was good not just for women, but for the health and wellbeing of men. What discussions has the Minister had with the Scottish Government to support further progress on this approach?

Kelly Tolhurst: I quite agree, and this Government are committed to delivering the take-up of shared parental leave. We know that it is good for employers, for the family and for employees. The scheme has been in place since 2015. We are evaluating it, and we will continue to consult with all partners on how we can increase take-up.

Mr Speaker: I call Victoria Prentis—not here.

Patrick Grady: Will the Minister give a timescale for the extension of shared parental leave to the self-employed?

Kelly Tolhurst: I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that, as I outlined in my last response, we are currently evaluating the scheme, which we are committed to delivering, as I have already said. However, in relation to self-employed people, I must point out that one of the benefits of implementing shared parental leave in the first place is that some people who are employed do not have the flexibility of the self-employed. Obviously, we are not ruling anything out, and we will continue to keep our policies under review. As I say, we will respond on the outcomes of our evaluation later on.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): In the future, we will look back at the inequality of parental leave between fathers and mothers, and wonder how on

earth we thought it was okay for it to be like that. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to rebalance parental leave between men and women—fathers and mothers—so that parents get equal opportunities to spend time with their children and pursue their careers?

Kelly Tolhurst: Absolutely. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that both parents are able to spend quality time with their children, particularly in their first year. I would like to highlight to my hon. Friend that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs reported that, in 2017-18, 9,200 employees took up the scheme, of whom 80% were men.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does the Minister think that that 80% figure is where we want to end up?

Kelly Tolhurst: No. We want to encourage further take-up. Currently, the take-up is between 2% and 8%, which is in line with our prediction. A figure of 80% is a good start, but I want to see more mothers and more fathers taking advantage of this shared parental leave policy.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): With take-up of shared parental leave at 2%, it is clearly not working for families across the UK. If we are serious about closing the gender pay gap and tackling maternity discrimination, the Government must increase statutory paid leave for new fathers. Will the Minister confirm that as part of her ongoing review, she will consider extending statutory paid leave to four weeks, to incentivise fathers to take it up?

Kelly Tolhurst: In reality, we are looking for a wider culture change. Other countries that implemented such schemes decades ago are still working to increase take-up of shared parental leave. We are committed to looking at what the barriers are, and at why people are not taking up such schemes. When we have that evidence base, we will tweak our policies to ensure that more people are able to take up those schemes.

Victoria Prentis *rose*—

Mr Speaker: It is very good of the hon. Member for Banbury to drop in on us, and we welcome her to the Chamber. I hope that she has fully recovered her breath, after what must have been an arduous excursion from wherever she was to the Chamber, and that she is now ready to deliver her question, which we await with bated breath.

Victoria Prentis: I cannot thank you enough for calling me, Mr Speaker, because this is a very important issue. Will my hon. Friend update the House on the progress of the research programme announced in September 2018 on gender equality in the workplace, and particularly on parental responsibilities? I know it is an evidence-based research programme, and we are all awaiting its results.

Kelly Tolhurst: The research programme into the workplace and gender equality will invest £1.1 million in academic research over two years. So far that programme

has commissioned an evidence-based review of family-friendly policies and women's progression, as well as considering how parents share caring for their children, and what motivates employers to improve their offer of shared parental leave. That programme will be based on evidence and advice from employers regarding how we can improve those family-friendly policies.

Highly Paid Professions: Girls and Women

2. **Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** If she will meet the Children's Commissioner and the Ofsted Chief Inspector to discuss barriers to girls and women entering highly paid professions. [909784]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): My colleagues in the Department for Education regularly meet Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner, and I will ask them to raise that matter at their next meeting. It is critical to get more women into professions where they are under-represented, not least because that will help close the gender pay gap.

Mr Sheerman: The Minister knows the information and data that those two organisations hold on the fact that so many bright girls are diverted early on away from science and maths, and away from other subjects that have a clear link with progression to high management. Surely that is criminal, and we should do something about it on an all-party basis.

Penny Mordaunt: I think the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to discuss this issue again. He is right, and this is an issue on which Members across the House will agree. Progress has been made, including a clear increase in girls choosing those subjects, which shows that effort does pay off, but there are still too few such cases, and we must not let up in our work to encourage women to have such choices and to go forward in those professions.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Women who enter high-paid professions face blatant discrimination—40% experience sexual harassment, 50,000 women a year feel forced to leave their jobs because they are pregnant, and organisations such as the BBC feel that it is okay for them to break the law by paying men and women differently for the same job. Why is there no mention of enforcing antidiscrimination law in the Government's "Good Work Plan", which is their employment strategy? Surely that should be at the heart of what they are doing.

Penny Mordaunt: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is consulting on that matter. My right hon. Friend mentioned a list of issues, and it is important to track the impact that policies are having on women and their choices. We will produce measures and metrics to sit alongside the strategy that the Government Equalities Office will produce on women's economic empowerment, so that we can all see how we are doing.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On 20 February I raised concerns with the Ofsted Chief Inspector that some schools are not following new safeguarding guidance on peer-on-peer sexual abuse,

but at best, the Chief Inspector's response required improvement. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can enforce safeguarding in schools?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue. It is a very serious matter indeed. I will certainly ask the relevant Minister at the Department for Education to meet her, and I will also follow up.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): We should accentuate the positive. Last year, 68.8% of those accepted on law undergraduate courses were women. The future for law in this country is bright. Does the Minister agree?

Penny Mordaunt: Every human endeavour depends for its success on women's involvement, so, yes, I am pleased about progress, but more needs to be done.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question asked by the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), one of the barriers to women holding highly paid positions is maternity discrimination. What further steps will the Government take to tackle this issue?

Penny Mordaunt: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is leading on a number of pieces of work. The women's economic empowerment strategy is considering all these policies in the round to look at what more we can do to ensure that women are supported and treated fairly, and can have full careers. It will be published later this spring.

Differential Gender-based Pricing

3. **Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD):** If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of prohibiting the differential pricing of products and services that are (a) intended for and (b) marketed towards specific genders. [909785]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): Although I share concerns on this issue, prices in the UK are set by competition, not by the Government. As intelligent questioning consumers, women should not be afraid to challenge retailers or manufacturers who are trying to rip us off and, where we are not satisfied, to vote with our purchasing decisions. The Government stand ready to back up any woman who wants to do that.

Christine Jardine: I thank the Minister for her comments. Research shows that women pay more than men for basic products 42% of the time. Manufacturers claim that this is competition or that more is involved in producing women's products. Scientists tell us that that is nonsense: we all have the same hair and skin types. Given what she has said about women standing up, will the Minister back my Bill on the pink tax, which is currently going through Parliament, or help to encourage manufacturers and retailers to do away with what is a sexist and outdated practice?

Victoria Atkins: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her private Member's Bill. The Government will not be supporting it, but we welcome the focus she is bringing

to this important issue. In the 21st century, things like social media will help to get the message out to manufacturers and businesses that they simply cannot rip women off. The work uncovered on Friday in the Rose review of access to finance, which female entrepreneurs are sadly not getting at the moment, is precisely why the Government are looking to help female entrepreneurs to set up businesses that will not rip women off.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Will the Minister kindly provide an update on the projects being supported by the tampon tax fund?

Victoria Atkins: I regret to say that I do not have that list to hand at the moment, not least because I was preparing answers on the pink charge on female products, but I will endeavour to write to my hon. Friend with a list. I know the work he has done on this vital topic. I am sure that, like me, he was delighted at the Chancellor's announcement yesterday that we will be providing free sanitary products to secondary schools.

Mr Speaker: As the Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) will be of wider interest, it might be of service to the House if the hon. Lady places a copy of her reply in the Library.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I am delighted to hear the Minister's commitment to supporting women who wish to take the matter of the pink tax to task. As it happens, we are in the process of establishing an all-party group concerning the beauty industry. I would welcome the Minister joining the group, so she could, alongside me and colleagues, encourage companies to look at the pink tax. It seems an irony, given that women's earning potential is less than men's. We really should be looking at this issue far more closely.

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful, as always, to the hon. Lady for her kind invitation. Sadly, I am not sure that, as a Minister, I am allowed to join an all-party group, but I very much look forward to learning from its work. Of course, if it ever wished to invite me to a meeting, I would be happy to accept the invitation.

Period Poverty

4. **Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** What steps she is taking to tackle period poverty. [909786]

5. **Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con):** What steps she is taking to tackle period poverty. [909787]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): I am convening a new taskforce of experts from all sectors to ensure that we end period poverty in the UK. The taskforce will build on good work already being done and recent announcements of funding for sanitary protection in schools and hospitals.

Rebecca Pow: I applaud the Secretary of State for the great work that we are doing in this area in the UK, but we must remember that it is also really important to tackle period poverty abroad, where sometimes women have even more serious problems than we have here.

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree. That is why we have also launched a new campaign to step up international action to end period poverty globally by 2030, in line with the global goals. This will be kick-started by £2 million of funding for small and medium-sized charities working in the Department for International Development's priority countries. We are building on our existing international work, because obviously this is embedded in all our education work.

Mrs Murray: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Like me, does she look forward with ever-increasing excitement to the day when we finally leave the EU and can set our own VAT rates on all products, including tampons, and end this injustice forever?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree. The Government strongly believe that VAT should not apply to these products. That is why we took the initiative in 2016 to introduce legislation to enable a zero rate to take effect as soon as possible. In the meantime, we currently apply the lowest rate that we can—5%—to these products.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I welcome the announcement this week, but has the Minister considered the provision of sanitary products in the workplace, perhaps starting with her Ministry or here in Parliament?

Penny Mordaunt: Yes, we have. I am sure that all Members across the House will welcome the recent announcements on schools, hospitals and colleges, but we want to look at the issue in the round. That is the job of the taskforce, and it will be about Departments, the private sector and the third sector coming together to create ways to sort this for any woman or girl who may find herself in that situation. On other issues such as primary schools, workplace settings and so forth, the taskforce is looking at all those, but I am also interested in ideas that hon. Members have, because I know that there are many great schemes out there in their constituencies.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I thank Amika George, the Red Box Project, the British Medical Association, the Communication Workers Union, Girlguiding UK, Plan International, Bloody Good Period, Beauty Banks, On The Ball, Hey Girls, Bloody Big Brunch, my hon. Friends the Members for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley), and Monica Lennon, the Labour Member of the Scottish Parliament, who helped with the policy on period poverty. I thank the Secretary of State and the Chancellor for the announcement yesterday. I am really pleased to hear that there will be a taskforce, and I wonder whether the Secretary of State would like to work with me and Monica Lennon so that we can make sure that refugee and homeless shelters all have free menstruation products.

Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely. This is an issue that can unite the whole House, and we need such issues, especially at times like this. When I launched this, I also paid tribute to many organisations, including those that the hon. Lady mentions, for the fantastic work that they are doing. We do not want to reinvent the wheel. There is

great, sustainable work out there, and we want to take those ideas, help them scale up and ensure that we can end this issue for good.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: As always, I want to help colleagues with important questions, but we are up against it, so I will take the next question and possibly one after, but they have to be one-sentence questions, and nothing more—we do not have time.

Public Spending: Disabled People

6. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What assessment the Government has made of the cumulative effect on disabled people of recent changes to public spending. [909788]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton)—I am sorry that she is not in her place today and that the sector will be disappointed that it has lost a good Minister. We need to take into account the impact not just of our policies, but of the policies of other areas, such as local government.

Debbie Abrahams: Disabled people have been absolutely hammered by this Government, with cuts of £4.8 billion in social security alone, so why was there absolutely nothing in the spring statement yesterday for disabled people, who are at the end of their tether? And please do not say that it was not a fiscal event, because there were spending commitments made yesterday.

Penny Mordaunt: The Department for Work and Pensions has been continuing to do the work that was outlined in the health and work review 12 months or more ago and is making progress. The Department is considering how we can ensure not only that the welfare system works better in supporting disabled people, but that it dovetails with other schemes such as Access to Work. I shall make sure that the Department is aware of the specifics to which the hon. Lady refers.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): What has happened to total spending on disability benefits since 2010, and what has happened to the employment and unemployment rates for disabled people?

Penny Mordaunt: Members will know the figures well. The amount currently spent on disabled people and those with health conditions is £50 billion. We are closing the disability employment gap, but there is still much more to do. One of the things that the Department has been doing well is looking at this in the round, along with other issues such as accessibility. We need to support disabled people in relation to every aspect of their lives and every ambition that they have.

Pension Age: Women Born in the 1950s

7. **Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of changes to the pension age on women born in the 1950s. [909789]

10. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of changes to the pension age on women born in the 1950s. [909793]

11. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of changes to the pension age on women born in the 1950s. [909794]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): The state pension age reform is focused on maintaining the right balance between sustainability of the state pension and fairness between generations in the face of demographic change. Without equalisation, women would be expected to spend an average of more than 40% of their adult lives receiving the state pension.

Emma Dent Coad: I should declare an interest: I am a WASPI woman myself, having been born in the 1950s. Many of my friends, neighbours and constituents have been hit hard by changes in their pension arrangements that are forcing them to work for an additional five years beyond their planned retirement date. Does the Minister agree that women who have set aside careers to care for families, unpaid, for many years should not be treated in the same way as men who have been able to pursue their careers unencumbered? Equality is not always achieved by treating men and women in the same way.

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that issue. It has been well debated, and additional transitional arrangements have been introduced. One development that we should all welcome is that since 1994, the rate of pensioner poverty has fallen faster for females than for males.

Liz Twist: There are many 1950s-born women in my constituency—I, too, should declare an interest, as a 1950s-born woman myself—who are facing real financial hardship because of the pension changes. What steps are the Government taking to relieve their difficulties?

Justin Tomlinson: That is exactly why we have continued to deliver the triple lock. We recently announced a £3 billion uprating, and 80% of women reaching state pension age before 2030 will be better off by an average of £550 a year under the new arrangements.

Christian Matheson: Do the Government accept that the DWP's communication strategy was well below standard, and many women found out about changes in their pensions only a year—or even a few months—before those changes were made?

Justin Tomlinson: That, too, is an issue that has been debated extensively in a number of Parliaments, and it has been encountered by Governments of all political persuasions. On our watch, we redoubled efforts to ensure that there was the maximum amount of communication so that people could make informed decisions.

Topical Questions

T1. [909821] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): This is LBT women's health week. We know that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are less likely to participate in services such as cancer screening, which means that they face a wide range of health inequalities. That must stop. As part of our LGBT action plan, we will shortly announce the appointment of a national LGBT health adviser to help to improve the delivery of healthcare services for LGBT people. We will also announce the membership of the new LGBT advisory panel before the first conference, which will take place next week.

Martyn Day: Will the Minister support calls from my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), other Scottish National party Members and women's advocacy groups for the introduction of separate payments of universal credit to protect victims of domestic violence and financial coercion?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman raises important issues that are being considered by both my hon. Friend the Minister for Women and our colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions, and the new Secretary of State is particularly attuned to them. I will ask Ministers to write to the hon. Gentleman to update him, and I will pass on his concerns today.

T4. [909824] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): In my constituency, the sex worker outreach project run by the admirable Nelson Trust is doing really good work to help women to come off the streets and lead very different lives. What support can the Government provide to help these kinds of community services? Does my right hon. Friend agree that reducing the number of women in prison on short sentences would help this kind of rehabilitation?

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): I recall the visit that I made with my hon. Friend to see how his local community was looking after vulnerable people in Gloucester. We believe that people who want to leave prostitution should be given every opportunity to find routes out, and this is why we are spending more than £2 million across the Government to support prostitutes and sex workers who are at risk of abuse and exploitation. Indeed, we have a piece of work at the moment involving ongoing research conducted by the University of Bristol into what prostitution in the 21st century looks like, precisely so that we can address the issues that that research identifies.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): The primary victims of religiously motivated attacks are women, but how can the Government reassure Muslim women that they are serious about tackling Islamophobia when they choose to ignore and shut down the voices of the British Muslims in their own party who are calling for an independent inquiry into institutional Islamophobia? Speaking as a British Muslim, I believe that it is disgraceful and patronising that the Conservative party continues to refuse to act and tells British Muslims in the party that there is not a problem. Will the Minister at least accept that her party has a problem?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): The Conservative party took immediate action to suspend

14 members who put issues in, so we are not going to take any lectures from a party that refuses to suspend people or throw them out of the party for antisemitism.

T6. [909826] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out the legislative timetable for removing caste as a protected characteristic from the Equality Act 2010?

Penny Mordaunt: We are proceeding with this as soon as a suitable legislative vehicle is available. However, I can update my hon. Friend and tell him that the guidance that we promised to publish alongside it has now been produced. It is there to help employers, service providers and individuals to understand the context of the Equality Act, and it is going out for consultation with stakeholders this week.

T2. [909822] **Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Balance, the North East Alcohol Office, is doing excellent work in our region to raise awareness of the link between alcohol and breast cancer. What steps is the Minister taking to increase awareness of the health risks associated with alcohol that apply to women?

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage): That is a really excellent question. The Government are investing an extra £16 billion in that sort of primary care and prevention to make sure that we have the public health investment that helps people to tackle alcoholism and ensures that women get the breast cancer support that they need. Today, we have released a written ministerial statement responding to the inquiry on breast cancer screening.

T7. [909827] **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Alison Rose review of female entrepreneurship highlights the fact that £250 billion of untapped potential is lost to the sector because it is not taken seriously enough. Does my hon. Friend agree that businesses, especially banks, should be urged to take a much more inclusive approach to female entrepreneurs?

Victoria Atkins: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has asked this question, as it gives me an opportunity to thank Alison Rose for her review, which tries to ensure that the business landscape is as fair for women as it is for men. It is a shocking fact that women's average starting capital is 50% less than that of men. I was at a fantastic reception at No. 10 last week, where there was a room full of female entrepreneurs, some of whom were world-leading entrepreneurs. We have fantastically talented, capable and creative female entrepreneurs in this country, and we absolutely must support them. We must ensure that businesses, banks, venture capitalists and angel investors are all doing their bit to help these women.

T3. [909823] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): What steps are being taken to ensure that non-disclosure agreements are not used to cover up discrimination and harassment?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): We have launched a consultation on the use of NDAs and have proposed to make it explicit that NDAs should not

prevent individuals from reporting any kind of harassment, sexual or otherwise, to the police. I hope that that answers her question.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): May I ask the Minister for Women and Equalities whether some MPs are more equal than others? Back Benchers—the poor bloody infantry—have to traipse through the Lobby for every three-line Whip, but Cabinet Ministers can sit brazenly on the Front Bench and then slope off in their limousines after betraying the people and the Prime Minister.

Penny Mordaunt: All the Ministers on the Front Bench this morning are here and ready for their duties, in particular the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), who was ironing his shirt 20 minutes before this session started. We are in turbulent times, but we must trust our institutions and trust in democracy. I am also the Secretary of State for International Development, and I will take messy democracy over any other system in the world.

Mr Speaker: I am a tad taken aback that the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) feels it necessary to disclose to his ministerial boss his personal habits in relation to such matters, but there we go.

T5. [909825] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Yesterday, I was delighted to welcome to Parliament the Tea in the Pot women's support service, and many of its staff are 1950s-born women. Will there be an equality impact assessment regarding the effect of recent pension credit changes on 1950s-born women? Will the impact on pensioner poverty also be measured?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): There has been an impact assessment all the way through. If the hon. Gentleman highlights a good group, I am sure that the Minister with responsibility for pensions would be delighted to meet its representatives.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I urge the Government to work with NHS England to provide support to women GPs who have left the workforce but want to return after caring responsibilities. They should be supported to return to practice so that patients can get the benefits of their skills and experience.

Caroline Dinéage: My right hon. Friend is right. As well as having more GPs in training than ever before, we need to attract GPs who have left the workforce back into work. In March 2017, we launched a major "return to practice" campaign that aimed to attract 500 GPs. So far, 263 have completed the scheme, and a further 266 are in train.

T8. [909828] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Hundreds of WASPI women from across the country were in Parliament yesterday to protest at the spring statement, and they would like to know why the Government have not considered a special compensation scheme for women who have suffered severe detriment following the state pension change because they were never told about it in the first place.

Justin Tomlinson: As has been extensively covered in several debates, we have allocated an additional £1.1 billion of transitional support. The recent uprating order included an additional £3 billion to support the uprating of the state pension, and we will continue to support pensioners of all genders.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): What measures could be included in the draft Domestic Abuse Bill to ensure that parental responsibility does not override restraining orders, especially when partners have been convicted of coercive behaviour?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend raised a constituency case during the International Women's Day debate last week, and we want the draft Domestic Abuse Bill to support both the victims of the many forms that such abuse can take and the children who live in abusive households. I urge my hon. Friend to write to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which is scrutinising the Bill, to make her point.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister for Women and Equalities knows, the estimated 18% gender pay gap is likely to grow following Brexit as women in public services and retail are disproportionately affected. Does she accept that the women who voted to leave did not vote to leave themselves worse off and that they deserve a final-say referendum on the exit deal?

Penny Mordaunt: No. We do not want a second referendum, which would be disastrous. We are doing specific work in those sectors to close the gender pay gap. However, I caution that some companies that are doing the right thing will see their pay gaps widen because they may be recruiting many more young women, so we must look at the figures in detail to see that good progress is being made.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I know that Ministers on the Treasury Bench wish to examine in great detail the work of the Women and Equalities Committee when we issue our reports, but could the Secretary of State perhaps explain to me why it has taken five months for the Government to respond to our very important report on sexual harassment in public places? This issue needs urgent action, not more deliberation.

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry that we have taken a long time over responding to the work of the Select Committee. I would rather publish a response that will actually take the right action than put out something swiftly that is not going to do the job. I hope that my right hon. Friend will understand that we want to be doing things that ensure we address the issues she has raised.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Mr Bradshaw, you are a curious fellow. You were standing up a moment ago. *[Interruption.]* Very well. We will take one more.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Minister for Women and Equalities join me in condemning the wording of letter ESA65B from the Department for Work and Pensions—the letter asks general practitioners to cease issuing fit notes to people with disabilities awaiting an appeal for employment and support allowance—and help ensure that such blatant discrimination against disabled people, which resulted in the death of my constituent who was forced back to work against his doctor's advice, will cease immediately?

Penny Mordaunt: It is critical that welfare and healthcare work absolutely together if we are to support people. If the hon. Lady would like to share the details with me, I will certainly get a response from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Point of Order

10.41 am

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman courteously gave me notice of his desire to raise this point of order, and I am happy to take it now.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland is, as we speak, announcing its intention to proceed to prosecute a number of people in relation to events that occurred on the day known as Bloody Sunday in Londonderry.

It is not my intention to intervene in any way on the legal process, but I was born and raised in the city, which I now represent in Parliament, and as a teenager I was there in the city centre on the day. I watched the events that led up to that day, including the murder of two police officers in the vicinity of the parade just three days before that parade commenced. No prosecutions have ensued as a result of any investigation, either through the Saville inquiry or any other police investigation since.

I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, on what a parliamentarian like myself can do to draw attention, for example, to Peter Gilgun and David Montgomery, the police officers who were murdered, and to the massive imbalance in legacy investigations into our troubled past in Northern Ireland. Many innocent civilians, police and soldiers have not had their investigations carried out and no prosecutions have occurred, yet we have the announcement we are having today.

Mr Speaker: In truth, I think the hon. Gentleman knows that he has found his own salvation. He asks, in essence, what recourse is available to him, and he has found it. He has registered his view, and it is on the record. I know he will appreciate that it is not a matter for adjudication by the Chair. Specifically, however, in the light of what he has said, I hope that it is helpful to the House for me to point out that, in the event that any charges are brought, the House will want to respect the autonomy of the judicial process and to observe our own sub judice resolution. I will leave it there for now, and I think he understands that.

Business of the House

10.44 am

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

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

MONDAY 18 MARCH—A motion relating to the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion relating to amendments relating to the Provision of Integrated Care Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Organic Production (Control Of Imports) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Organic Production and Control (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

TUESDAY 19 MARCH—A motion to approve the draft Food Additives, Flavourings, Enzymes and Extraction Solvents (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Genetically Modified Food and Feed (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve the draft Animal Feed (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by motions relating to Select Committee appointments.

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH—A motion to approve the draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion relating to the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention and Levy and Safety Net) (Amendment) and (Levy Account: Basis of Distribution) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve The Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

THURSDAY 21 MARCH—A general debate on services for people with autism, followed by debate on a motion relating to NICE appraisal processes for treatments for rare diseases. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 22 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

Mr Speaker, this has been an important week for Parliament. There have been difficult decisions to make and at times some challenging exchanges. With such strongly held views across the House, that is to be expected, but it is vital that we continue to listen to each other with respect and understanding. Over the centuries, the country has looked on as Parliament has faced historic decisions, and even in the most challenging of times we have pulled together and put our duty above all else. I hope the House will come together to find a consensus that delivers on the will of the people to leave the European Union and does so in a way that inspires confidence in Parliament and in us as MPs.

Valerie Vaz: I do not know what to say to that, other than that it feels like a wash-up and that we should be getting ready for a general election. I was going to ask for an Opposition day. With the Government losing votes, it feels like we have already had them, but we have not. When my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau

[Valerie Vaz]

Gwent (Nick Smith) asked the Leader of the House when the next Opposition day debate would be, she said they were announced every Thursday, so, today being Thursday, I invite her to give us an Opposition day. The last one was on 13 November.

I was going to ask for statutory instrument debates, but I see they have already been tabled for next week. Following what has been an absolutely astonishing week, we have a series of SIs. More importantly, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who recently resigned, said that a few SIs had been deprioritised and would not be passed by the end of March, which was confirmed by a No. 10 spokeswoman. Will the Leader of the House ensure that a list is published of the prioritised and deprioritised SIs? What criteria are the Government using to deprioritise some of them?

Several Bills have to be passed before exit day. The Trade Bill had its Report Stage in the House of Lords yesterday, but other essential Bills—the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill and the Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill—have yet to have theirs. When are they likely to be debated? I raised the financial services Bill and the cross-party amendment last week after the debate was pulled. The Leader of the House said that she wanted

“time to look properly at the proposed amendments and consider their impact with the Crown dependencies, which are separate jurisdictions with their own democratically elected Governments.”—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2019; Vol. 655, c. 1135.]

That is right, but the UK Government are responsible for the good government of the Crown dependencies, and it is already Government policy, passed in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) have said that offshore secrecy represents a threat to UK national security. Could the Leader of the House say whether there are any conflicts of interest in the Cabinet that are preventing the amendments from being debated?

Today we will debate another motion on section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. It is about the negotiated withdrawal agreement, which was laid before the House and voted upon on 15 January and 12 March. Today's motion is substantially the same as the previous two, so the House is being asked to vote on the deal once again. “Erskine May” states—I have looked it up, Mr Speaker—that that is a matter for the Chair to decide, because this is the same motion. I do not want to trivialise the matter, but it sounds rather like that line from Morecambe and Wise: the same words, but not necessarily in the same order. The motion is effectively the same, with a few other words added. The footnotes in “Erskine May” state that the last time this provision was used was in 1920, and the reason it was put into “Erskine May” was to prevent MPs and the Government from putting motions again and again.

It is the Government who have put us in this position. Their red lines were drawn right at the beginning and formed the boundaries for the negotiations. There are ongoing investigations into how the vote was conducted.

There was secrecy and a lack of information, and Parliament was bypassed and ignored. That is pernicious to democracy.

One of the biggest announcements on Wednesday, apparently, was the Chancellor's spring statement. He used it to set out a “deal dividend”—if Parliament votes to leave the EU with a deal, we can have the money. That is effectively blackmailing us. He also said that austerity is coming to an end. Yes, and the people have said that they want authenticity, not austerity. But the latest figures show that the Office for Budget Responsibility has cut its growth forecast for 2019 to 1.2%, which is the weakest growth rate since 2009. That is a significant cut from its predicted 1.6% expansion, and that is from the Government's own economic watchdog. Who is right: the Chancellor or the OBR?

It is no good the Leader of the House telling us that there are more people in work. Yes, there are, but they are self-employed, on zero-hours contracts and in insecure work. There was absolutely nothing in the spring statement about local authorities or social care. The Health for Care coalition has said that the Government's failure to protect social care is “a national disgrace”. When will the social care Green Paper be published? It was expected last summer. The Women's Budget Group said that there have been cuts to youth services of 65%, cuts to Sure Start of 50%, and cuts to subsidised buses of 48%. All of that has to be addressed. When will we have a debate on the spring statement, or do I have to make an application to the Backbench Business Committee?

Next Thursday is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination—importantly, it is also the day when the European Council meets. It is important that we are careful with our language in areas surrounding race and accept that there is unconscious bias. More importantly, tomorrow our young people are being explicit; they are taking action to protect the very thing that gives us life. We must listen to them. I also want to send the House's good wishes to James Shaw, New Zealand's Climate Change Minister, who has sadly been attacked.

Finally, on a slightly happier note, I want to wish a very happy birthday—today is a triple birthday—to my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali).

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady has asked a number of questions, but I would like to start by sharing in her good wishes to all who are celebrating their birthday today, and I would add to her list my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross), who is celebrating the birth yesterday of his new baby boy—fantastic news.

The hon. Lady asks about Opposition days. She will recognise that we have had incredibly important business this week, and for next week I have announced a range of important secondary legislation. I hope she will welcome the fact that I have announced debates on two statutory instruments requested by the official Opposition: the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2019 and the Amendments Relating to the Provision of Integrated Care Regulations 2019. I will continue to consider carefully the hon. Lady's requests for different types of business.

The hon. Lady asks about the Brexit SIs generally. I am still confident that we will meet all the necessary SIs required to be laid by 29 March in a no-deal scenario and in a deal scenario; that is what the Government have been working towards. Over 500 EU exit SIs have now been laid, and I pay tribute to the sifting Committee, which has considered over 210 negative SIs, recommending over 60 of them for upgrade to the affirmative procedure. There is a huge amount of work going on, and many thanks to all hon. Members who have taken part in Delegated Legislation Committees.

The hon. Lady asks about primary legislation for Brexit Bills. She will know that in addition to the EU withdrawal Act, nine exit-related Bills are in Parliament or have already received Royal Assent; the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill completed its 10th sitting in Committee last week; the Agriculture Bill, Fisheries Bill and Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill are currently before the House of Commons; and the healthcare Bill and Trade Bill are progressing through the House of Lords.

The hon. Lady asked particularly about a financial services Bill. She will be aware that as I said last week, which she has pointed out, we are considering the amendment put forward, but on transparency in general it is this Government who are taking the lead on international transparency measures at home and around the world. It was Conservatives in government who led the world with the first public registry of company beneficial ownership in the G20, and it is the Conservatives who have driven the global agenda on tax transparency.

The hon. Lady asked about the Brexit decision today, and particularly the motion on the Order Paper. Today's debate is not about forcing the House to make a decision on whether the Government should seek a short or a long extension. The Government's motion simply sets out the factual position so that Members can take a decision on extension in full knowledge of the consequences. The Government's position is clear, and this is backed up by the comments made in Brussels over the last 24 hours. A short extension only works if a deal has been agreed by the House and the extension period is used to pass the necessary legislation to give effect to, and allow ratification of, a withdrawal agreement. A short extension does not work in any other circumstances, and a long extension would mean the UK having to participate in the EU elections.

The hon. Lady asked about the same question rule. "Erskine May" sets out that a motion

"which is the same, in substance, as a question which has been decided during a session may not be brought forward again during that same session."

However, any motion that we would table for any further approval would reflect the situation at the time—if it were to be tabled.

The hon. Lady says the economic data in the spring statement was not positive. I simply disagree: borrowing so far this year is at its lowest level for 17 years; our economy has grown for 24 quarters in a row, the longest streak of growth in the G7; wages are growing at their fastest rate for a decade; and from April the national living wage will rise again, taking the total annual pay rise for a full-time worker to over £2,750 since its introduction.

Finally, I join the hon. Lady in commending all the young people who are doing so much to indicate their support for protecting our global climate challenge. I

absolutely pay tribute to them, but say again that the greatest gift of any society to its children is a good education, and I urge them not to take valuable time out from school on this subject, but instead to spend their time campaigning for it, which is the right way to do it.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time to ban the use of living animals for warfare experiments? In the last year 3,865 animals were experimented on for chemical weapons at Porton Down, which is an absolute disgrace and totally unacceptable in what is supposed to be a civilised society.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important matter that I know is of interest to many Members of this House. The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down has an active programme to minimise the use of animals in experiments, in accordance with the principles of the three Rs—reduction, refinement and replacement. The Ministry of Defence does not conduct animal experiments for the development or testing of offensive weapons, and the Home Office does not grant licences for those purposes.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the almost comical business for next week. We are still considering our whip on the draft Novel Food (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 motion, which we will be considering as an important measure next week.

Today is a bit like the morning after the night before, with people collectively asking, "What on earth happened last night?" We had members of the Cabinet failing to support the Government on a three-line Whip against their own motion but still keeping their jobs. Politically, the UK is now close to becoming a failed state, with a Government barely able to function, and now we have today's Government motion and this woeful business statement. There is only one item of business this Government covet, and that is another crack at their dead deal. Today's motion is exclusively designed to allow that, in the vain hope that the threat of an extended delay will bring the Brexiteers back on board. How many times are the Government going to try to get this deal through? They are like vampires with an ability to survive a stake through the heart. I know that you will make a ruling on this, Mr Speaker, but as I heard the shadow Leader of the House say, the position on bringing a motion is clear. Page 397 of "Erskine May" states:

"A motion or an amendment which is the same, in substance, as a question which has been decided during a session may not be brought forward again during that same session."

But that is exactly what this Government are intending to do. I am sure you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Therefore, this is a Government who should be certified.

We also need to see the legislation that will honour last night's decision. The House has now voted three times to take no deal off the table, but the House remains ignored. The Government are right to say that the default position is to leave without a deal—that is what the legislation says—but what we have to do is

[Pete Wishart]

bring forward legislation to honour and respect the wishes of the House. If the Government are not prepared to do it, let the House do it.

This has been a disastrous week for the Government: they have been defeated on their deal; no deal has been taken off the table; and tonight there will be an extension to the 29 March departure date. Those of us who just despise this chaotic Brexit are beginning just to see this nightmare possibly slipping away, but let us be in no doubt that we are certain in Scotland that we are not going down with this doomed ship.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I, as a democrat, am absolutely determined to fulfil the will of the people in leaving the European Union. He, on the other hand, is determined to ignore the will of the people of the United Kingdom, both on leaving the EU and on the question of independence. So we know where he stands.

I make it clear again that today's debate is not about forcing the House to make a decision on whether the Government should seek a short or a long extension. The Government's motion simply sets out the factual position so that Members can take a decision on extension in full knowledge of the consequences. If Members think it would be possible between now and June to agree a new negotiating position in the House, to secure agreement in Europe for a new deal based on that position and to pass the primary legislation needed to give effect to a new deal, that is a matter for hon. Members to put forward in today's debate, particularly given the frequent representations I get here in business questions from Members from right across the House who have concerns about having the time they need to scrutinise and debate legislation.

I think the hon. Gentleman is in cloud cuckoo land. Do not take that from me, because Donald Tusk today says:

"During my consultations ahead of #EU27, I will appeal to the EU27 to be open to a long extension if the UK finds it necessary to rethink its #Brexit strategy and build consensus around it."

Michel Barnier says today:

"Why would we extend these discussions?"

He continued:

"The discussion on article 50 is done and dusted."

He then says that they are waiting for the "answer" and that

"the House of Commons says what it doesn't want" and that:

"Now this impasse can only be solved in the UK."

That means everybody in this Chamber needs to look at the consequences of what they are doing, and today is a very important day.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): May we have a debate on the Vienna convention on the law of treaties? The law is complex, and it is difficult in the big debates to get more than a few minutes to describe it, but the Vienna convention may well provide an exit route out of this impasse, because a state can abrogate part of a treaty if there is a change of the circumstances that are the basis of consent. I tabled an amendment to

the first meaningful vote, and since then I have been talking about the idea of a unilateral declaration, but these are complex matters and we need to discuss them in full. Perhaps that would allow the Attorney General to come back with a different opinion so that more of our colleagues can vote for the Prime Minister's deal.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend has long championed this idea, and I commend him for that. He will know that the Attorney General has considered these matters in great detail and come to the House to answer questions on them for several hours. If he has more to say on the matter, I am sure he will come to the House to say it.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I need to put something right for the record. The shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), suggested that she might apply to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate on the spring statement; I am afraid that as a Front Bencher she does not enjoy the privilege of being able to apply to the Backbench Business Committee. I apologise and wish I could accommodate her, but I am afraid that the Standing Orders prevent me from doing so.

I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement, and for announcing the two debates next Thursday on services for people with autism and a motion relating to NICE appraisal processes for treatments for rare diseases. My Committee has a hefty queue of important debates waiting for time. There are more than a dozen, including on heavily subscribed subjects such as school funding, fracking, the use of restraint on children and court closures, so we would be very grateful for any more time we can get.

Andrea Leadsom: As always, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me prior notice of urgent debates for which he is seeking time. I will always seek to accommodate the Backbench Business Committee.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for being in her place and attending to her duties. May we have a debate about those Ministers who seem to think that supporting the Government is optional, despite their evident willingness to draw a Government salary paid for with our constituents' taxes?

Andrea Leadsom: I absolutely understand my hon. Friend's concerns. He will appreciate that there are widely held views right across the House among different Members, and it is extraordinarily difficult, at this time that is so important for the nation, to try always to deal with every single aspect of all eventualities. My hon. Friend knows that yesterday Government Members were given a free vote on the Government's motion, but in the end that was not what the Government were voting on. The motion was amended by the House, which is why the challenging whipping arrangements occurred.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Leader of the House will surely not be surprised to hear me sounding outraged. Nine statutory instruments are to be taken on the Floor of the House next week, of which seven are from the Department for Environment, Food

and Rural Affairs. There are also back-to-back DEFRA statutory instruments upstairs on the Committee Room corridor. I know that as the shadow DEFRA Whip, and the Leader of the House and her DEFRA Whip must know that. I cannot see how physically we can possibly get through all these statutory instruments in the time available. It is not proper scrutiny, either, which is another consideration. Is it not time for the Government to admit that we need to extend article 50 and put back the date for leaving the EU?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be delighted to know that we have a motion on exactly her suggestion for the House to vote on today. Perhaps she had not noticed. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the DEFRA officials and Ministers who have worked day and night to ensure that they get on top of the many DEFRA SIs that are necessary to prepare either for a deal or for no deal. That is what they have achieved and I am delighted to say that we will be prepared, with all the SIs necessary, for 29 March.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The hand that fate deals can make or break lives, and those with acquired disabilities and those who have always had disabilities pay dearly. The disability equality charity Scope recently published “The Disability Price Tag 2019”, which sets out some of the additional costs faced by those with disabilities—things such as therapies, home adaptations, transport and insurance. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on why too many disabled people continue to pay too much? The Government should make their abiding mission the redistribution of advantage.

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that this Government have been absolutely determined to ensure that everybody in our society gets the best possible opportunity. He will know that we spend £50 billion a year on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. That is up more than £8 billion in real terms since 2010. I am so proud that the number of disabled people in work has increased by over 900,000 over the last five years under this Government, giving more people the chance to do something meaningful and useful, and to improve their circumstances in life.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Can I ask the Leader of the House for some guidance that would be helpful for all Members? I understand that the House authorities have been notified of possible industrial action for a period of three days next week. This will affect visitors coming to see Members in the House over those three days. Will she assure me that access will not be denied to people who have appointments with Members of Parliament in that time?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Lady is right that the Public and Commercial Services Union has announced, following a ballot of its members, that security staff at the Palace of Westminster have voted in favour of strike action. This is a matter for the House authorities, and I am assured that Parliament is putting in place business resilience plans to maintain both the security of the estate and the continued functioning of the business of both Houses. The priority will be to ensure that the business of the Houses, including Select Committees, is

unaffected. I will take away the right hon. Lady’s request, but I am aware that priority will be given to people who have appointments with their Member of Parliament.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): The stronger towns fund has the potential to regenerate towns in areas such as Erewash that were neglected for so long by the Labour Government. Will my right hon. Friend ask the relevant Minister to bring forward further details of how bids can be submitted to the fund?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is a great champion for her constituency. She will be aware that the new stronger towns fund will provide £1.6 billion of investment in the future prosperity of English coastal, market and industrial towns; £1 billion of investment will be targeted at the towns with the greatest need and will be distributed by local enterprise partnerships, and £600 million will be available as part of a competitive process that any town will be able to bid into. My hon. Friend might like to table a written question to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for further details on how to apply for that funding.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Tomorrow is the Nottingham North jobs fair, which is a collaborative effort between the council, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Futures Group, my office and my charity, the Rebalancing the Outer Estates Foundation. Last year we helped 150 people to find work in my community, and we will be at the Bulwell Riverside from half-past 9 tomorrow morning. Would the Leader of the House find Government time in which we can have a wider debate on supporting communities such as mine into work?

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on organising a jobs fair. I know that many right hon. and hon. Members do so, and it is incredibly appreciated by their constituents. Such fairs are amazingly successful at bringing together employers and those seeking work. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss with Ministers whether more can be done to support these excellent initiatives.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): World TB Day is on 24 March. Tuberculosis is the world’s deadliest disease; it still kills 1.7 million people a year globally, which is more than AIDS and malaria combined. There are still thousands of cases in the UK and drug resistance is a growing global health threat. Can we have a debate on this issue and on the importance of the successful replenishment of the global health fund? It is time to end TB.

Andrea Leadsom: First, I acknowledge the work of my right hon. Friend as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on global tuberculosis. It is an absolutely terrible disease that we must beat. The Government are already doing a great deal, including providing support through our commitment to the global fund. There is more to do, and the UK will continue to lead in this important area, but the whole world must act together if we are to eradicate this terrible disease.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Can I ask the Leader of the House for some Government time for a debate on scamming? This week, my constituents have been contacting my office to say that people are calling pretending to be

[Chris Elmore]

BT phone handlers asking for information. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has reported that in the six months to January this year it has received 60,000 complaints in relation to scams. Only yesterday, a constituent of mine emailed me saying that he had received an email from me with a link asking for their personal information. That has been referred to the House authorities. Could we have an urgent debate on this very important issue in which the Government can explain what more they can do to deal with scamming?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. It is important that anybody who receives an email or a call asking them for any personal details should never give them until they are absolutely certain of who the person is on the other end of the phone or the email. He is absolutely right to raise this. I would encourage him perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that other hon. and right hon. Members can share their views.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): The Leader of the House correctly said in her earlier remarks that education is the best gift that we can give to our young people. Yesterday morning, I was pleased to meet Crawley secondary school headteachers. I welcome the more than 10% increase in local school funding, but they told me that they would benefit from multi-year funding settlements so that they can better plan for the future. Can we have a statement on this from the Secretary of State for Education?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is a strong voice for his constituents, and he is right to raise this matter. We are all grateful for the superb contribution of teachers in our constituencies. He will be pleased to know that there are now 1.9 million more pupils in good or outstanding schools than in 2010, that the attainment gap has narrowed and continues to narrow, that there are over 34,000 new trainee teachers this year—over 2,600 more than last year—and that those from a disadvantaged background are more likely to go to university than ever before. We want to give schools and local authorities as much certainty about funding for future years as possible. The budgets for 2020-21 and beyond will be subject to the forthcoming spending review.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last week, the Leader of the House said that Timpson's review of exclusions would be published soon. I am just wondering what kind of soon she is referring to. Is it the kind of soon where your boss asks you for something and you say, "Yes, yes—I'll get on to that soon", or is it the kind of soon where your partner is asking you to do chores and you are like, "Yeah, yeah—I'll get on to that soon"?

Andrea Leadsom: It is not the latter—I know that one very well. First, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her absolute commitment to eradicating the appalling problem of young people getting into a life of serious crime, and particularly knife crime. She has been absolutely stalwart in her determination to see more done, and she is absolutely right in that. As I said last week, I cannot give her a firm date, but I can say that Timpson's review

is considering how schools use exclusion and how it affects all pupils, but particularly why some groups of children are more likely to be excluded. In particular, it will consider why there are differences in the rates among areas, schools and groups of pupils, given that the power that schools have to exclude and the framework in which they do so apply to all state-funded schools across England. The Government support headteachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted, but the Timpson review, when it comes forward—which will be as soon as possible—will consider the subject in more detail and should shed some useful light on it.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Last Saturday, I joined about 200 of my constituents who were protesting against the closure of Suggitts Lane level crossing in Cleethorpes. Network Rail is trying to railroad this closure through against the objections of local people when other safety measures could be introduced. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the accountability of organisations such as Network Rail?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a concerning constituency issue. He will know that we have launched a comprehensive review of our railways, to build on the success of privatisation and get the best from both public and private sectors. He might like to seek an Adjournment debate so that Transport Ministers can respond to his particular concerns directly.

Mr Speaker: The star of the show, Helen Jones.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. This morning on the radio, the Chancellor echoed the Prime Minister in saying that this House must decide not just what it does not want but what it does want. Yet next week's business is filled up with statutory instruments, many of which could be taken in Committee. Given that the Leader of the House is not only the spokesperson for the Government but a champion of the rights of the House, when will she make time for a series of indicative votes to allow the House to express its will on what it does want in negotiations with the EU?

Andrea Leadsom: I can assure the hon. Lady that I take seriously my responsibility to be the voice of Parliament in Government, and all the time I reflect the views that I hear in the Chamber. I am pleased to be able, for example, to give time for statutory instruments to be debated in the Chamber on request from the Opposition, and to give a great deal of time for general debates that have been requested by hon. and right hon. Members across the House. In response to her question about the business for next week, I am sure that she will appreciate that today the House is being invited to consider whether it wishes the Government to seek an extension to article 50. Until we have established an answer to that question, we cannot consider what are the next steps.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) is an authentic representative of the Scottish scouting movement, I believe.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. On Friday night I visited Fifth Clyde Broomhouse Scouts group in my constituency,

which kindly gave me this necktie. Can we have a statement from the Government encouraging people to join their local scout group? When the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, will she give a firm thank you to the volunteers who go out on a Friday night to invest in young lives?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman looks very fetching in his scout tie; it is fantastic to see. I absolutely join him in congratulating all those who volunteer their time to take part in scouting groups, which do so much for young people in our United Kingdom. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate so that all hon. Members can pay tribute to their local scouting groups.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I have a constituent who served in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles, and he is extremely scared that, although he has done nothing wrong, he will be dragged through a process to rake over the coals of events of decades ago. When can we have a debate on the imbalance between the treatment of people who served this country bravely in Northern Ireland and of the terrorists who dragged Northern Ireland through the troubles for decades, and when can we have a debate on how we can bring closure and fairness for all those who served this country bravely?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important issue. The Government recognise the terrible loss suffered by all those who lost loved ones during the troubles. We have said that the system needs to change to provide better outcomes for victims and survivors of the troubles, and to treat everyone fairly, including those who served in the armed forces and the police. I will take my hon. Friend's request back to the Department and seek their agreement to update the House further.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): May we have a statement from the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), on the outrageous decision by the Church of England to issue the official invitation to next year's Lambeth conference and explicitly forbid the same-sex spouses of bishops from attending, when the heterosexual spouses of bishops have been warmly invited? This is a totally unacceptable position for our established state Church to adopt, and this House needs to tell the Church we have had enough of it.

Andrea Leadsom: I was not aware of that situation, and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising it. If he would like to write to me, I will certainly raise it with my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman).

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Ten days ago, Travellers illegally occupied the Anmer Lodge site in my constituency, which has been cleared to provide 120 social housing units and much-needed retail and employment prospects. Hour after hour, tipper lorries turned up bringing contaminated waste on to the site. Last Thursday, the Travellers left, and they left behind a bill for hundreds of thousands of pounds to clear the contaminated waste, ahead of a High Court ruling on Friday. May we have a debate in Government time on

measures that can be taken to ensure that the private sector is enabled to clear sites when Travellers illegally occupy them?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises what sounds like an appalling situation in his constituency. He will be aware that the Government have done a great deal to try to deal with the problem of illegal fly-tipping and, in particular, of leaving the taxpayer with a huge bill to pick up. We have Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions on Thursday 28 March and I encourage him to raise the matter then.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Niloofer Begum is a severely frail 80-year-old suffering from end stage renal failure, hypothyroidism and dementia, and she depends on her granddaughter for 24-hour care. Despite this, the Home Office continues to seek her removal to Bangladesh. Will the Leader of the House find time for a Home Office debate on the removal of a wheelchair-bound 80-year-old lady to a country where she has no one to care for her?

Andrea Leadsom: I am truly sorry to hear about the case of the hon. Lady's constituent. I am sure she is doing everything she can to raise this directly with Home Office Ministers. If she would like to write to me following business questions, I can take it up on her behalf.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that the tech giants in this country have accumulated too much power, which means that the digital market is not serving the interests of start-ups that want to innovate in this space to bring more choice to consumers? May we have a debate about the role of the Competition and Markets Authority in the creation of a more stimulating and thriving digital economy?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to be championing greater progress in the digital economy. She is right to do that. As she may have heard, the Chancellor announced in the spring statement yesterday that he will examine proposals in the Furman review and in the "Unlocking digital competition" report. I look forward to hearing more about that.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): May we have an early debate on NATO and, in particular, on the work of those Members of this House and the other place who contribute to our country's foreign policy by their participation in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly?

Andrea Leadsom: I think all hon. Members would want to join the hon. Gentleman in praising NATO, the absolute core of our defence for many decades. We are incredibly grateful to all of those who work and serve in NATO and all those in Parliament who take part in all the different organisations that support NATO. I encourage him to seek a Westminster Hall debate or a Backbench debate so that all hon. Members can share their views.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): In the spring statement yesterday, the Chancellor announced a number of new housing infrastructure fund bids, which was very welcome, but there was no update on the progress of outstanding HIF bids, including the one for the City of York. May I

[Julian Sturdy]

ask the Leader of the House for a statement on the future of ongoing HIF bids, which are so important to cities such as York?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that building new houses is a clear national interest in the United Kingdom, and he will know that one of the top domestic priorities of this Government is to see more homes built for people. The spring statement yesterday was, of necessity, brief and did not go into details on the issues he is raising precisely because the comprehensive spending review will be later this year, as will the proper Budget. Nevertheless, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise these particular issues directly with a Minister.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Newford residents association in my constituency called my office this week to report 90 aggressive cold calls to elderly residents who have already registered for the Telephone Preference Service. May we have a debate in Government time on how we can tackle this antisocial and illegitimate business practice?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to raise that concerning issue. It can be frightening for elderly or vulnerable residents to receive cold calls from pushy people who are trying to scam them or sell them something. The Government have introduced significant measures to try to prevent such behaviour, but if she is seeing a rise in the number of such incidents, I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate and to raise the issue directly with Ministers.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time to welcome the Government's future high streets programme and the stronger towns fund? Does the Leader of the House agree that, as Britain's oldest recorded town and first Roman city, Colchester would be an ideal beneficiary of multimillion pound investment?

Andrea Leadsom: Nice try, but sadly my hon. Friend will appreciate that that is not a call for me, although I am certainly a big fan of Colchester and his support for it. I encourage him to seek his own bid for some of that £600 million; it is open to any town to compete for it.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): British Steel pensioners in Blaenau Gwent have received poor advice, high adviser charges and seen their families' fortunes put at risk. Being removed from the register and suffering financial penalties is insufficient to deter pension sharks. May we have a statement from the Treasury to promise new criminal charges for rogue financial advisers, so that they are properly held to account?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that issue, as it is worrying for people to receive cold calls that seek to remove their pension rights, or encourage them to invest in non-existent assets. That is an appalling scamming practice. The Government have already done a lot to improve people's access to information and to stop such practices, but I encourage the hon. Gentleman to seek an Adjournment debate and to raise his concerns directly with Ministers.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Over a month ago I started to engage directly with the Leader of the House, following engagement since November with the Tory Whips, who have been cynically running down the clock on helping refugee families. Those actions mean that people who should have rights will probably end up taking dangerous journeys from refugee camps across the desert with people traffickers, rather than simply flying. What has the Leader of the House done to get the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill into Committee, and to give children the same rights as adults? If she has done nothing, will she just say so and not waste time?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman mentions his private Member's Bill again, and I commend his commitment to helping the most vulnerable people around the world. He will have received my letter this week in response to his. In addition to what I have said in recent weeks, he will know that the Government have done a huge amount—particularly in the region but also here at home—to help refugees from countries such as Syria. We have expanded our resettlement commitments to provide for more than 23,000 refugees by 2020, and we have committed more than £2.7 billion of humanitarian aid to the Syrian conflict. We must ensure, however, that our focus is on supporting the most vulnerable people who need international protection, and on encouraging those fleeing persecution to seek help in the first safe country they reach, as that is the fastest route to safety.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Demelza House children's hospice provides outstanding end-of-life care to children in south-east London, yet only 20% of funds for children's hospices come from central Government. Although the NHS long-term plan provided a welcome boost to the children's hospice grant, it is still not enough to ensure that hospices are able to deliver their world-class services. May we have a debate in Government time about funding for children's hospices?

Andrea Leadsom: I pay tribute to all the fantastic work done by children's hospices across the United Kingdom. The Department of Health and Social Care is very aware of the issue of funding for children's hospices. Questions to that Department are on Tuesday 26 March and I encourage the hon. Lady to raise the issue directly then.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): The Co-op party's food justice campaign is highlighting the extraordinary situation here in the UK, the sixth-largest economy in the world, where some 8 million people still struggle to put food on the table and 500,000 people are using food banks. When might the Government find time for a debate on ending hunger in this country?

Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's point. Of course, it is the Government's clear goal to ensure that nobody needs to go hungry. He will appreciate that there are now 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty, which is a record low. It is the Government's policy to help more and more people into work, so they have the security of a pay packet to help them and their family to feed and take care of themselves. We now have 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty

and we have taken 4 million of the lowest paid out of paying any income tax altogether, all of which is helping people to meet their own needs and to be independent.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): North Lincolnshire Council has ended its core funding for North Lincolnshire citizens advice bureau. That means that the general advice sessions, which are very much valued locally, will cease. May we have a debate on the value of citizens advice bureaux and their partnership working with councils, which is crucial to their future?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is right: citizens advice bureaux do fantastic work across the country and I think we are all very grateful to them. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can raise his concerns directly with Ministers.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Ind): When can we have a debate to finally sort out the terrible way that women who were born in the '50s have been treated in relation to their pensions? I have lost count of the number of women in Dudley who left school at 15 or 16, started work straightaway and did hard work all their lives. Some had to take time off to bring up kids or care for relatives. Some have been bereaved. They have had no time to plan for these changes. Women like that have done their bit and it is high time the Government sorted this out.

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman. As we have made clear previously, the Conservatives in government committed over £1 billion to support those affected so that no one will see their pension age change by more than 18 months relative to the Pensions Act 1995 timetable. Those with the most significant changes have received at least seven years' notice. What I would point out to him is that the new state pension is more generous for many women. By 2030, over 3 million women stand to gain an average of £550 more per year as a result of the recent reforms.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Commercial radio is booming in terms of both ratings and revenue but, as a result of totally unnecessary deregulation of FM licence conditions, Global, which owns Capital, Heart and Smooth, is axing local breakfast and drive-time shows. This means that studios will close completely in 10 towns and cities from Kent to Kendal, and more than 100 presenters, producers, journalists, engineers and other staff face losing their jobs in these and other locations, including Nottingham. At a time when many people feel that their area is being left behind, their concerns ignored and their voices unheard, is it not time that we debated the loss of local news and the centralisation of our media in London?

Andrea Leadsom: I am genuinely very sorry to hear about the loss of local radio stations and local news. The hon. Lady raises a very important point. We do need to have a thriving local and regional media. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate, so that she can raise her concerns directly with Ministers.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Could we change the name of this session to "Potential Business of the House"? I have looked through the entirety of next week's business and cannot see another vote on the meaningful vote between now and Wednesday. If it is

the Government's intention not to bring a meaningful vote next week, why is it being trailed to the media today that it will be brought next week, and what is the necessity of paragraph (2) of today's motion if there is no intention to bring one next week?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I announce the business every Thursday, as usual. In the event that it is necessary to bring forward an emergency business statement, I will do so. I would have thought he would realise that, just because he has heard something trailed in the media, it does not necessarily make it true.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): With two of Scotland's most polluted roads in my constituency, I am acutely aware of the public health implications of breathing in toxic air. Yesterday, a study in *The Times* showed that air pollution now causes more deaths than smoking; smoking is avoidable but breathing in toxic air is not. In the light of that, can we please have a debate in the House on how all areas of Government across the UK can get to grips with this dangerous problem?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right that this is an incredibly concerning problem and it is something that the Government are taking very seriously. We are cleaning up our air by ending the sale of new conventional diesel and petrol cars and vans altogether by 2040. She will be aware that the Government have a £3.5 billion spending commitment to reduce roadside emissions. Air pollution has been reduced significantly since 2010. Emissions of toxic nitrogen oxides have fallen by 27% and are at their lowest level since records began. She will also be aware that we will be introducing the first environment Bill in over 20 years, which will establish a world-leading body that will hold Government to account for environmental outcomes in the future.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Under this Government, one in four school support staff and nearly one in three teaching assistants in Barnsley schools have been lost, their national body has been abolished and pay has been driven down. Can we have a debate in Government time on school support staff and when austerity will really end?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced his plans yesterday, if we do achieve a smooth transition out of the European Union, to significantly allow investments in some of our key public services, because of the achievements of our economy and all those who have worked so hard to minimise the damage done by the last Labour Government. I pay tribute to all those teaching support staff who do so much for all our children and young people. She will be aware that the core schools budget will rise to £43.5 billion next year—its highest ever level—and that overall per-pupil funding is being protected in real terms. As well as that, we are introducing a national funding formula to make sure that schools and pupils are fairly and consistently funded.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Organisations such as Best for Britain and People's Vote UK look, operate and sound a bit like political parties, and I believe, therefore, that they should be subject to

[Gareth Snell]

the tax and regulatory requirements of the United Kingdom. So imagine my surprise when my office started receiving these postcards, all postmarked from Guernsey, which, last time I checked, was a non-EU tax haven. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Cabinet Office Minister to make a statement on how the regulation of pseudo-political parties in this country operates, so that they are truly transparent?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point and he is absolutely right to do that. The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), is in the Chamber and will have heard his comments, but we also have Electoral Commission questions next Thursday week—28 March—and I encourage him to raise his question there.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The retrospective loan charge deadline is causing unbelievable stress to tens of thousands of people who thought that they were doing the right thing in respect of their tax affairs, some for up to 20 years. The all-party loan charge group has evidence that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs knows of up to six related suicides, yet yesterday, the chief executive of HMRC denied that. May we have an investigation into this and an urgent debate?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue. I also have constituents who have come to me with concerns about the loan charge and I am seeing the Minister responsible shortly to discuss it further with him. She will appreciate that the issue here is one of tax avoidance which HMRC has concluded was not legitimate tax avoidance. It is absolutely vital that we do everything we can to ensure that people are paying the right taxes in this country.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Last week, I asked the Leader of the House for a debate on Islamophobia, given the crisis that the Tory party finds itself in, and on the definition of Islamophobia from the all-party group on British Muslims. The Leader of the House somehow confused that with a Foreign Office issue, so I would like to give her a second opportunity to answer the question: when will this House have a debate on Islamophobia?

Andrea Leadsom: Islamophobia is appalling wherever it takes place, including in the United Kingdom. I must say that I was hurt to see my comments misrepresented last week; the hon. Lady had not made clear in her question whether or not she was referring to a global definition of Islamophobia.

International efforts to combat Islamophobia are led by the Prime Minister's special envoy on freedom of religion or belief, Lord Ahmed, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That is why I suggested that the hon. Lady seek an Adjournment debate involving the FCO. Of course, any form of Islamophobia in the UK would be dealt with swiftly by the Home Office or the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as appropriate.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): May we have a debate on the way in which police forces are funded, and the Government assumptions that underpin decisions on funding? For instance, council tax will contribute 1.9% of the funding for police forces in England, but 4.4% of the funding for those in Wales. This matter needs to be considered urgently. It cannot be right that local taxation in Wales is expected to shoulder a heavier burden to deal with UK-wide issues such as county lines which should be addressed by the central police grant.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very important point that is specific to Wales. As he will know, overall we have protected police funding since 2015 and next year there will be up to £970 million of extra investment in the policing system, but if he wants me to take up his specific point about Wales, perhaps he will write to me following business questions.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): May we have a debate, and Government-commissioned research, on the long-term impact of poverty, stress and mental ill health on children who are bereaved, and who, because their parents are not married, cannot benefit from the widowed parent's allowance?

Andrea Leadsom: As always, the hon. Lady has raised an incredibly important issue, in this case the mental health of young people. She has particular concerns about the impact of bereavement and the consequences for particular benefits. On the subject of mental health generally, however, she will appreciate that at the heart of the NHS long-term plan is the largest expansion of mental health services for a generation. That includes 24/7 mental health crisis care for adults, children and young people through NHS 111, giving them access to vital support when they need it. If the hon. Lady wishes to raise specific issues, I suggest that she seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise them directly with Ministers.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

As was mentioned earlier, on Wednesday the security staff who protect all of us on the parliamentary estate so diligently are set to go on strike in an increasingly bitter dispute over pay parity and the unfair dismissal of a colleague. It is concerning that the Public and Commercial Services Union has warned that staff are not prepared to put up with a culture of fear in the Palace of Westminster. Will the Leader of the House intervene as a matter of urgency, and seek to resolve this dire situation and end this culture of fear?

Andrea Leadsom: As I said in an earlier reply, the strike—which I deeply regret—is a matter for the House authorities. It is not a matter for me, as Leader of the House, and I am therefore not in a position to intervene as the hon. Gentleman suggests that I should. Nevertheless, as the representative of the House in the Government, I will always take away any concerns that are raised here and raise them myself with the appropriate authorities.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate in Government time on the proposed changes in IR35 tax regulations? The Conservative

party claims to be the party of entrepreneurs and small business, but those changes will severely hamper small entrepreneurs and businessmen such as my constituent Steven Smith, who will be stifled by the classing of contractors as company employees. This will ruin the livelihoods of thousands of people in financial services and other key industries. It is a sledgehammer to crack a nut. I should appreciate it very much if the Leader of the House would make representations to the Treasury to get the matter sorted out.

Andrea Leadsom: I am aware that many Members are concerned about this issue. I know that it is not absolutely the correct Department, but questions to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will take place on Tuesday 19 March. The hon. Gentleman might like to raise the matter then, because, at the business end, it would be important for BEIS to be aware of the concerns that his constituents are raising with him.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): May we have a debate on this Government's lack of respect for the devolution settlement? I have been unable to get answers on what the Barnett consequential for the £1.6 billion stronger towns fund will be, and it has emerged that Treasury officials are considering giving the funds straight to local authorities in Scotland, bypassing the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government. This is breaking the vow and breaking the rules. Will the Leader of the House explain why this Government want to ride roughshod over devolution?

Andrea Leadsom: It will not surprise the hon. Lady to learn that I completely disagree with her. The Government have enormously sought to show courtesy and respect for the devolution settlement and to collaborate closely with officials in the devolved Administrations to ensure that, apart from anything else, we take carefully into account their views and their preparations as we leave the European Union. We have Scotland questions on Wednesday 27 March, which would be the right place for her to raise her particular question.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for her response on 3 March to my question on WASPI women, and I apologise for being unable to email her about it last night. There were other things taking our attention. Yesterday, the Chancellor said that he was going to make "no further announcements" regarding WASPI women. Could the Leader of the House seek a statement on the specific questions affecting the WASPI women with regard to the court case and the information that is being given from the Department?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the Chancellor has just stepped into the Chamber and is now in his place. He will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I am afraid that I cannot give any further information on this subject, but if he wishes to write to me, I will take the matter up with the Chancellor.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Leader of the House will know that it is becoming more and more difficult for our constituents to get appointments with GPs. Tomorrow, I have a meeting at

the Faith House surgery on Beverley Road in Hull North, which is under threat of closure. May we please have a debate in Government time about what more can be done to adopt a joined-up approach to the funding, training, recruitment and retention of GPs, to take the pressure off our A&E departments and to ensure that areas that are under threat of losing their GP practices are prioritised for any additional funding?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the importance of GPs to all our constituents. We all rely heavily on them, and their workload has grown significantly in the recent past. She will be aware that the Government have provided an extra £33.9 billion in cash terms for the NHS by 2023-24. That will make a significant difference, and the profound changes proposed in the NHS long-term plan will mean that more people than ever before will be able to access their GP in a timely fashion.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time on electronic voting? Since my colleagues and I were elected in 2015, this House has spent 205 hours—eight and a half full days, or five and a half working weeks—just on voting, in smelly, sweaty, stuffy voting Lobbies. This is wasting time and thwarting democracy.

Andrea Leadsom: I am very sorry if the hon. Lady's Lobby is smelly and sweaty. I can assure her that the Government's Lobby is totally charming and full of courtesy and respect. Perhaps she should join us; she might enjoy the experience. I do take her point seriously; it has been raised on a number of occasions by her hon. Friends. As I have said before, were the Procedure Committee to choose to conduct an inquiry into electronic voting and to take views on it from across the House, I would of course consider its recommendations very carefully.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Last week, the world celebrated International Women's Day. In this House, we recognised the challenges faced by women the world over. Women still face discrimination, harassment and violence simply for being women. Women from marginalised religious or belief communities have it even worse: they suffer because they are the wrong woman, and also because they belong to the so-called wrong faith. For example, the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan has found that at least 1,000 girls from Hindu and Christian families are kidnapped and forced into marriage every year. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this matter?

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, the hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. He is a strong voice on these issues. We are continuing to tackle forced marriage at home and overseas. We criminalised forced marriage in England and Wales in 2014, we have introduced lifelong anonymity for victims and we are consulting on a mandatory reporting duty. Internationally, we have scrapped loans for repatriation costs for the victims of forced marriage who are helped to return to the UK and, through our flagship programme, 4.8 million people around the world have participated in initiatives designed to change attitudes and practices related to girls' rights.

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

The hon. Gentleman might like to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can take up these issues directly with Ministers.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Can we have a statement on contractor liability through the Government's energy company obligation scheme—the ECO? My constituent Hilary Moore has had her home rendered unliveable following work that was supposed to make it warmer by fitting Kingspan insulation, but she cannot find out whom to raise a complaint with due to the Government's blind auction scheme. Is it not time for a clear redress process for people who are so badly let down?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman rightly raises an important matter for one of his constituents. We have Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions on Tuesday 19 March, so I encourage him to raise the matter directly with Ministers then.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): There are moves by the White House to remove, as part of any future trade deal, the rules that limit what American drug companies can charge NHS services across the UK, which would allow big health corporations to bid for control of large parts of our NHS. Can we have a statement setting out the Government's commitment to rejecting categorically such an attack on our NHS?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will know that this Government are absolutely committed to the NHS being free at the point of delivery. That has always been the case. The NHS received its biggest-ever investment following the Government's latest announcement of billions of pounds more funding. We have Health and Social Care questions on Tuesday 26 March, so she may like to raise the matter directly with Ministers then.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): A week ago today, Ayub Hassan, who was 17 years old, lost his life after being brutally stabbed in the street in West Kensington. His death has traumatised his family and the community in White City in which he lived, and a 15-year-old boy has been charged with his murder. Tackling the scourge of knife crime across our country is both urgent and complex, and it will not be resolved by the Chancellor handing back a fraction of the money that has been taken from the police. When will the Government bring forward a comprehensive and adequate response to knife crime?

Andrea Leadsom: The death of any young person is tragic, and for it to happen through such horrendous and violent means is totally unacceptable. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor provided an extra £100 million in his spring statement yesterday for urgent action to be taken by police and crime commissioners—a specific intervention to help the situation now. The Government have an enormous range of different interventions to try to tackle the bigger problem of young people getting into gang membership and a life of crime, including £970 million of extra investment in the policing system next year, the serious violence strategy, and the establishment of a

serious violence taskforce. We are also bringing through the Offensive Weapons Bill to make it harder for young people to get into a life of a crime, and we are investing significant sums in local community initiatives to try to get young people away from the attraction of joining gangs and carrying knives. The Government are committed to tackling the problem at every level.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am sure that the Leader of the House will join me in congratulating Lyndsey Coleman of the Y Sort It youth group in West Dunbartonshire. Last night, she was a finalist in the Scottish youth worker of the year award while the Y Sort It management board won the youth participation award for the whole of Scotland. Does the Leader of the House not think that it is time for a debate in Government time to discuss the value of investing in community youth work across the entire United Kingdom?

Andrea Leadsom: I join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating his constituent on their award; it is always great to hear about the success of youth workers. We recently had a debate in which all Members were able to congratulate the work done by community groups, volunteers and youth workers, but I will certainly take away his request for further such discussions.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The Leader of the House has said that next Friday will be allocated for private Members' Bills, but this is a two-year parliamentary Session and, so far, we have had only 10 sitting Fridays. We would expect seven a year, so we are four short. When will she table a motion for the extra sitting Fridays, as required?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will know that these matters are decided in Standing Orders, and the Government have certainly complied with the Standing Order requirements for private Members' Bills. I am proud of this Government's record in which, since 2010, more than 50 private Members' Bills have received Royal Assent. This Friday we will have the opportunity to debate Lords amendments to the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the remaining stages of the Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton). I wish all those Bills well for tomorrow, and the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) will know that the Government have complied with the requirement for private Members' Bills.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I feel sorry for the Leader of the House has been dealt by the Prime Minister's incompetence, causing her to pad out the business for next week. Perhaps I can be helpful in suggesting a debate, perhaps between the motions on flags and Select Committee appointments, on how this Government's policies, including on the benefits freeze and the two-child policy, are impoverishing the people of these isles.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have some very serious statutory instruments to consider next week, which is why I have put them on the Order Paper. It is Work and Pensions questions on Monday 18 March, and I suggest he raises his specific concerns then.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My constituent invested her £60,000 life savings in London Capital & Finance and had put £20,000 in a similar company called Blackmoor, which markets individual savings accounts with 7% interest, using a third party that took 25% commission, but the small print said they were not ISAs but investment bonds. LCF went into administration earlier this year after the Financial Conduct Authority ordered the sale of the bonds to stop, but investors' money was lent to people with a connection to LCF, including its founder. Can we have a debate on this scandalous and fraudulent issue?

Andrea Leadsom: I had heard of this appalling collapse, and the hon. Gentleman is right to raise it. There will be people who have really suffered financially as a result of this. I suggest that he seeks an Adjournment debate so he can raise it directly with Ministers.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My constituent moved here from France 15 years ago—back to her Scottish mother—and she has had three children born in Scotland, yet the DWP has decided that she does not have a right to reside. It also rejected her universal credit claim, which means she has now lost her child tax credits. With no housing benefit, she is at risk of eviction from her house and she is relying on family support to survive. She has now applied for UK citizenship in a last-gasp effort to get the right to reside here. How can her case be expedited, and when will the Government review their pernicious immigration rules associated with universal credit?

Andrea Leadsom: I am genuinely sorry to hear about the hon. Gentleman's constituency case. We have Work and Pensions questions on Monday, and I suggest that he raises it directly with Ministers then. He will appreciate that universal credit replaces an old system that trapped people on benefits. Universal credit is a much better, modern benefit based on the principles that work should always pay and that those in need of support should receive it.

Points of Order

12.4 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Secretary of State for International Trade inadvertently misrepresented my views and those of the Liberal Democrats during his winding-up speech in yesterday's debate on our withdrawal from the European Union when he said:

“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.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 449.]

That is a gross misrepresentation of what I said. I said:

“The will of the people is a fig leaf for Members in this House to pursue their own Brexit agenda... The Brexit camp cannot agree what the will of the people is.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 428.]

I continue to say that more than 50% of people in this country now want to stay in the European Union—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must resume her seat. Forgive me; I am trying, as I always do, to accommodate the House. Can I politely appeal to her to have some regard for the sensibilities of the House and the desire of colleagues to progress business? I am sorry if she is disquieted by something that someone said about her that misrepresented her views, and I accept that that is irksome to her, but it does not threaten the future of her Bath constituency. We know her views; she expresses them with force and will have other opportunities to do so. Can we please leave it there, take a wider view of the mission of the House today and not have a lengthy exchange on points of order? I have tried to be extremely accommodating to her, but we must let it rest there.

Wera Hobhouse *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, no; I am not debating it with the hon. Lady. I have given a ruling.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will know that the independent inquiry into child sex abuse is taking evidence. Yesterday, a sitting Member of the House of Lords—a legislator in the other place—was giving evidence in which they publicly stated under oath that they knew that a former Member of this House had conducted child sex abuse. Indeed, they contradicted themselves, because, on 4 June 2018, they publicly stated that such allegations were based on “scurrilous hearsay” and “tittle-tattle”.

I am sure that you will appreciate, Mr Speaker, that it places every single Member of this House in a difficult position when former Members who are also Privy Counsellors seek not to be unambiguous with the truth. We were not assisted either when the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—I advised them that I would be mentioning them—yesterday stated that the money spent on such inquiries had been “spaffed up the wall” and was a waste of public investment. In this matter of a sitting Privy Counsellor and legislator in the other place, can you advise the House, Mr Speaker,

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

that the House of Lords should conduct itself better? If it does not, how might the situation at the other end of the corridor be rectified?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He has registered his consternation, and possibly that of others, at the conduct he has described, but I have no responsibility for what is said in the other place. In so far as he is inquiring about redress or recourse, the hon. Gentleman, who is a parliamentarian now of noted adroitness and dexterity, has found his own salvation by expressing himself with his customary force today.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, during Cabinet Office questions, I asked about a phone conference that had taken place between the Cabinet Office and regional returning officers at which the preparations for the European Parliament elections had been discussed. The Minister without Portfolio responded, saying it was “simply not true”. In today’s *Guardian*, however, the Electoral Commission is reported as saying that discussions have been taking place and that this call did happen. I am seeking your guidance, Mr Speaker, on how the right hon. Gentleman might have an opportunity to correct the record, should he have inadvertently misled the House.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and her characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intention to raise it. The right hon. Gentleman is in his place and approached me to acknowledge the likelihood of this matter being raised and to indicate a readiness to respond. Let us hear from the Minister.

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I will not keep the House long. I only want to say that the Government have not asked anyone to start contingency planning for the European Parliament elections. That is our position in public and in private.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is recorded in column 391 of yesterday’s *Official Report* that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said that the Government would

“start formal engagement with the Irish Government about...decision making”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 391]

in Northern Ireland. As you will be aware, that would be a complete breach of the terms of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, indeed, the Belfast agreement. Do you believe that the Secretary of State misspoke, or

has he a duty to come to the House, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and announce a new policy shift, if that is the case?

Mr Speaker: I had no advance notice of this matter and, in truth, I must confess that I am unsighted on it. Rather than dissemble, which would be wrong, or to seek to give the hon. Gentleman the impression that I have an authoritative view to offer, I think it best simply to say that if a Minister has a new policy to announce, they should announce it in the House. If some incorrect impression has been given, of a kind that either flummoxes or irks the hon. Gentleman or others, I feel sure that a sensitive Minister will wish to put the record straight, sooner rather than later.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During business questions, the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) raised the issue of the avalanche of statutory instruments going through Parliament, particularly from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the massive overstretch next week, both on the Committee corridor and in the Chamber. It might be easier to handle the volume if we had adequate notice, but the times for the Delegated Legislation Committees keep being chopped and changed, and more Committees are added at the very last minute, making it very difficult for those of us responsible for filling them, in all parties, to do so in time for the Committee of Selection. What options are open to us to ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to get his act together and provide adequate time and notice for the scrutiny of these statutory instruments?

Mr Speaker: I think that it is always very much in the interests of the House that we have maximum notice and minimum confusion. The hon. Gentleman, in his capacity as a Member of Parliament and as his party’s Chief Whip, has registered his dissatisfaction, which will have been heard on the Treasury Bench. I trust that it will be heeded, both in order to pacify the hon. Gentleman and, if he will forgive me for saying so, for the wider convenience of the House.

I am looking for somebody who I thought might be planning to raise a point of order, but the hon. Member in question does not appear to be here at this time. We will therefore now proceed with business.

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 European Union not later than 5.00pm; 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.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

UK's Withdrawal from the European Union

12.12 pm

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected amendment (h), in the name of the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), and amendment (i), in the name of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), to which a manuscript amendment—

“Line 2, at beginning insert ‘for a period ending on 30 June 2019’”—

has been submitted, in the name of the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), which I have selected; it will be distributed shortly. I have selected amendment (e), in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and amendment (j)—J for Jemima—in the name of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). If amendment (h) were to be agreed to, amendments (i) and (e) would fall. If amendment (i) were to be agreed to, amendment (e) would fall.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I express some disappointment that you have chosen not to select amendment (b), which has the support of 127 Members of the House, including the entire Democratic Unionist party, 13 Labour Members and one independent to boot, the rest being Conservative Members. It therefore has far more signatories than any other amendment on the Order Paper, and the support of three different parties.

Mr Speaker, when you have given guidance on how you select amendments—we accept that the final decision is yours; you are the referee—you have often said that you look at whether the House wants to decide a question, then you look at the number of colleagues who have signed an amendment, and then you look at the breadth. Amendment (b) has the support of 127 Members, that support is cross-party and the House clearly wants to decide on it. May I therefore ask for clarification?

You made a decision, Sir, and we must abide by it. But you have selected amendment (h), to

“leave out from ‘House’ to end and add ‘instructs the Prime Minister to request an extension to the Article 50 period at the European Council in March 2019 sufficient for the purposes of legislating for and conducting a public vote’.”

We thought that our amendment was even clearer, but in effect amendment (h) does represent a vote in this House this evening, in principle, on whether or not to have a second referendum. Is that interpretation correct?

Mr Speaker: I am very happy to respond to the right hon. Gentleman. First, let me thank him for his courtesy in raising the matter in the way he has done. Secondly, what I say to the right hon. Gentleman, whom, as I reminded him recently, I first came to know 35 years and six months ago, is that it is not uncommon for a Member of the House to be mightily pleased when his or her amendment is selected, and notably displeased when it is not.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman, who is an extremely experienced Member of the House, and whom I greatly respect, will understand when I say that Members do have to take the rough with the smooth. He was

much exercised yesterday about the prospect of an amendment dear to him being able to be voted upon by the House. I selected that amendment, and although there was scope for different interpretations as to whether it conflicted and was incompatible with the verdict on an earlier amendment, I exercised my discretion and allowed it to be put to the House so that the House's will could be tested. That brought a smile to the face of the right hon. Gentleman. Today he is disappointed that the amendment that he supports has not been chosen.

The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly right to say that numbers are a factor, and he simply repeats what is a matter of fact: the range of parties from which the amendment's signatories are drawn. The Chair has to make a judgment on a variety of criteria. Numbers are not the only factor; breadth of support is a factor. This place works on the assumption that the Chair does his or her best to facilitate debate and allow the House to speak. I have tried to make a fair judgment, with a range of different points being canvassed and the opportunity for the House to decide upon them.

Finally, I say to the right hon. Gentleman—I do so with the utmost courtesy, as he has treated me in the same way—that, in respect of his last point, it is not for the Chair to seek to interpret what the purpose or effect of a particular amendment is. I am not, if I may put it this way, going to put a spin on the matter. The hon. Member for Totnes can speak to her amendment and others can make their own assessment. Ultimately, if those matters are put to a vote, the House will decide. I have done, I am doing and I will always do my best to be fair to the miscellany of different points of view represented in this House. I think that we should leave it there for now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Resume your seats. Order. I have given a ruling on the matter which seems to me to be entirely reasonable. The right hon. Gentleman made it clear that although he was seeking clarification he was not presuming to argue the toss with the Chair, and I think it reasonable in the circumstances, with very significant numbers of Members wishing to speak in the debate, that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), should be called to move the motion that stands in his name.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman is not going to argue the toss, but I am very happy to hear his point of order briefly if he wishes to raise it.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: There might be some concern, Mr Speaker, that the selection of amendments does not reflect the will of the House, because the will of the House cannot be expressed on an amendment, as you have said previously, until there has been a vote on that amendment. Therefore, given that amendment (b) expresses different matters that you have chosen not to select, what are we to conclude from your own views on these matters?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not to conclude anything in respect of my views; the hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of this House and what he can conclude from the selection is that key propositions will be put to the House. If people agree with those propositions they will presumably vote in support of those amendments, and if they disagree with those propositions they will presumably vote against those amendments. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying so, I think that point is pretty clear.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Now that there has been clarity on which amendments have been selected, I am somewhat concerned about amendment (h), because it does seem to imply a certain heavy cost to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in having to fund all this. Can we have some figures associated with what the cost of conducting a public vote would be? I simply ask for clarity on that matter.

Mr Speaker: That is not a matter for me. The reality is that that amendment is perfectly orderly. If the hon. Lady disapproves of that amendment, and, more specifically and narrowly, if she wishes to ascertain further and better particulars either about the meaning of the amendment in terms of words or in terms of the mindset of the mover, that is a matter that will be extracted in the course of debate.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I welcome your selection today, because although I was disappointed that amendment (b), which I did not put my name to, was not selected, I am delighted that you have selected an amendment that will allow this House for the first time to vote on whether it supports a second referendum or not. So I thank you, Mr Speaker, for that. Nobody in this House should be under any illusion—this vote today on amendment (h) is about saying whether we do or do not support a second referendum, and I urge the House to oppose a second referendum.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the whole House is immensely obliged to the right hon. Lady for offering it her opinion on what the meaning or implications might be. If she feels better as a result then I am deeply grateful to the right hon. Lady, but it is purely her view; it does not mean anything more than anybody else's view—or indeed, for that matter, anything less.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think it would be helpful to have some clarification, because “Erskine May” says that selection is made by the Chair

“in such a way as to bring out the salient points of criticism, to prevent repetition and overlapping....and where several amendments deal with the same point, to choose the more effective and the better drafted.”

I understand that your predecessor gave a memorandum to the Select Committee on Procedure in 1966-67 on how amendments were selected, and I wondered if it might be helpful if you were to update your advice so that in future we would be clearer as to how these decisions are made.

Mr Speaker: I do not think there has been any notable complaint of ambiguity thus far. I confess, I say to colleagues and those attendant to our proceedings, that I have been accused of many things over the years,

but ambiguity and unspecificity and lack of clarity in saying what I mean has not been one of them. If the hon. Gentleman thinks I need to speak a little more clearly and to enunciate more satisfactorily I am always happy to benefit from his wise counsel in these matters; however, as far as procedure is concerned I am comfortable that a perfectly proper decision has been made after due reflection—considerable reflection—this morning and consultation with my professional advisers. The hon. Gentleman's view as to which amendment is better worded or likely to be more effective is a view, and I treat it with respect, but I do not think it is definitive so far as the choice today is concerned. If more widely he thinks that a manual on this matter for the future would be of use, that is a matter I will be happy to discuss with him over a cup, or mug, of traditional tea.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As a point of detail and to contextualise the situation, I am interested as a relatively junior Member of this House to understand further how these decisions are made. There are, according to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), 127 Members who have signed amendment (b), whereas a quick count shows that there are fewer names between all the other amendments tabled, and many are repetitions. How, Mr Speaker, do we determine what represents the will of the House when more Members have signed one unselected amendment than all the others?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but I do not think there is an ambiguity on this matter. First, I have already made the point, which I think she heard me make, that numbers are a factor but they are not the only factor: breadth is important, too. I have selected an amendment on this subject to which there is breadth, and that seems to me to be a valid choice. So far as the wider policy position is concerned, as the hon. Lady will be well aware that her own party—the Government she supports—has a clear view on this matter. I think it is evident that she shares that view, and if she disapproves of the amendment she will be able to register her view, quite possibly in the debate, but if it is put to the House, in the Division Lobby. If it were not put to the House, she would in any case not be disquieted. I think the position is clear.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I welcome your selection of amendment (i), which the whole House will be under no illusion is in fact a disguised amendment aimed at securing a second referendum. May I seek your guidance on this one point, Mr Speaker? The amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), which you have not selected, has twice as many signatures, is cross-party and is also very clear in its intent, so in relation to the memorandum that your predecessor submitted in times past, which my hon. Friend referred to, will you update the House on the guidance and the basis on which selections are made?

Mr Speaker: I have already explained those matters. I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known well for many years, but I think he is misleading himself and I would not want him to be

afflicted by that curse. I think when he refers to the failed—as in non-selected—amendment of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) he is referring to the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley). That is quite important—Somerset and Derbyshire are quite a long way apart from each other, but there you go.

I have already explained the basis on which the Chair tries to make a judgment to facilitate the key issues being debated in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman might not like my answer, but that is my honest answer, which I would defend to this House and indeed to the world. More widely I say to the hon. Gentleman, who is an extremely assiduous Member, that I am not sure the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who is a great gentleman in this House, will take particularly kindly to his characterisation of amendment (i). I very much doubt that the right hon. Gentleman would accept that characterisation, so it is the hon. Gentleman's opinion. If he is called to speak in the debate he will have an opportunity to express his opinion, and I hope that will satisfy him, at least for now.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand from the Vote Office that one of the amendments—I believe it is amendment (i)—has subsequently been amended from what is on the list of manuscript amendments currently available at the Vote Office, and that there is an intention to distribute the revised amendment in due course. Can you confirm whether that is correct?

Mr Speaker: I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, but I am not quite sure at what point in the proceedings he graced us with his presence. It is a great pleasure to welcome him—[*Interruption.*] If he is signalling that he was in the Chamber at the time I referred to the selection of amendments, he will have heard what I said on that matter, and therefore it requires no repetition. If he was not here, I can refer back to what I said when I made the announcement of the selection, about which he is most welcome to consult colleagues. I have just heard one right hon. Member say, “Well, the selection has already been announced”, and that Member was a little quizzical as to why the hon. Gentleman is rather belatedly raising the matter. I have already announced the selection. I said that an amendment to an amendment had been submitted and that copies thereof would shortly be distributed. I hope that that is now clear and satisfactory to him. The fact that he has broken out in into a smile warms the cockles of my heart and no doubt the cockles of other parliamentary hearts to boot.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the assistance of the House, given that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Member for Meridian chose not to press her amendment but other colleagues chose to do so, can you advise the House as to what would happen at the end of proceedings were proposers of amendments who are called to speak to choose not to press their amendments? Who would be entitled to press an amendment if the proposer chose not to do so?

Mr Speaker: The convention, I think, would be that another signatory to the amendment would be entitled to test the will of the House. I do not wish to be unkind

to the hon. Gentleman, who is a doughty parliamentarian, but I think the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) might be getting a little fed up with people referring to her constituency as “Meridian”. I say to the hon. Gentleman that it is a place called “Meriden”, which is in the west midlands. It has nothing to do with “Meridian”. The right hon. Lady did not wish to submit her amendment to a Division of the House, but, as I advised her, other key signatories to it did wish to do so. I therefore allowed it to be put to the House and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, that amendment was passed. The general principle is that someone who has tabled or co-tabled such an amendment would be presumed to have a right to test the will of the House. I hope that is helpful.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I just get clarification on that? My understanding is that once the amendment is accepted by you, it is the property not of the signatories but of the House. Therefore any Member, not just those who have signed it, could force a Division.

Mr Speaker: I think that is true in relation to Orders of the Day. As far as today is concerned, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman, who is very experienced in these matters, will be satisfied with the explanation—or, indeed, description of circumstance—that I have offered to the House. It does seem to me that it is not something that need vex us any further today. It is quite clear that if somebody has an amendment and wishes to put it to the vote, it can be put to the vote. If the lead sponsor does not wish to do that but others do, it can be put to the vote. I hope that that is helpful to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House.

Now, out of respect for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, I invite him to open the debate and to move the motion.

12.33 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I beg to move,

That this House:

(1) notes the resolutions of the House of 12 and 13 March, and accordingly agrees that 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 that any extension beyond 30 June 2019 would require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May 2019.

This motion arises because last night this House voted to reject the UK leaving the EU without a deal. So, in line with the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and in line then with

[Mr David Lidington]

the motion that this House subsequently passed last Thursday, the House today must consider the issue of extending article 50.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but before I do so I want to say to hon. Members on both sides of the House that my intention is to set out, first, the Government's case for the motion that we have tabled today and the nature of the decision that we believe faces all of us, as Members of this House. I will then come on to address the various amendments that you have selected for debate today, Mr Speaker. I hope that colleagues will therefore contain any impatience, as I will come on to speak about the amendments, but I want to set out the Government's case first.

Ian Murray: The Minister mentioned today's motion, so I wonder whether early in his remarks he could clear up the confusion about paragraph (2) of the motion. It suggests that "the"—not "an"—EU withdrawal agreement and political declaration currently on the table—the only one on the table—will have to be voted on again by 20 March. Will he be bringing meaningful vote 3 forward before 20 March?

Mr Lidington: I hope that once I am able to make a little progress beyond my introductory paragraph, I will be able to provide the hon. Gentleman and others with an explanation of the different elements of the Government's motion.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): This intervention provides an early opportunity for the Minister, in setting out the Government's case, to clarify something for us. He will know that yesterday a Cabinet Minister, from that Dispatch Box, basically said that more powers would be given to Dublin to be exercised over Northern Ireland. The Minister for the Cabinet Office will know how insulting that is to Members who sit on this Bench. He will also know that it is the Members who sit on this Bench who keep his party in power. Would he now care to clarify that the Secretary of State involved misspoke from that Dispatch Box and that there will be no involvement in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland and its governance?

Mr Lidington: I wish to say two things to the hon. Gentleman in response. First, the Government's position has been absolutely consistent on this, from the Prime Minister down: we stand by every aspect of the three-stranded process embodied in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and the peace-building process in Northern Ireland. I can put on the record that there are absolutely no plans at all to transfer additional powers or rights to the Government of Ireland. There are certain rights of consultation that flow from the three-stranded process, and those, clearly, we need to observe. On the specific comments that the hon. Gentleman attributed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he will recall that I was not in my place yesterday, because I was attending a family funeral. However, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will hear of his intervention. I will make sure that he does, so that he consider whether he needs to make any further comment on that subject.

Mr Francois *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way once more and then I really do want to proceed with the substance of the debate.

Mr Francois: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, as he can help the House here. I am not arguing with the referee—I have accepted the referee's decision. We now have amendment (h) before us and it seeks a vote, in principle, on whether or not to have a second referendum, because it calls for the time to legislate for it and for it to take place. So it is clear what the amendment is asking for. That being the case, as it has been the Government's long-standing policy to oppose a second referendum, will my right hon. Friend confirm now at the Dispatch Box that the Government will oppose amendment (h) and will whip their MPs accordingly? And Ministers!

Mr Lidington: As I indicated earlier, I plan to address amendment (h) later in my speech, along with the other amendments that you have selected, Mr Speaker. I hope it will provide some reassurance to my right hon. Friend if I say that the Government's collectively agreed policy as regards a second referendum has not changed.

I should be clear that seeking an extension to article 50 is not something that the Government ever wanted to have to do. We believe that we negotiated a good deal for this country, and one that also respected the result of the referendum and would have allowed the United Kingdom to leave the European Union on 29 March this year. By rejecting that deal, the decisions of the House have brought us to this point today. It is important for all Members, from whichever political party they come, to acknowledge that the path ahead and the choices that confront us as a House are far from straightforward. We need to decide how long an extension to propose and we need to put that proposal to the European Council before it meets next week, in order to seek agreement from the 27 member states.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make some progress.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said to the House last night, this situation means facing up to some difficult choices. In particular, it means understanding the interaction of the article 50 process with the European Parliament elections that are scheduled for May this year, which is why this morning the Government published a short factual document that explains the parameters of any extension, and why the motion tabled for today's debate is a stark one—basically, we have two options before us.

Neil Gray: I am sure the Minister will be aware that this morning Donald Tusk tweeted:

"During my consultations ahead of"

the European Council to which the Minister just referred "I will appeal to the EU27 to be open to a long extension if the UK finds it necessary to rethink its #Brexit strategy and build consensus around it."

What is the Minister's reaction to that? The SNP is clear that that long extension is definitely required.

Mr Lidington: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I intend to make reference to President Tusk's comments later.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that I will not support the motion this evening. What message does he think it would send to those we represent if, nearly three years after voting to leave the European Union, we held elections to the European Parliament?

Mr Lidington: I think that a great many people would feel that that act set aside the decision they took in a democratic referendum three years ago. That was part of the case that Government Members put to the House in advocating endorsement of the deal which, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) said earlier, is the only one currently on the table.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise if the Minister is going to answer this point later. The Government motion talks about an extension till 30 June to allow the progression of legislation, but the letter exchanged between Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker says that we would have to be out by 22 May in order not to trigger the obligation to take part in European elections. Will the Minister please explain the difference in those dates?

Mr Lidington: It is a perfectly serious question, but I appeal again for patience from Members, because I want to set out in detail the reasons for the Government's choice of motion and the nature of the choice before the House.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) *rose—*

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) *rose—*

Mr Lidington: I shall give way one last time to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins); then I shall make progress.

Toby Perkins: In terms of what people were expecting during the referendum, the Minister will be aware that the Vote Leave campaign made it clear that leaving the EU would be “a careful change” and that we would not leave until our future relationship was resolved. Even now, the Vote Leave website says:

“There is no need to rush. We must take our time and get it right.”

Did not people who voted leave absolutely understand that we would take our time to get it right before we made any rash decisions?

Mr Lidington: With all respect to the hon. Gentleman, I am perhaps responsible for many things as a member of the Government, but I suspect not one of my right hon. and hon. Friends would want me to assert responsibility for what the Vote Leave campaign has said at any stage in the past or the present.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose—*

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Lidington: I will give way to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee; then I do want to make progress.

Sir William Cash: I am most grateful. In relation to this pamphlet, or whatever it is my right hon. Friend is producing today, will he confirm now, on the Floor of the House, that the fact that exit day may or may not be extended does not affect the fact that under section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which received Royal Assent on 26 June last year, the repeal of the European Communities Act takes effect, notwithstanding any extension of time, as prescribed by the 2018 Act?

Mr Lidington: The Government have given a commitment that in the event of the House voting in favour of extension and—this is not a given—the European Council agreeing to an extension, we will bring forward the necessary legislation, in line with the expressed wishes of the House.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman said a few moments ago that there is just one deal available, but that is not the full picture. The other deal available is the deal that is enjoyed by the 27 other members of the European Union, and that is full membership. Article 50 could be revoked and we could go back to that. Full membership is the best deal that anybody can have. This entire Parliament knows that it is the best deal, so when he talks of deals, will the Minister please remember that the best deal is still available? Up until 29 March we can revoke article 50 and cancel the Prime Minister's letter, and this will be over in an afternoon.

Mr Lidington: As a matter of law, the hon. Gentleman is correct. Following the judgment of the European Court it is clear that the United Kingdom does have the power unilaterally to revoke its article 50 notification before exit day. It is not a legal argument but a political one as to whether it can possibly be right for this House to determine to set aside a decision that was taken democratically in the referendum in 2016, which produced a higher turnout than any recent general election and which at the time almost every political party said we would treat as decisive. It is a political judgment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Lidington: No, I am not going to give way again for the moment.

As I said, the motion that the Government have tabled for today's debate is a start. We basically have two options. First, if the House has approved a meaningful vote by 20 March and agreed a timetable for the EU withdrawal agreement Bill, we can expect the European Union to agree to a short technical extension to allow the necessary legislation to be carried through. If for whatever reason that proves not to be possible, we would be faced with the prospect of choosing only a long extension, during which the House would need to face up to the choices in front of it and the consequences of the decisions it has taken.

The Government recognise that the House would require time to consider the potential ways forward in such a scenario, so I can confirm today that in such a scenario the Government, having consulted the usual channels at that time, would facilitate a process in the two weeks after the March European Council to allow

[Mr Lidington]

the House to seek a majority on the way forward. We should be clear about the consequences if that were to happen. If we are in the world of a longer extension so that this House can come to a decision, we will be required, as a condition, to hold European parliamentary elections in May. As the note on this issue published by the Government today sets out, we would need to begin to prepare for those elections in early April. In other words, we either deliver on the result of the referendum, giving people and businesses throughout the country the certainty that they are calling for, and move on as a nation, or we enter into a sustained period of uncertainty, during which time the Government would work with this House to find a way through, but which I fear would do real damage to the public's faith in politics and trust in our democracy.

Charlie Elphicke: On the possibility of having to conduct European elections if the extension went past 23 May, can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the Cabinet Office is prepared for that? On what date would such elections take place and how much would it cost?

Mr Lidington: I do not have the figures on cost to hand; they would be a matter of record available on the Electoral Commission's website. However, we would have to make those elections possible—not something that the Government wishes to do at all—and that would require secondary legislation to be laid before the House in mid-April.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): For the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Minister has given, it is obvious that we have to try to get through a deal that the Attorney General can sign off. I am not asking the Minister to give a detailed legal opinion, but will he note that the unilateral declaration, which we have now lodged, gives us an opportunity to beef up the declaration and to make it clear that we do have a unilateral right of exit from the backstop? If we could do that, I am sure that we could reassure colleagues, particularly those in the Democratic Unionist party, and make progress.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend will understand that it would be wrong of me to comment upon a legal opinion by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General, but I am sure that he and the other Law Officers will take note of my right hon. Friend's point.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I think my right hon. Friend agrees with me that no Government in the 28 member states wishes to have a British election to the European Parliament in the course of any process, but the obligation that he refers to is, I think, based on the treaty. It would take a comparatively minor amendment to the treaty to make the obligation not apply to a country that has submitted an article 50 application. I see no reason at all why rapid unanimity could not be achieved in the Council of Ministers to agree to that, so that the treaty could be amended and the problem that he is warning us of easily averted.

Mr Lidington: I am second to none in my admiration and acknowledgment of my right hon. and learned Friend's experience in this House, but I say to him,

having served six years as Minister for Europe, that there is no such thing as a simple and easy change to the EU treaties. I was present in the United Kingdom seat when a very minor change of about half a sentence was made to the treaties to accommodate the needs of eurozone countries and ensure that what they wanted to do had an effective treaty basis. The process took roughly 13 months or so from the time that it was initiated until the time that it took effect. That is because not only do the treaties require a process of treaty change to go through a particular and detailed EU primary legislative process, but a change to the treaties also involves national ratification by the member states concerned. Indeed, I remember having to take a short Bill through this House, even though the treaty change that was at stake applied only to the member states of the eurozone, not to the United Kingdom. For that reason, I do not think that the sort of rapid treaty change that he would hope for actually exists in practice.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Paragraph 12 of the document that the Government placed in the Library this morning addresses the question of the possibility of a second extension after a first, stating that “a second extension is not considered to be viable”.
Not considered to be viable by whom?

Mr Lidington: But paragraph 12 explains why, because it describes a scenario in which the United Kingdom had not participated in European Parliament elections and did not have any duly elected MEPs. In that case, we believe from all the feedback that we have had from the European Union that a second extension is not considered to be viable, because without UK MEPs being present from the date at which the newly constituted European Parliament met—namely, in a plenary on 2 July—the European Parliament would be improperly constituted. It is for that reason that we do not see any willingness, or, indeed, any legal power under the treaties, for the European Union to agree to a second extension if we were in those circumstances at that date.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Further to the intervention of the hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), will the Minister confirm that the Electoral Commission, which I believe comes under his responsibilities, is contacting returning officers to tell them to advance their preparations to hold European Parliament elections?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman asks a perfectly fair question, but he will also know that the Electoral Commission is a statutorily independent body—it does not fall under ministerial direction, but reports to a Committee chaired by Mr Speaker—so it is for the commission to say what, if anything, it has been doing.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Ind): It is clear that, if we seek an extension, we will need to give a specified purpose, and members of the European Council have already been clear that holding a people's vote would fulfil that requirement. At the very least, however, this House needs to come to a decision on where the majority view lies. The right hon. Gentleman seemed to be saying that, if we passed this motion tonight, the Government would seek to provide time for us to come to that view

by having a series of indicative votes. Am I right? If I am, by what time does he envisage those indicative votes being held? There is no time to waste and there is no reason why we should not hold those votes in the next few sitting days.

Mr Lidington: I did explain this earlier in my remarks. What the Government have expressed in our motion and what I am trying to put before the House is that there is basically a choice of two options before the House. The first is that a decision is taken to agree the deal that has been negotiated and is on the table—which we know the European Council is willing to accept and believe the European Parliament would be willing to accept—and get on with things. In that case, we may need a short technical extension just to permit the necessary implemented legislation to pass here. Or—[*Interruption.*] I am trying to respond to the question of the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna), and I hope that the House will allow me to do so.

The second option is that we would face the prospect of having to seek a longer extension. As I said earlier, in such a scenario, where we would be going into the European Council without approval for the deal on the table, the Government's commitment is that we would, in the two weeks following the European Council, consult through the usual channels with other parties and work to provide a process by which the House could form a majority on how to take things forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I am not going to give way again for a while, Mr Speaker, because when I spoke in the Chamber about a week ago, you gently chided me for having gone on for too long, and when I looked at *Hansard* it was because I had perhaps taken too many interventions. I think I have given way a fair number of times already today.

I want to put on the record—because I think this will help to clarify the nature of the choice for hon. Members on all sides of the debate—that article 50 of the European treaties does say, in terms, that the treaties “cease to apply” to the departing member state

“from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification”

of triggering article 50. In other words, it is the sooner of the conclusion and entering into force of the withdrawal agreement, and the two-year deadline. Logically it therefore follows that, were an extension of any length to be negotiated and agreed, it would always be possible for the House and the other place to bring about an earlier conclusion to that extension than the specified deadline by agreeing to a withdrawal agreement at that earlier date.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: No, I am not giving way again for a while.

I hope that the factual document that the Government published this morning, coupled with the latest statement from the President of the European Council, Mr Tusk, will have convinced right hon. and hon. Members that the choice I have described is not one that has somehow been invented for political ends but rather one that this House must face up to and confront.

I want to take a moment to set out to the House the reasons why the choice is so binary. That means explaining in a bit of detail the interaction with the European Parliament elections. Those elections will take place across the EU on 23 to 26 May, and the new European Parliament will meet for the first time on 2 July. As the Father of the House said, it is a fundamental requirement under the EU treaties that EU citizens are represented in the European Parliament. That derives from article 9, which says,

“Every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship”,

and from paragraph 2 of article 10, which says:

“Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament.”

The subsequent legislation that the European Union has passed is founded on those key principles set out in the treaties—the primary law that every member state of the European Union has to comply with and which has primacy over any domestic law to the contrary.

It flows from that that the new European Parliament would not be properly constituted if any member state did not have MEPs, and that for it to be improperly constituted would put all that Parliament's actions, and the proper functioning of the EU's institutions and its legislative process, at risk. There is no legal mechanism by which the UK could return MEPs to the new European Parliament other than by participating in the elections. The upshot is that the longest extension that we could propose without holding the elections is until the end of June, and if we did that, it would not be possible to extend again, because, as I said in response to an earlier intervention, to do so without having elected MEPs would compromise the proper functioning of the EU's institutions and its legal process. In the absence of a deal, seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless and completely at odds with the position that this House adopted only last night, making a no-deal scenario far more, rather than less, likely. Not only that, but from everything we have heard from the EU, both in public and in private, it is a proposal it would not accept.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has had an opportunity to read the advice given by George Peretz QC on the example of Croatia, where special arrangements were made. It is possible for there to be an agreement between the EU and the UK as to a mechanism that may not involve elections but would still involve representation in the European Parliament.

Mr Lidington: I have not had the pleasure of reading that legal opinion. However, there is a critical difference between the scenario that we are describing in respect of the United Kingdom and that of Croatia in the case that my hon. Friend describes. In that case, Croatia was a third country in the process of joining the European Union, and the treaties allow accession states to go through a transition process. What she has described was part of that transition process embodied in the accession treaty negotiated by Croatia with the existing states of the European Union. In the case of the United Kingdom, we are talking about us beginning to move from being a full member of the European Union with both the rights for citizens and the obligations that go with that full European Union membership. Without

[Mr Lidington]

treaty change, there is not a legal mechanism that simply allows those rights for EU citizens to be set aside. That is the brutal truth that this House needs to recognise.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): If the Government were, for the first time, to be prepared to support and to facilitate some processes for indicative votes and so on, I think it would actually be possible to take some decisions quite quickly. The Minister will understand that his credibility in making these arguments about the timescale needed is rather undermined by the fact that, as of a couple of weeks ago, he was saying that we were going to be able to get everything through, including all the legislation, by 29 March, but now we apparently need three months in order to do so.

Specifically on the European parliamentary elections, I wonder whether the Minister has seen the comments by Eleanor Sharpston, an advocate general of the European Court of Justice, who has said, in response to the arguments that he is making,

“This is an oversimplified and ultimately fallacious presentation of the situation”,

and sets out a range of ways in which this issue could be resolved, saying that

“if the political will...is there, a legal mechanism can be found”.

Mr Lidington: Though I have the utmost respect for Eleanor Sharpston, that view is very different from the views that have been expressed to us very clearly by the institutions of the European Union.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister may be aware of the legal advice from the legal service of the European Parliament issued on 1 February 2019, which states very clearly:

“Even in the case that the UK would not hold elections, the new European Parliament could validly be constituted.”

Does he disagree with that?

Mr Lidington: I have not seen that particular item, but my understanding is that the legal service of the European Parliament has made it very clear that it does not see that an extension is possible beyond the date of the first plenary meeting of the new Parliament on 2 July, in the absence of treaty change.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Can I take the deputy Prime Minister back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) when he said that it was a matter of law that the UK can revoke article 50 in its entirety? Should there be a member state that does not agree to an extension—for example, Hungary or Italy—would it not therefore be a matter of political reality that the revocation of article 50 should be exactly what the Government do? If that happens, will they revoke article 50?

Mr Lidington: It would be a decision for the House to take were that to happen. It was open to the hon. Gentleman to table an amendment to that effect today had he wished to do so. These are matters for the House as a whole.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The 2014 Euro elections cost £100 million, which seems like a lot of money, but the Transport Secretary could spend it in a morning, so I would not worry too much about that. The real issue today, though, and it continues

to be the issue, is that unless we can secure an agreement that gets majority support in this House, we are going to continually go round in circles on this. So surely the Minister must agree that the only way to move forward and unite people is for compromise from the Government to actually get a deal that we can support.

Mr Lidington: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to this extent: the only way we can move forward, whether we are looking at the immediate future or the longer term, is for this House to come behind an actual deal embodied in text which the European Union is also willing to accept.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right about the chaos that would be caused. The Legal Service has also made it clear that, if we extended and thus had to fight the elections and we subsequently left, the European Parliament would be left unconstituted, because there would be no mechanism to change the numbers that had been set. The EU does not want to go down that road so my right hon. Friend is quite right.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend is right. I do not detect from my conversations in Strasbourg much enthusiasm among Members of the European Parliament for another contingent of British MEPs to be there, especially if that was only on a temporary basis.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I do not doubt, and I think it is true that the whole House does not doubt, that the right hon. Gentleman is a man of his word, and when he gives a commitment at the Dispatch Box we all absolutely have confidence that it will be delivered. Can he help us, though? At column 167 of *Hansard* on Tuesday 26 February the Prime Minister set out her plan, all of which is unfolding. So today we are having the debate, and we will have the votes on the Government motion and the amendment. If either of the amendments are successful or the motion prevails in the end, we know that there will be an extension. The Prime Minister undertook in that event to

“bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.”—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2019; Vol. 655, c. 167.]

Will that legislation be brought forward to the House next week, and if not when?

Mr Lidington: From memory, I think that my right hon. Friend repeated this from the Dispatch Box last night, so I am happy to record again that undertaking by the Prime Minister and the Government. The exact timing for the introduction of legislation will have to await a decision by the European Council. If we are talking about an extension for a specific time period, the Government's commitment was to do that once this had been agreed not just by the House but by the Council. There is little point in our introducing legislation for a particular duration only to find that that does not fly at European Union level.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): A while ago, before my right hon. Friend got drawn into this arcane debate about the minutiae of the European Union's peculiar practices, he fleetingly mentioned the public. Our legitimacy is built on public faith and bolstered by public trust. The Government chose to specify a date in the legislation and thereby created an expectation. Frustrating that expectation would be seen

by the public as a breach of faith, which might not worry unreconstructed remainers who regard the public not, as I do, with reverence, but with disdain. Such a breach would do the Government and the House immense damage.

Mr Lidington: I do not disagree with my right hon. Friend, but the remedy for the House is to rally behind an actual deal that allows our exit from the EU to take place.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making his case with his customary acuity and good manners. I agree with him that the essence here is not all these *arcana imperii* about the European elections but rather the fact that this House has to come to a decision and agree on a way of leaving this institution in an orderly fashion if it is to prevent a no-deal exit. That is clear to almost everyone in this House. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while it is obviously appropriate for the Prime Minister to continue to do whatever she feels she needs to do to promote the deal that she is promoting, and for which I have voted and will continue to vote until the very end, it would also be appropriate for her to enter, after an extension has been agreed, into immediate discussions across the House to ensure that, in a parallel process, a cross-party view of a deal that could obtain a majority could be settled by the House? We could then find out which of the two alternatives permits a majority to be found and a deal to be enacted.

Mr Lidington: As I said earlier, the Government are giving a commitment that, if it is not possible to secure support ahead of the European Council for our withdrawal under the negotiated deal, we would have to come back to the House in the two weeks following the Council to consult through the usual channels the political parties across the House to agree on the process by which the House could then seek to find a majority.

For reasons that I will come on to—if I ever get to address the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and other hon. Members—this is far from uncomplicated, but I think I gave that commitment earlier in my speech.

Anna Soubry: The right hon. Gentleman is very generous in giving way, and I accept that I have the benefit of *Hansard*. The Prime Minister was clear that the Government would,

“if the House votes for an extension, 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.”—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2019; Vol. 655, c. 167.]

With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, it was not “or”, it was “and”. So it is both—seek a date with the approval of the EU, and bring forward the legislation.

Mr Lidington: I really do not think that there is a big difference between what the right hon. Lady quotes and what I said earlier. The commitment is there, in *Hansard*, as she says, from the Prime Minister to seek to agree in those circumstances an extension with the European Council and to introduce the necessary legislation, but the legislation would have to provide for the duration, purpose and condition of any extension that had been agreed with the Council. We cannot operate in a vacuum

here. We are dealing with a process that flows from article 50 of the treaty. It is not something that the House can simply resolve on its own. The job of the House is to come to agreement on a deal.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will give way to my hon. Friend, who is a former distinguished Member of the European Parliament.

Neil Parish: For over two years now, since we invoked article 50, we have been absolutely incapable as a party, a Government or a Parliament of reaching a decision on a withdrawal agreement. Why would my right hon. Friend ask me to vote for an extension of article 50 so that we can just argue for another couple of months? We have to have a withdrawal agreement before we extend anything.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Members of this House, whichever side they have taken in the numerous debates that we have had on European matters, should not underestimate the exasperation not just in the EU institutions but in the democratic Governments of the EU member states at the inability of the House to decide what it is prepared to get behind.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I will not give way. I am conscious that I have been speaking for a long time. Other Members wish to speak, so I am going to make progress now. I want to finish what I am saying about the Government's case and then move on to the amendment that you have selected, Mr Speaker.

We do not want to be in a situation where the only certainty would be more uncertainty, but if the House has not come together around a deal by Thursday next week, the only viable extension would be a long one. We would have to hold the European Parliament elections, and the Government would facilitate a process with the House to consider the potential ways forward to reach a majority. However, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last week, that delay would ensure that the only certainty would be greater uncertainty for businesses and for the constituents whom we represent. That is the choice that we face and the responsibility that we must now shoulder.

If I may, Mr Speaker, I will turn to the amendments that you have selected for debate.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: No. I apologise to hon. Friends and Opposition Members who wish to intervene, but I have given way many times, and I have tried to be fair to Members of all political parties represented in this House. I want to speak on the amendments, conclude my remarks and let other right hon. and hon. Members speak.

If I may, I will turn first to amendment (h) in the name of the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). It requests an extension of article 50 for the defined

[Mr Lidington]

purpose of holding another referendum on whether to remain in the European Union. I do not think it will come as a surprise to the hon. Lady if I say that the Government's position is well rehearsed. I respect her persistence and that of others who have tabled similar amendments putting forward this proposition, but I do not believe another referendum offers the solution that we need. Rather, it would reopen the divisions established in the 2016 campaign, and would damage what is already a pretty fragile trust between the British public and Members of this House. Our obligation, first and foremost, is to honour the mandate given to us in that first vote, which was to leave the European Union, and that is why the Government are focused on honouring that mandate in a smooth, orderly way.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: No. I am not giving way; I am sorry. I beg the hon. Lady's pardon, but I have given way many times. I hope she will have the opportunity to catch your eye later, Mr Speaker.

If I may, I will now turn to amendment (i) in the name of the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, and others. The amendment proposes a particular process to enable the House to find a way forward that commands majority support through an extension period. Paragraph 2 of the amendment would suspend Government control of the Order Paper on Wednesday 20 March to give priority to a cross-party business motion tabled by 25 Members from at least five different political parties. It seems that this motion would be used further to direct the business of the House on a future day or days to allow further debates on matters relating to EU exit.

The Government have previously set out to the House our case that this amendment or others similar to it seek to create and exploit mechanisms that would allow Parliament to usurp the proper role of the Executive. It would be unprecedented action, and it could have far-reaching and long-term implications for the way in which the United Kingdom is governed and for the balance of powers and responsibilities in our democratic institutions. I am sure that the majority of Members—whether they are hon. Friends who are supporting the current Government, or perhaps people who aspire to support and serve in a future Government of some political stripe or other—must recognise that fact. While I do not question the sincerity with which the amendment has been tabled, to seek to achieve that desired outcome through such means is, I think, a misguided and not a responsible course of action.

I think that is equally true of paragraph 3 of the right hon. Gentleman's amendment. Frankly, it is an extraordinary requirement and, I suggest, an undemocratic one. It means that if 100 Members from the Conservative Benches moved a motion under the terms of the amendment, that motion could not be called. It means that if 100 Members from the Labour party Benches moved such a motion, that could not be called. It means that if 400 Members from both the Government and the principal Opposition Benches moved such a motion, it could not be called.

That paragraph would hand the power over whether a motion could be called—in effect, a power of veto—to the smallest parties in the House, if such a motion had their support. Let us assume that the right hon. Gentleman's amendment was accepted by the House. That would mean that a motion brought forward under paragraph 3 of the amendment, if it had the support of Members from the Scottish National party, from Plaid Cymru, from the Liberal Democrats, the lone Member from the Green party and—if they constitute themselves a political party in time—from Members of the Independent Group, could be moved. However, if it had the support of every single Conservative, Labour and Democratic Unionist party Member, it could not be moved. I do not doubt the right hon. Gentleman's sincerity, but I have to say to him that that strikes me as absurd in democratic terms.

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman's argument that contrary views could not be heard is defective, as he will see if he goes back to paragraph 2 of the amendment. Sub-paragraph (d) says that

“debate on that motion may continue until 7.00 pm at which time the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on that motion including the questions on amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved”.

In other words, the motion provided for in paragraph 3 starts the debate, and any Member can move an amendment, which, if you select it, Mr Speaker, will be voted on at the end of the day. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's argument that the views of others—of 300 Conservatives—would not be heard is not correct.

Mr Lidington: While I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's defence of his amendment, my objection still stands. In the scenario that he has described, a motion in the names of very large numbers of Members of Parliament—not just from my party, but from his as well, or a very large number of some hundreds of people on a cross-party basis—could be moved only if it were in the form of a motion that had previously been tabled and accepted for debate, under the limited terms specified in his amendment.

It is of course for you, Mr Speaker, to make a ruling on which amendments to select and which not to select, but as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, there are practices, traditions and precedents of the House—about, for example, the material of an amendment needing to be pertinent to the motion to which it has been tabled—so, flowing from his amendment, there would be a potentially very severe restriction on the rights of many hundreds of Members of this House to come forward and table motions that raise subjects they want to be debated.

Charlie Elphicke: My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful argument, but the position is in fact worse than he says. Paragraph 3 of the amendment mentions

“at least five Members elected to the House”—
elected to the House—

“as members of at least five different parties”.

It is carefully crafted to exclude the TIGgers, meaning that we will have tyranny by a minority, because either Plaid Cymru or the Greens will need to be included in such a motion. In other words, four Members of this House could hold the entire House to ransom.

Mr Lidington: As my hon. Friend says, although the intention behind the amendment is sincere, it is defective on both constitutional and technical grounds, and I think the approach I have outlined on the Government's preferred way forward offers a better route.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): My point is very similar to the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke). What is the position, based on the wording of this amendment, of Members of this House who are not in receipt of a Whip, as happens from time to time? Indeed, there are Members of this House who are currently not in receipt of a Whip or who are not a member of a political party. It seems to me that this form of discrimination against independent Members of this House is quite unacceptable.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend raises an interesting question that I confess I had not considered in detail. A number of Members of the House sit as independent Members of various kinds, and they may or may not be registered as a political party with the Electoral Commission under the terms of the relevant legislation. Again, it seems wrong in principle for those Members to be denied the right to at least put forward for consideration a motion that embodies their wishes.

Sir Oliver Letwin: My right hon. Friend is an old friend, and I admire the ingenuity of his logic. Will he return for a moment to an issue that concerns the fate of more than 60 million of our fellow citizens—namely whether this country will leave the EU without a deal because the House has failed to reach an agreement? The amendment seeks to facilitate, within a short three-month extension—not a long one—the House's ability, through some mechanism, to debate and resolve the question of a deal across the parties. Perhaps my right hon. Friend would like to make a statement now from the Dispatch Box to state that on the day in question the Government will bring forward their own motion, describing exactly the process we are seeking, and allowing the House, by express votes, to arrive at a sensible compromise solution. None of those who have tabled this amendment prefer to grab the Order Paper or to use these elaborate devices to achieve that. We seek, above all and only, to ensure that the House has the opportunity to rescue our fellow citizens from a fate that both my right hon. Friend and I wish to avoid.

Mr Lidington: I completely accept the sincerity and good intentions of the approach taken by my right hon. Friend and the other signatories to the amendment, but I still believe it has the deficiencies to which I referred. In this scenario we need a process that ensures that the House faces up to decisions. Therefore, on behalf of the Government, I have proposed that in the two weeks following the European Council—were we to be in the position by then that no withdrawal agreement has been approved by the House to allow for a technical extension only of article 50—we should hold consultations with other parties, through the usual channels, to try to find a process that enables the House to find its majority.

For the reasons that I set out earlier at some length, I simply do not think that the European Council would think it plausible to agree a three-month extension to article 50 without much greater clarity about the process and outcome of that hypothetical scenario. As he says,

my right hon. Friend has always supported the deal that the Prime Minister negotiated and is on the table, but he puts forward a scenario in which the House might agree on something that required significant changes to the current text of the agreement. We do not know that, but we could then face a considerable exercise at EU level, with textual amendments and the process of going through different EU institutions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: No, I will not give way now. I think that the procedure I have set out, and to which the Government are committed, offers the House the best way forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Lidington: No, I will not give way further. I have been on my feet for more than an hour, and it is fair that other Members have the opportunity to catch your eye, Mr Speaker.

Finally, amendment (e) is tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. It requests an extension of article 50, and for time to be provided for the House to find a majority for a different approach. On the first point, I am sure the official Opposition will be pleased to see that the motion under discussion concerns whether to extend article 50, so an amendment is hardly required on that point. As ever, however, the Opposition amendment is all about ruling things out, and never about proposing anything in their stead. I note that once again the Leader of the Opposition does not advocate a second referendum, and although that position accords with Government policy, I did not think it was also Labour policy. In truth, the right hon. Gentleman's alternative Brexit plan—itsself of questionable feasibility—was decisively rejected by 323 votes to 240 in the debate on 27 February, and I do not see the need to provide further time to discuss it.

In my opening remarks I said that seeking an extension to article 50 is not something that the Government ever wanted to do, but we have arrived at this point because that has been the will of this House. Now the House has to decide between the two courses of action that are realistically available. Either we approve a deal before the March European Council, legislating for it and ratifying it during a short technical extension until 30 June, or we fail in our duty to deliver on the result of the referendum and, if we are to comply with what the House voted for last night, we will be required to hold elections to the European Parliament, two months after the British people expected us to have left the EU, thereby prolonging the uncertainty that will do severe damage to this country. We face a stark and serious choice, and I commend the motion to the House.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): What about my amendment?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is observing—some would say bleating; I would say observing—from a sedentary position that his amendment was not referred to by the Minister. I am sure his tender sensibilities will recover from the assault to which they have been subjected.

Mr Lidington: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If it helps the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), I am conscious that I omitted to refer to his amendment, but I shall draw that to the attention of the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union so that, if time permits, he can respond to it during his concluding remarks. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asks whether the Government will be supporting his amendment, but I urge him to contain his excitement on that matter.

1.38 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I rise to support amendment (e) tabled in my name and that of the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister announced two weeks ago that she would hold a second meaningful vote on 12 March; and that if that failed she would enable a vote on 13 March to rule out leaving the European Union on 29 March without a deal; and that if that succeeded, she would enable a vote on the extension of article 50 on 14 March, which is today. She was taken at her word. Had she simply done that yesterday, and tabled a simple motion to seek agreement that the UK would not leave the EU on 29 March without an agreement, she would have succeeded with a hefty majority. However, for reasons best known to herself and her advisers, she tagged unnecessary words on to her motion, causing splits, divisions and chaos on her own side, and putting further into question the ability of the Government to govern.

Today, it seems that the lessons of yesterday have not been learnt. A simple motion today seeking a mandate from this House to ask for an extension of article 50 for a length and purpose to be negotiated with the EU would pass by a hefty majority, but again the Prime Minister risks splits, divisions and chaos by tabling a motion that wraps the question of whether there should be a third meaningful vote into what should be a simple question of extension. The idea of bringing back the deal for a third time without even the pretence that anything has changed—other than, of course, using up more time—is an act of desperation.

Mr Speaker, yesterday I was offered a £50 bet on the third meaningful vote by the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), which would go to Help for Heroes. I should have taken up that bet. Perhaps he and I should now both offer £50 to Help for Heroes, because, in all seriousness, it looks as though the Government are adopting the absurd and irresponsible approach of simply putting before us the same deal again a week later, but now not even pretending that anything has changed other than that another week has been used up.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am very grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. Has he, like me, read the rumours in the newspaper that the Government might try to argue that there has been a material change in circumstances by changing their legal advice to take into account article 62 of the Vienna convention? Does he, like me, agree with the weight of legal opinion that they are on a hiding to nothing with that argument?

Keir Starmer: We wait to see what further advice the Attorney General gives, if any. I have to say, however, that the suggested nuclear option of crashing the treaty completely—bringing down citizens' rights, the financial

arrangements, the customs arrangements, the trading arrangements and so on—as the way forward came as rather a surprise. That is the reason I thought the Attorney General left it out of the advice he gave last week. To burn the whole house down to try to suspend or stop the backstop is so extreme that I would be extremely surprised if the Government rest their case next week on that basis.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I have no idea what the Attorney General is going to say next week, but I say politely to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that in paragraph 19 he clearly makes reference to a fundamental change of circumstances. That would indicate to me that article 62 was in his mind.

Keir Starmer: I accept that, and it is there in that paragraph. What I am saying is this: it is a nuclear option to crash a whole treaty, including everything in it. That has consequences in international law. If you crash a treaty, you can be taken to court and challenged on it. Everything would be crashed. All the citizens' rights that have been agreed—crashed; all the trading arrangements—crashed; the transition period—crashed. Are we really suggesting that that is the credible basis for a further meaningful vote?

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I agree with every word the right hon. and learned Gentleman says. This is a unicorn; it cannot happen unless so seismic a failure were to take place with the other party that it could be justified. The idea that, simply because the backstop is still in place, it could justify bringing down the whole treaty under article 62 is so far fetched that there can be no doubt, if it was ever contemplated, that that is why it was left out, because it is an unsustainable argument.

Keir Starmer: I could not agree more. I suspect that that is why it was left out, in any meaningful sense, from the advice last week. We will wait to see what the Attorney General says if there is a meaningful vote next week. If the idea is to bring back the meaningful vote with the suggestion that what has changed in a week is that we now know we can crash the entire treaty, we will wait for that argument to be presented, but I am not sure it will be persuasive to those whom the Government hope to get back on board with their deal.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) indicated that she thinks that the article 62 option was already foreshadowed in the existing legal opinion. If she is right about that, then it will not be a change in circumstances justifying meaningful vote 3, will it? It was there already.

Keir Starmer: The problem with the argument is that as far as the Government are concerned the mere fact that it was available last time we voted does not appear to inhibit them from saying that it is a change of circumstances.

Victoria Prentis: I did say very clearly that I have no idea what is in the Attorney General's mind at this moment, but that it seemed to me that the use of those words meant that he had at least considered article 62. He may of course wish to develop that argument much further and I look forward to hearing from him.

Keir Starmer: What I am trying to say is this: with the meaningful vote having been put once and lost heavily, and having been put again and lost heavily, I think the yearning across the House, the majority view, is that what we really need to do now, and what we are trying to do this week, is simply decide that no deal on 29 March should be ruled out. A simple proposition would have done that without all the fallout. A simple proposition today to extend article 50 would have allowed us then to press on in some form that we could agree to find a purpose and a majority.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Keir Starmer: Not just at the moment, but I will in a minute.

Across the House, precisely what that model is and how we do it is secondary to the fact that we have to find a way to find a majority, otherwise the whole discussion about lengths of extension is an argument in a vacuum. If you do not know what you are doing then you do not know how long you need.

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

Keir Starmer: I will give way, because I hope the right hon. Gentleman will join me in giving that £50 to Help for Heroes—but don't tell my wife I gambled.

Mr Francois: My hon. Friends have told me that the right hon. and learned Gentleman very kindly referred to me. I apologise; I had popped to the gents and that is why I missed that. I am very sorry. Mr Speaker, I do not share your iron bladder. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right. I bet him £50 for Help for Heroes that meaningful vote 3 would be on 26 March. It is now perfectly clear from the Government's motion that it will be before 20 March and I would now guess on 19 March—so, next Tuesday—in which case I will definitely give him £50 for Help for Heroes, a brilliant charity. For the avoidance of doubt, will he take a cheque?

Keir Starmer: Taking cheques from the right hon. Gentleman might be a slippery slope. In the spirit of compromise, why don't we both give £50 for Help for Heroes?

Mr Francois: Done!

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is laudable to donate money to charity, but is it in order to be gambling? Are we turning the House of Commons into a casino?

Mr Speaker: Despite the seriousness of the situation, we should not altogether lose our senses of humour. I think the observations of the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and those of the shadow Secretary of State should be taken in that vein.

Mr Francois: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the avoidance of doubt, we will call that £50 each way the Starmer compromise.

Mr Speaker: That does not require adjudication by the Chair, but the right hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record. I think the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) was about to intervene.

Clive Efford: I think the moment has passed, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* I am going to dispense with the gambling theme.

My right hon. and learned Friend will have heard the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office try to answer the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) on facilitating discussions across the House. Did my right hon. and learned Friend, like me, expect the Government to come here this morning, following their defeats last night, to talk about how they can facilitate those discussions, rather than come up with technical points to defeat an amendment that is trying to achieve that aim?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention, because it follows up on a theme I was trying to advance yesterday: how we go forward from here depends on the attitude of the Prime Minister and of the Government. At this stage, what I think a majority in the House want is a Prime Minister who says, "I now recognise that my deal has been heavily defeated twice, and in the spirit of finding a way forward I will drop my red lines and come up with a process by which the House can express views as to an alternative way forward." If we cannot do that—this is the point I was trying to make yesterday—and if the Prime Minister does not facilitate that and put that process forward, the only thing that the House can do is try to force it on her, and that has constitutional ramifications.

I am not saying that that cannot be done, and I am not saying that it should not be done. It may have to be done, but—and this is a serious point for the Government—I think it would be better if the Prime Minister were to say today that she would in fact play her part in whatever the process needs to be to find a majority. I think that would be the first step forward. I said yesterday and I say it again: I actually think that should have happened two years ago, but that is as may be. Otherwise, we risk simply setting another clock ticking that then dictates in exactly the same way what happens—whether it is months or weeks, or however long it is. If we just do this all by a clock and without a purpose, we will not get anywhere.

Anna Soubry: I am listening to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying with great care. It seems that the Opposition's policy has now changed again. As I understood it from his party's conference, having failed to get its own version of Brexit through, it would then seek a general election. If that failed, it would then back a people's vote. Now it seems that his party's policy is to compromise with the Government to facilitate Brexit. On that basis, could he confirm whether tonight, when the vote on amendment (h) is called, Labour will be voting for a people's vote, abstaining, or voting against?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. I have said on a number of occasions that the Labour party supports a public vote and I played a very large part in the conference motion, but today is about the

[Keir Starmer]

question of whether article 50 should be extended and whether we can find a purpose. [Interruption.] Hear me out, it is a very serious question and a very serious challenge, and I need to answer it. The right hon. Lady will know that many colleagues, in and out of this place, absolutely supportive of the cause that she supports—namely, a people's vote—vehemently disagree with this amendment being tabled and voted on today.

The People's Vote campaign—it is pretty clear where it stands—has issued a formal statement of its position, today, in response to amendment (h). It says that it has made it clear that it does not regard today as “the right time” to press the case for the public to be given a final say—[Interruption.] I am just answering the question—I am answering it fully and I want to do it properly. This is the People's Vote campaign issuing a statement in response to this amendment:

“Instead, this is the time for parliament to declare it wants an extension of”

the “article 50” Brexit deadline

“so that, after two-and-a-half years of vexed negotiations, our political leaders can finally decide on what Brexit means.”

That is the official position of the People's Vote campaign.

In addition, this will be the first time—[Interruption.] I am going to complete this answer. This will be the first time, I think, that I have quoted Alastair Campbell from the Dispatch Box. Whatever we could or could not say about Alastair Campbell, we cannot doubt where he stands on a people's vote. He said today that it is:

“Wrong to press @peoplesvote_uk amendment...when the issue is”

essentially about “extension. I think” it is the

“wrong time and I fear the wrong reasons”—

[Interruption.] I am going to complete the answer.

[Interruption.] I am going to complete the answer. Those pressing this amendment seem to be out of step with the vast majority of co-campaigners who are campaigning for exactly the same point. They may genuinely have a difference of opinion, but we will not be supporting amendment (h) tonight.

Anna Soubry: Shame on you! [Interruption.]

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. We are two weeks away from leaving the European Union, as things stand. We are where we are in terms of the amendments that are in front of us today. I would not necessarily have chosen to put down the amendment in the way that it has come forward, but I say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—our friend and colleague on the Benches beside us—that we have the opportunity with the amendment today to express the views of people in the House of Commons that we must have a people's vote. I implore him not to stand against the amendment today, or I am afraid that Labour will be found out for what they are: a fraud. They are participating in Brexit happening if they fail to back the people's vote this afternoon.

Keir Starmer: Great rhetoric, no substance. [Interruption.] Just to be clear, the amendment that the Labour party has put down today is clear that we seek an extension of article 50 and that we want to find a process to decide where the majority is and how we go forward. Our position

has been clear about what we support and I have said it from this Dispatch Box many, many times—a close economic relationship based on a customs union and single market alignment and a public vote on any deal the Prime Minister gets through. That has been our position. I have said it so many times from this Dispatch Box. We want to have those options decided upon but, as the vast majority of people and Members in the House think, today is about extending article 50 and finding a way to that process. It does not rule out those amendments. It does not rule out support for those amendments and to suggest that it does is disingenuous. It is simply saying that today is about extending article 50 and moving on from there.

Antoinette Sandbach: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there is great concern that elected Members of Parliament who represent the interests of their constituents have not had an opportunity to vote on a wide range of options that may lead to consensus in this House about a way forward? In fact, the Prime Minister never put her negotiating red lines to this House. It is therefore very difficult to see, without that process, how we can properly examine all the compromises that the Prime Minister keeps urging us to unite around.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, because that encapsulates the problem that we have been living with for the last two years. The referendum answered the question, “Would you rather be in or out of the EU?” It did not answer the question, “If out, what sort of future relationship do you want?”, on which there are many views, ranging from a very remote relationship, looking elsewhere for trade and so on, to essentially keeping within the models that have worked reasonably well in the last half century or so. They are massively different—ideologically different—views. That is the reason why the Prime Minister should have put her red lines to Parliament. The original red lines that came out in the autumn of 2016 were not even put to the Cabinet before the Prime Minister announced them. On a question of this importance, whether someone is the Prime Minister or not, it is not good enough to shrink that decision to such a small group of people, not to open it out to the Cabinet in the first instance, and never to open it out to Parliament. That is a central point.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): As always, I am extremely grateful for the words that my right hon. and learned Friend has to say on another referendum, but does he understand that many Opposition Members are very strongly tempted to vote for the amendment that is on the Order Paper today, partly because not all the shadow Cabinet, and sometimes, official spokespeople for the Leader of the Opposition, speak with the clarity that my right hon. and learned Friend speaks with, and people are very unsettled about that? We accept that there may be more and probably better opportunities to vote for an amendment on another referendum, such as the one in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Peter Kyle) and for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson). Nevertheless, we have to ensure that the Labour party speaks with one clear voice on this—no more mixed messages.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. I have always tried to speak about this issue in a clear voice and I have spoken for the Labour party on it. As my

right hon. Friend will know, I have had many and ongoing discussions with my hon. Friends the Members for Hove and for Sedgfield about the amendment on which they have been working. Today is not about the Labour party saying that it would not support such an amendment; today is about extension and about the process.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: Let me just restate this. The Labour party is supporting a public vote on any deal from the Prime Minister that gets through—there is a lock on that—but today is about a different issue. I hope that that is clear, and gives some reassurance to my right hon. Friend.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that important assurance, which is what I want to hear said consistently from the Front Bench. He always says it with great clarity, as does the shadow Chancellor. I want to hear the same from all Labour Members, because we need that public vote, for which I have campaigned repeatedly from the start.

Let me ask my right hon. and learned Friend about a different issue. He has talked about the Cabinet, and about advice and discussions. Is he aware of reports that the Attorney General has been sharing new draft legal advice, allegedly with members of the European Research Group? It is not clear that it is being shared with the Cabinet or, indeed, Members of the House. Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that such a situation would be legal, given that such people normally say that they do not share any draft legal advice, or does he believe that the advice should be made available to all of us in the House?

Keir Starmer: The short answer is that I do not know whether the advice has been shared, although I remember the Attorney General asserting very strongly from the Dispatch Box that it would be quite improper to share any advice with any Member of the House unless, of course, it is shared with all Members.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I have given way many times and I will now make some progress.

This debate is absolutely necessary, but it is not welcome. Applying for an extension of article 50 with 15 days to go is a hopeless end to two years of negotiation. The fault lies squarely at the Government's door, not with civil servants and not with the House.

I touched on this point yesterday, but I want to repeat it, because it is extremely important. It is no good the Prime Minister and the Government blaming everyone but themselves for the position in which we find ourselves. To be in government is to govern, to lead, to think through what deal might secure majority support, to realise that consensus will be needed, to have a two-year strategy to ensure that that consensus is reached, and to understand that, given the deep divisions on the Government side, meaningful engagement with the Opposition from the start would have been better than blinkered intransigence. All that has been missing. I have lost track of the number of times I have complained

that the Prime Minister and the Government have pushed Parliament to one side, and this week is the culmination of that failed strategy.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): May I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman, ever so gently, to reflect on the fact that what he and the Labour party are proposing to do today is causing considerable anxiety among many businesses in Northern Ireland, because they want certainty? It is also, I believe, causing considerable anxiety among the border communities. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman cares about that. How can he offer reassurance to businesses in Northern Ireland, and to the border communities, about what the Labour party is proposing in its amendment?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful, as ever, for the hon. Lady's intervention. There is great anxiety about uncertainty, and the uncertainty exists because the Government, after two years, have come back with a deal that they cannot get through Parliament. I think that that is because the red lines were wrong in the first place, because the Prime Minister never engaged Parliament in the negotiating objectives so that she could have the majority, and because of her blinkered approach, which says, "I am going to keep ramming my deal time and again without listening to other people." We have reached an impasse. That does create uncertainty, and it is causing anxiety both in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom.

The question was, what is the Labour party trying to do? This is what we are trying to do, and we are not alone: our aim is clearly shared across the House. Given the current impasse—and there is no point in anyone pretending that it is not an impasse; once you have lost by 230 votes and 149 votes, you cannot pretend that you are not facing an impasse—we are asking the Government to say, "We realise that this is an impasse, and we will now find a way in which to establish what the majority view is, so that we can move forward." But they will not do it, so what we are proposing—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: No, I will not give way. I am going to finish my answer.

What we are proposing is that we extend article 50 and, as soon as we can, identify a mechanism or process—and we should be open-minded about what it will be—that will enable us to find out what the majority in the House want, because otherwise we will not find that majority. We have repeated time and again the two proposals for which we have always argued, the proposals for a close economic relationship and a public vote, but we have to listen to Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress.

Here we are, with 15 days to go, and the extension of article 50 is a necessity, not a choice. It is the only way in which we can try to prevent ourselves from leaving without a deal on 29 March, and that is what our amendment seeks to achieve.

It is important for us to identify a purpose, and the first purpose is to remove the 29 March cliff edge. We cannot simply vote against no deal, as we did last night,

[Keir Starmer]

and then take no further action. I have said repeatedly that this should have been done weeks ago rather than being left to the last minute, and that the sooner it is done, the better. Parliament must act today, and instruct the Government to seek an extension of article 50. However, we do need to begin the debate about the wider issues. The extension should be as short as possible, but it needs to be long enough to achieve the agreed purpose.

I listened to the earlier exchanges about EU elections. Let me make it clear that the Labour party does not want to be involved in those elections. There are at least three different views, both here and in Brussels: I know that, because I have been discussing this issue in Brussels for six months. One view is that we cannot get past May without participating in the elections. Another is that we cannot get past June without doing so. Another is that it might be possible to add a protocol or agreement to the treaty that would allow a long extension without EU elections. All three opinions are circulating here and in Brussels, and lawyers are putting their names to them.

We must decide, as a House, what we are requesting extra time for. The Government must then go to Brussels and seek an extension for the agreed purpose, and engage in discussion and negotiation about how long it should be. The one thing that we should not do is just set the clock running and say that that will dictate everything that happens from here on.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman wholeheartedly. Is not the whole experience of dealing with the EU—not just on these matters, but for many years—that because it is a treaty-based organisation, politics and law are much more closely aligned than they are in this country, for example? It is perfectly possible for the members of the European Council, acting as member states, to make decisions that actually become effective. Even if some set of lawyers within the apparatus happen to think it rather odd at first, they adapt themselves to it with heroic adaptability.

Keir Starmer: I absolutely agree. The right hon. Gentleman has probably—like me—been having those conversations with lawyers, officials and politicians across the 27 EU countries. All three of those views have been expressed to me by officials and politicians, including the view that, if it were necessary to go beyond June for an agreed purpose, that could be possible without our being involved in EU elections. I do not pretend for a moment that there are not legal implications, and I do not pretend for a moment that it would be easy, but I do know that this is a discussion that could be had.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I strongly agree with what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying. Does this not underline the fact that continuing to delay a decision because the Government are not getting the answer that they want, and their own delay of crucial votes, means that we have a tendency to be overtaken by events? We clearly do not like the prospect of European Union elections, but other events may intervene to complicate the House's ability to make decisions.

We should get on with the process that will unblock the gridlock, so that we can move things forward and move our country forward.

Keir Starmer: I agree with the right hon. Lady. One of the frustrations is that we are now faced with arguments from the Government that the period of time for an extension must be really short for various reasons, yet they ran away from the vote on 10 December. We could have known on 11 December that this deal was never going to go through. We would then have had three and a half months left on the clock before we even got to any question of an extension, and then another three months, even on the Government's own analysis, to try to sort the problem out. Yet here we are, with 15 days to go, having this discussion about an extension in the worst of circumstances, and we are doing it for one reason. That is that the deal that was signed on 25 November and that could have been put to the vote on 11 December was pulled. Not one word of that agreement has ever changed. All that has happened is that we have been waiting for three-plus months to vote again on the same proposition. We cannot waste another week doing the same thing next week.

Charlie Elphicke: I welcome the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be opposing amendment (h) tonight, and I will join him and the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) in doing so. It is right that the House should send a clear message on the matter of the people's vote. The question should be put to the House tonight, and I hope that it will be defeated so that we can move on.

Keir Starmer: That is not what I said. I did not say that we would oppose it. It is obvious that we are supportive of the principle; it is a question only of timing.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that people have to be clear before the last minute, so I want to ask him a question in the interests of clarity. If other member states of the European Union were to veto an extension of article 50, what would his position be? Would he be for a no deal, or would he be for the sensible option of revocation?

Keir Starmer: One of the advantages of having this debate for four days running is that most of the questions and answers have been well rehearsed. I shall give the hon. Gentleman the same answer that I gave yesterday, which is that we will cross that bridge when we get to it.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): On the subject of amendment (h), may I say, through my right hon. and learned Friend, that he has nothing to be ashamed of in how he has led our party's position on Brexit? Yelling "Shame on you" across the Chamber does not inspire a great deal of support among Labour Members; I did not think that that was the way to build the new politics. Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), there is a considerable degree of discomfort among Labour Members who support the principle of allowing the people to decide, not because of anything that my right hon. and learned Friend or the shadow Chancellor, or other leading figures, have said, but because there is not a uniform position on this on the Front Bench. In the event that a

proposal on this comes forward from my hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Peter Kyle) and for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), as I hope it will, will he clarify that this principle—which I believe is the only way to break the deadlock Brexit—will be wholeheartedly supported by the Labour leadership?

Keir Starmer: Yes. I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. The point I was trying to make about amendment (h) is this. In the circumstances where the vast majority of those who are campaigning for exactly the same end think that this is not the time for that amendment, is it the case that those who are pushing the amendment genuinely disagree with their co-campaigners, or are they pushing it for another reason?

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Given the record-breaking defeats suffered by the Government, and their abysmal failure to get a consensus, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that amendment (e), tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and amendment (i) tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), merely provide a vehicle to arrive at consensus? Given that the Government have failed, surely that is the only way in which we can move forward.

Keir Starmer: I agree with that. In the end, stripping away all the amendments, the simple proposition is whether we can vote to extend article 50 today and then, between us, come up with a vehicle or model to help us to break the impasse. That is why we crafted our amendment. We have been clear that we support a close economic relationship, and we also support a public vote. We have offered, as of yesterday, to talk to people across the House to discuss those approaches. That will take time—it is not a silver bullet—but it is the responsible thing to do. It is the way out of the mess that the Government have made. The Government should listen, even at this late stage, and facilitate that process. I urge the House to support our amendment tonight.

2.15 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Alarmingly, during his speech, the Chancellor of the Duchy—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must calm itself. We are about to hear from the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee.

Sir William Cash: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Alarmingly, during his speech, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster did not answer when I asked him for confirmation that the express repeal of the 1972 Act under section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 would be continued. This includes the time and date of our leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019. This is the law of the land, which, despite any motions that might be passed, precludes not only an extension of time but the revocation of article 50. This is what the voters voted for in the referendum.

Moreover, the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), in his exchanges with me last week, asserted that he wanted the repeal of the 1972 Act itself to be repealed. I would be grateful to hear whether he wishes to contradict that.

Keir Starmer: I am sorry—I only caught the second half of the hon. Gentleman's point; there is no discourtesy intended. If this is the point that is being put to me, I have always said that fixing a date to repeal the Act on 29 March was a mistake, because we would always need transition, and that we would need the Act to run during that transition. I have always thought that putting a date on the statute was a big mistake, for many reasons, and now we are going to have to put it right before 29 March.

Sir William Cash: I understand that point, but that was not the point on which we had an exchange last week. I am sorry if the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not catch what I was saying. I was asking him whether he wanted a repeal of the repeal of the 1972 Act that is contained in section 1 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. He indicated to me last week that he did want that. After all, the Labour party itself voted against the withdrawal Act on Second Reading and indeed on Third Reading, so we can assume that it did not want the repeal of the 1972 Act and that it is therefore committed to a course that is inconsistent with what the voters decided in the referendum. In respect of the position on both sides of the House, the United Kingdom is therefore at a dangerous crossroads in the middle of a fog.

I have done my best over the past 30 years to be consistent and to address the principles that underlie the sovereignty of this Parliament in delivering the democratic wishes of the British people through parliamentary Government, and not through government by Parliament, as is being proposed by certain Members of this House in respect of giving priority to private Members' Bills, despite the Standing Order No. 14 requirement that Government business takes precedence. I for one believe that this Parliament can deliver the referendum vote; ensure the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland; fully comply with the vote to leave following the European Union Referendum Act 2015, which was passed by a 6:1 majority in this House; comply in full with the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017, which so many Members who are now turning into rejoinders, let alone reversers, actually voted for; and comply in full with the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which received Royal Assent on 26 June last year and which itself includes the provision for exit day to be on 29 March. I say with great respect to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that, as I am sure he will recall, he voted for the Third Reading of the Act.

We have had substantial debates about the backstop and, of course, the most recent advice of the Attorney General. My European Scrutiny Committee has issued a critical report of the withdrawal agreement. It came out only last week and I urge the House to read it. We have asked for, but have not yet received, a draft of the withdrawal and implementation Bill, and I say that because that Bill, if passed, would enact the withdrawal agreement in our domestic law—the law of the land. I seek to make some proposals for what would be needed in any such Bill, as enacted, in order to satisfy the fundamental issues, bearing in mind that we have only a few days to go, and to ensure that we actually leave the European Union on 29 March. Given the timescale available for the withdrawal and implementation Bill to

[*Sir William Cash*]

be enacted, we can assume that it will be rammed through with virtually no time to discuss proposals that could be made by way of amendments to it. There will be no proper debate. The law of the land relating to the withdrawal agreement will be rammed through this House.

What do I have in mind? First, we must protect Northern Ireland's constitutional status in the United Kingdom. Discussions have continued since the Attorney General's recent advice and will continue on matters relating both to the backstop and to issues arising in international law, including article 62 of the Vienna convention, that are being further analysed by distinguished lawyers. Such matters are important and remain unresolved. I was extremely glad to hear Arlene Foster confirm this morning that that was the current position, and when that further analysis becomes available, I trust that the Attorney General will take serious note of the points made by that panel of distinguished lawyers.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for all his work as Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee. He mentioned Northern Ireland. Is he still concerned by what the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said yesterday about more power being given to the Irish Government? People sometimes say, particularly in Northern Ireland, that there is no smoke without fire.

Sir William Cash: I entirely agree. I was concerned by what I heard, and I will add that I have always believed, since the backstop's origin on 8 December 2017, that the bottom line here was that the door would be opened to the prospect of the Taoiseach being able to hold a border poll and to maintain the aspiration for a united Ireland.

Secondly, the Prime Minister has assured me on the Floor of the House that the express repeal of the European Communities Act 1972 contained in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 would be restated in the withdrawal and implementation Bill, as enacted, including therefore the exit date of 29 March. In respect of any disapplication by the courts under article 4 of the withdrawal agreement, combined with sections 5 and 6 of the 2018 Act, the Bill would need to contain an express exclusion of the power of the courts to disapply the repeal of the 1972 Act and other related Acts. It is dangerous that, according to article 4 of the withdrawal agreement, we have been given an arrangement under the withdrawal and implementation Bill whereby the courts would be able to disapply enactments, even potentially including the 2018 Act itself or aspects of it. The repeal of the 1972 Act is the statutory anchor of the referendum vote.

There are also issues of international law with respect to the compliance of international obligations arising from the withdrawal agreement, which includes the fact in international law that the agreement, as yet unsigned even now, was negotiated in the certain and understood knowledge in the European Union that we had enacted the repeal of the 1972 Act, subject only to the question of exit day, which we are now considering. The repeal itself is paramount, and it also applies to the backstop and the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as an

integral part of the United Kingdom. It is essential that the repeal is maintained within the framework of the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, as I have repeatedly stated with respect to the question of control over laws. To repeat what I said to the Prime Minister two days ago, she said at Lancaster House—this is a fact and it is law—that we will not have truly left the European Union if we are not in control of our own laws.

Lady Hermon: May I correct the record? I want to make it absolutely clear that the Brexit deal that the Prime Minister has signed actually protects the Good Friday/Belfast agreement on page 307, and it protects the consent principle. The constitutional status of Northern Ireland remains unchanged by the Brexit deal and the political declaration, and it would remain in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a border poll.

Sir William Cash: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that point, but I will say in addition that we do not know what the withdrawal and implementation Bill will contain. That is the problem. That is why my European Scrutiny Committee insisted on seeing a draft of it. It is one thing to have a treaty arrangement that is still uncompleted and unsigned, but it is another thing then to know how the draftsman will attempt to implement it in a Bill that we have not even seen. That is a serious problem, and we have almost no time, as the hon. Lady will understand as a lawyer herself, to examine the significant provisions that will be in that Bill.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking a second intervention so promptly. I just want to repeat to him that the political declaration on the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU says in black and white—I have not invented this—that it protects the Good Friday Belfast agreement in all its parts. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Prime Minister and this Government do not mean and will not keep their word? I will be very concerned if that is what he is suggesting.

Sir William Cash: Well, I have to say that on the Chequers deal, for example, we went through the whole ramifications of enacting the 2018 Act including the date of 29 March, but then, on 6 July, we had it completely overturned. That is why I said in a previous debate I had lost trust in the Government and the Prime Minister. That is my point. I am asking a lot of big questions simply because I have grave doubts as to what we will be confronted with. The Bill that will enact into domestic law the arrangements that are supposed to be included in the withdrawal agreement, to which I have been so vehemently opposed because it undermines the sovereignty of the United Kingdom, Parliament and the vote, is my reason for stating now that I retain my concern and my distrust.

Jim McMahon: We need to call out the idea that the Irish Government are trying to deliberately cause problems to push for a referendum to try to get a united Ireland. The Irish government have been trying desperately to make sense of the confusing negotiations led by this Parliament and by this Government, making sure that their own interests of course are aligned. However, it is not the case that the backstop does not provide a

problem for the Good Friday agreement and for Northern Ireland, because it does, and that has been the lion's share of the debate here. If we are not part of the customs union and the single market, we must have a border somewhere. Whether on the island of Ireland or in the Irish sea, it has to be somewhere, and the idea that that can be cast aside as if it is not important is negligent. We cannot continue to have that kind of vacuous debate in here. Let us talk substance.

Sir William Cash: I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that, having been involved in these European issues for about 34 years and having some knowledge of constitutional law and the way in which these things operate in practice, I am not going to trust anybody or anything until I see a copy of the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, which will be rammed through this House. If we do not have a chance to look at it beforehand, it would put us at considerable risk. That is my point, and I think we need to take it into account.

I now turn to the framework for our leaving the EU lawfully under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. Subject only to the extension of time, this is the law of the land and it is how we assert our sovereign constitutional right not merely to reaffirm but to guarantee in law that we control our own laws in this Parliament as a sovereign nation, in line with the democratic wishes of the British electorate in general elections.

The European Communities Act itself was passed on the basis of the White Paper that preceded it. In that White Paper there was an unequivocal statement that we would retain a veto on matters affecting our vital national interests. Gradually over time, since 1973, there has been a continuing reduction, a whittling away, of that veto to virtual extinction.

Leaving the EU, however, in the context of article 4 of the withdrawal agreement raises this question again as an issue of fundamental importance. We are no longer living in the legal world of Factortame—that was when we were in the European Union. When we leave, the circumstances change. We simply cannot have laws passed and imposed upon us, against our vital national interests, by the Council of Ministers behind closed doors during the transition period, or at any time. That would be done by qualified majority voting or consensus and, as I said to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in my first intervention in the previous debate, it would subjugate this Parliament for the first time in our entire history, as we would have left the European Union. It would therefore be a radical invasion of the powers and privileges of this House, which I believe would effectively be castrated during that period of time. We would be subjected to total humiliation.

I therefore regard it as axiomatic that, in the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, we must include a parliamentary veto over any such law within the entire range of European treaties and laws. As Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, I know that we currently have about 200 uncleared European provisions and, in my 34 years on the Committee, we have never once overturned a European law imposed on us through the Council of Ministers.

Just think about it. This House will accept laws by qualified majority vote without our being there and with no transcript. Where we were once in the EU, we will now have left. Leaving totally changes the basis on

which we conduct our business. Under our Standing Orders, my Committee has the task, in respect of European Union documents, of evaluating what is of legal and political importance, and it has the right to refer matters to European Standing Committees or to the Floor of the House, particularly where the Government accept the latter.

We can impose a scrutiny reserve, which means that Ministers cannot, except in exceptional circumstances, agree to any proposed law passed in the Council of Ministers in defiance of our scrutiny reserve. However, that is not a veto. Once a matter has been debated, or once the scrutiny reserve has been removed, any such law becomes the law of the United Kingdom and is thereby imposed on our constituents.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that, after we leave at the end of March, there will be a transition period in which we will have no veto over European laws, which is true. Is he therefore arguing that it would be better to crash out? Does he accept there is a risk that we will not agree anything by the end of March, that we will not have an extended date, that we will crash out and that, under the Good Friday agreement, Ireland could vote to reunify? That would be a complete disaster.

Sir William Cash: The hon. Gentleman is a member of my Committee, so he knows exactly what I am saying, and he understands perfectly well that when we leave we leave. When we do leave, the circumstances under which we currently operate, under our Standing Orders, will change.

When we leave the EU, the situation becomes radically different. I therefore propose—in line with the Prime Minister's own suggestions as set out in a carefully crafted pamphlet published in 2007 by Politeia, a think-tank—that the European Scrutiny Committee should, upon our leaving the European Union, be able to make recommendations as to how and when our veto should be invoked, as justified by our national interest.

The alternative is that we will just have laws imposed upon us. That will include, for example—I invite the hon. Gentleman and the House to listen to this—matters relating to tax policy. There are now proposals on the table to change tax policy from national unanimity to majority vote. Defence and defence procurement are also included, as is state aid. The list is endless.

Contrary to some assertions that the EU law-making process takes so long that there would be no problem, the European Union is quite capable of accelerating its procedures, and I believe it would do so by putting us at the mercy of our competitors. One recent well-known example is ports regulation. We fought that in the European Standing Committee and, despite the fact that port employers and trade unions were against it, it went through. This would happen in respect of almost any proposed EU law within the vast swathe of competences in the entire corpus of the European treaties. If that happened, we would have no redress. We would not be able to veto it if we do not get a veto, and we would not be able to affect it properly under our current scrutiny arrangements. Furthermore, the British people would be the ones to suffer, and that would include people in Scotland, too. Do not get the idea that this is a free zone situation for Scotland. SNP Members will also be affected, and they had better start taking it seriously.

Sir John Hayes: My hon. Friend will know that, as shipping Minister, I fought the port services regulation tooth and nail but, because of the limits on my competence, I could not stop it happening. He is making an interesting suggestion about the role of his Committee during the transition period. Would the Committee be recommending to the Executive that they implement the veto? He would not expect his Committee to assume the role of the Government.

Sir William Cash: That is absolutely right, and I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend, because he was the Minister responsible for ports regulation, and he has just reconfirmed that there was nothing he could do about it. It will be even worse during the transition period and thereafter. The reality therefore is that, as set out in the proposals I have discussed, the manner in which the veto would be expressed is perhaps on a recommendation by my Committee, because it would be of such legal and political importance, but obviously it would then have to go to the Government and to the Floor of the House to decide. The exact mechanism would have to be worked out, but to suggest that it would not be a matter of immense and urgent importance to the House is to assume that we in this House are a bunch of fools. It is unthinkable that the EU could impose laws on us by qualified majority voting on any matter within the corpus and range of the European treaties without our having some means of blocking it.

Having repealed the 1972 Act, we must not find ourselves in a customs union or single market, which are themselves within the framework of the Act, not only because our manifesto is the basis on which we were elected, but because leaving the EU includes the repeal of the Act. We must therefore also protect Northern Ireland within the constitutional framework of the UK, whose Parliament—some may find this surprising in the light of what we hear from other sources—includes Northern Ireland. It is represented here as a member of the UK and helps to pass the laws repealing the Act, including section 1 of the EU withdrawal Act.

In conclusion, I can say, without prejudice to any further discussions, that we might shortly be in a position not merely to check out of the Hotel California, but to take the bus to the airport and fly out of the EU altogether.

2.41 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The UK Government have descended into total farce. The Prime Minister has lost control of her Cabinet, her party and her Parliament. What we witnessed in the House last night was nothing short of absolute chaos. Mr Speaker, have you ever witnessed a Prime Minister whip her own party against her own motion? The Tory party truly is a shambles: more Ministers resigning, a Prime Minister with no authority, a Government incapable of governing. She has lost all control.

The Prime Minister lost a vote on her deal by the largest margin in parliamentary history, lost a second by a near historic margin, and lost a vote on taking no deal off the table, yet she tries to carry on as if nothing has happened. Apparently, we are to vote on her deal again next week. For her, nothing has changed. She does not want a second EU referendum, yet we are offered multiple votes on her deal. We are now on to the third—not the best of three, under her rules, because she only has to win once; we have to win every time to

stop her Brexit madness. If she loses next week, do we get a fourth, fifth or even more meaningful votes, until Parliament does what she wants? She has to accept that she is out of time. She has to accept reality. Her deal is a bad deal; no deal is a calamity.

This week, the House of Lords placed an amendment in the Trade Bill to prevent a no-deal Brexit. That is a legislative instrument. The Government must now bring back the Trade Bill before 29 March. This is crucial, and I expect the Brexit Secretary to respond when he sums up. The Prime Minister cannot stifle the legislative process to meet her party political interests. She must accept the will of the House. So much for parliamentary democracy—she ignores what she calls the sovereignty of Parliament. Her actions underline that this truly is a constitutional crisis.

The only way out of this disaster is to put the decision on our EU membership back to the people. The people must take back control. We have an amendment before us on a people's vote. It is not our amendment; it has come from others. I did not choose the timing, but the fact is, it is in front of us today. The House has its first opportunity—perhaps its only opportunity—to say, on the basis of what we know, on the basis of what has changed since the referendum in 2016, that the people of the United Kingdom deserve to have a people's vote. We must all reflect on the reality that there is no such thing as a good Brexit. People will lose their jobs.

On a day like today, we expect the so-called official Opposition to get behind that amendment, but you know what's happened? A shiver has run along the Front Bench of the Labour party looking for a spine to crawl up, but it has not found one. I will say this: the Labour party will pay a price. It is little wonder that in Scotland it has been found out for its behaviour over the past few years, having worked hand in glove with the Conservatives and Better Together to frustrate independence for Scotland. Today, we find again that it is not prepared to stand up with the young people throughout the United Kingdom who are going to lose their rights to work and travel in 28 EU member states.

I reflected a couple of days ago on how the Prime Minister sat and laughed as we talked about that, but then there is a man I have had some respect for, the Labour party Brexit spokesperson, and he has simply flunked this opportunity. The Labour party truly is a disgrace. It is little surprise that it has fallen to third place in Scottish politics. My goodness, it is going to stay there for a considerable time to come.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): If the Prime Minister can allow MPs to change their mind on Brexit, why can she not allow the people of this country to do the same?

Ian Blackford: My hon. Friend is correct. Apparently, we will be coming back here to vote time after time to see if the Prime Minister can get a majority. The reality is, her deal is a bad deal.

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

Ian Blackford: I should not give the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to embarrass himself, as he has done countless times before, but on you go.

Mr Sweeney: I will do my best not to embarrass myself, speaking as a young person from Scotland. I share the right hon. Gentleman's support for a public vote, but it is critical that we maximise a majority in the House to secure it, and that will not happen today, because there will not be sufficient numbers. Furthermore, if it were to pass, it would bomb out amendment (i), in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), which I support and which would extend article 50 and secure control of the Order Paper. That is the risk associated with this vexatious amendment tabled today. We must wait until a time when it could be won.

Ian Blackford: Well, well, well; there we have it—weasel words from the hon. Gentleman. I hope that people in Glasgow see that. He has the opportunity today to stand with the rest of us who want a people's vote, and what does he do? He does what the Labour party has done year after year; he sells out the people of Scotland. The people of Glasgow North East will extract a price from the hon. Gentleman when at the next election the SNP wins back that seat for the people of Scotland.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), whom I disagree with, is a friend of mine. However, it is a bit rich for Labour Members—and I include the hon. Gentleman in this—who have spent two years in a period of Herculean self-flagellation over a people's vote, to come to the House today as though they are some kind of voice of authority on the matter and seek to lecture those of us on the SNP Benches, or indeed the TIGs up at the back, on a people's vote. I only wish that they were as eloquent on their feet as they sometimes think they are. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. I appeal to Labour Members—and I am looking at them now—to show some responsibility. *[Interruption.]* Yes, they can wave, but this is serious. They should come through the Lobby with us tonight, or be exposed, frankly, for exactly what they are. They have failed at this time of crisis to stand up for the people of Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I am going to make some progress.

Parliament has repeatedly rejected the Prime Minister's deal and leaving with no deal. Both those points must be respected. When we said no to her deal, we meant it. Only a fresh referendum can now unblock things. The UK Government must now extend article 50 and set in motion plans to hold a second EU referendum, with remain on the ballot paper. Staying in the European Union is the best deal of all. It is what Scotland voted for. It is the only way to protect jobs, living standards, our public services and the economy. Holding a second EU referendum is the best and most democratic way out of the impasse at Westminster. Westminster has failed, and the people must now have, and will have, their say.

The SNP tabled an amendment that would have got us out of this mess. Our amendment would have seen the Government move to agree an extension to article 50 with the European Union, to provide time to hold a

second EU referendum. We know that the EU would consider an extension. Only this morning, Donald Tusk tweeted:

“I will appeal to the EU27 to be open to a long extension if the UK finds it necessary to rethink its Brexit strategy and build consensus around it.”

That is the way out for everyone in this Parliament. Our amendment would have ensured that any second EU referendum would include an option to remain in the European Union. That is what is required.

Members must recall the resolutions of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly on 5 March 2019, which opposed the UK Government's exit deal and agreed that a no-deal outcome to the current negotiations on EU withdrawal would be completely unacceptable. This House must wake up to that reality, and to the democratic votes of the institutions of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Members must recognise that democracy means respecting the will of the people, but that means all the people. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain. On that point, I will give way.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I am puzzled by the right hon. Gentleman's desire for a third referendum. In 2014 he disrespected the outcome. In 2016 he disrespected the outcome. If we had a third referendum, would he respect the outcome then? Would there be a change?

Ian Blackford: It is quite remarkable. I always love to hear from the Scottish Conservatives, who have been sent here temporarily to represent some constituents in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that in 2014 we were told that if Scotland stayed in the United Kingdom, our rights as EU citizens would be respected—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: They were guaranteed.

Ian Blackford: Indeed, they were guaranteed by many Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) must reflect on the fact that Scotland voted overwhelmingly to stay in the European Union, yet we are being dragged out by this House. He and his friends have not stood up for their constituents in Scotland, in every single local authority area. They have been tin-eared to the interests of the Scottish people. *[Interruption.]* Yes, he can sit and laugh, but they have failed to stand up for their constituents. That has been the case with every single Conservative Member of Parliament.

We in the Scottish National party are not prepared to sit back and see ourselves dragged out of the European Union against our will. The people of Scotland are sovereign, and this House respected that sovereignty when it passed a resolution on the Claim of Right last July. If the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock believes in democracy, he should reflect on the fact that in the Scottish Parliament there is a majority for a referendum on Scottish independence—it resolved by 69 votes to 59 to allow the Scottish Parliament to have a referendum. I say to all hon. Members that if the First Minister of Scotland, with the backing of the Scottish Parliament, does decide to give the people of Scotland that opportunity to secure our future as a European nation, I would expect this House to recognise democracy

[*Ian Blackford*]

and the position of the Scottish people, and to recognise that an independence referendum should, must and will take place.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): If the right hon. Gentleman is so confident in the views of the Scottish people and that they want a second independence referendum, why does he not suggest to his colleague the First Minister of Scotland to call an early Scottish parliamentary election, stand on a clear and explicit call for a second independence referendum, and put it to the test? The Scottish Conservative party is ready to go and will take the right hon. Gentleman on and will prove that the Scottish people do not want a second independence referendum.

Ian Blackford: Dear, oh dear: talk about bravado! We have a mandate from the people of Scotland and what we are asking is that the Conservatives, if they are democrats, recognise that right of Scotland to determine its own future.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am hearing calls from Conservatives for an election. If there was an election, I wonder if those self-same Conservatives would accept it being fought on independence, and if the SNP were to win a majority of seats we would move to independence on that basis, as Margaret Thatcher said, even without a referendum.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Interesting and diverting though it is to listen to the internal wrangling of the Scottish independence argument, might it be possible to persuade the SNP spokesman to remember what this debate is meant to be about? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Newlands, calm yourself; you are usually an unassuming gentleman, but you seem to be getting quite carried away.

I accept the thrust of what the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) has just said. Frankly, I think the criticism applies to Members on both sides; a certain tribalism is in danger of enveloping the House, but we must focus on the substance of the debate and there is not that long.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker, although I may say that all I have been doing is responding to interventions from the Government side.

As I was saying, 62% of Scotland voted to remain; every single Scottish local authority area did so. So if the UK Government and indeed the Opposition believe Scotland is an equal partner, it is time that they showed respect for the will of the Scottish people. Scotland will not be taken out of the EU against its will.

Time and again the SNP and our Government in Edinburgh have sought to achieve compromise; we have suggested solution after solution to protect the interests of citizens in Scotland and across the UK. [*Interruption.*] That issue about lack of respect is amply shown here. [*Interruption.*] I can see the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) laughing away.

The Scottish Government issued a paper, "Scotland's Place in Europe", in December 2016 with contributions from a wide number of experts across the land, and the UK Government could not even be bothered to respond. That is lack of respect, which is demonstrated once again this afternoon by those on the Conservative Benches. I hope the people of Scotland reflect on that, because frankly those Members do themselves a great disservice. This Government would not listen. This Prime Minister and the Tory party care only about the interests of England. They talk about nationalists and separatists; the real separatists sit on the Conservative Benches.

The Prime Minister and the Tory party do not care about Scotland's interests, and the truth is neither does the Leader of the Opposition: neither the Tories nor Labour give a toss about Scotland. Just look at the polls: earlier this week we saw Westminster voting intention for the SNP up 4%; for the Conservatives down 3%; and for Labour down 3%. Even so-called Scottish Tory MPs went through the Lobby last night to keep no deal on the table. They ignored the wishes of the Scottish people; they voted to leave with no deal on the table and the chaos that would ensue—they voted to put leave on the table with the prospect of shortage of medicines.

The Scottish Tories come with a health warning: they risk damaging the health of the people of Scotland. That is true after months and months of ignoring the voices of the people of Scotland and after years of showing nothing but contempt for our Government, our Parliament and our people. I urge MPs across this House, looking to the Scottish Tories and to the Scottish Labour MPs, to ask themselves: "Do you stand with Scotland? Will you stand up for Scotland's national interests or will you instead stand up for your narrow party interests only?" I appeal to them: the time has come to put party aside. [*Laughter.*] People will be watching this and reading *Hansard*. What do we get? We get laughter from those on the Government Benches. That is what Scotland gets: not being taken seriously, but being laughed at, not so much as an afterthought.

The time has come to do what is right, what is necessary. Those Members are duty-bound to the people of Scotland to stand up for their interests, and should do that by standing with the SNP. What about the Secretary of State for Scotland, who abstained on an issue as critical as removing no-deal? He was standing on the sidelines as Scottish jobs are threatened. He ought to have resigned by now, but this really is the last straw. If he has any shred of dignity and possible remorse after having failed again to stand up for Scotland, he should do the right thing—he should resign. [*Interruption.*]

Ian Murray: I have tremendous respect for the right hon. Gentleman for giving way during his speech. He has to be careful that he does not tar everyone with the same brush. When I wrote to the First Minister of Scotland in July last year to ask whether she and the SNP would support a people's vote, she wrote back to me and said no. I am therefore glad that come late October the SNP did support a public vote and I am glad that we will be voting likewise on that. Can he confirm to the House—[*Interruption.*] It is funny that I still get barracked even when I agree with him. Can he confirm to the House that his support for a public vote is completely unconditional and does not include a condition of holding an independence referendum?

Ian Blackford: I am genuinely fond of the hon. Gentleman, but I have to say to him that if he wants to write to someone to ask whether a leader is going to support a people's vote, he should be writing to his own leader. I can tell him that every SNP Member will be going through the Lobby today to vote for a people's vote. I say to him: come and join us. He will be very welcome in doing that, and I would applaud him for doing that.

The way Scotland has been ignored throughout the Brexit process means that the case for independence is now stronger than it has ever been. I respect that our amendment has not been selected today, but had it been taken it would have been the best way to protect the will of the Scottish people, as it sought to stop Scotland being dragged out of the EU against our will. That can best be avoided by the people of Scotland exercising their sovereign right to choose their own constitutional future as a full, equal, sovereign, independent member state of the European Union. We did not ask for this Brexit crisis. The people of Scotland do not want this chaos. The damage and destruction caused to British politics has been the fault of Conservatives and Labour alone. Make no mistake: the United Kingdom is facing a constitutional crisis. Decades of neglect by consecutive Labour and Conservative Governments have seen our people let down, and have seen the economy grow weaker and smaller, with wages stagnating, communities divided and public services on their knees. This is broken Britain. The cracks appeared before Brexit, but Westminster has failed to fill them in. Now, Britain is shattering; divisions are deeper, politically and socially. This is not a Union that we want to be part of.

I look instead to our work in Scotland, and how devolution has developed our society and how our Scottish Government have built up our communities and broken down barriers. Our constituents get free education and free prescriptions; our children get the best start in life, regardless of their family circumstances; our society looks out to the world; and we welcome EU nationals to become part of our communities.

Peter Grant: My right hon. Friend has commented previously on the Government's abject failure to seek any kind of cross-House consensus in the almost three years since the referendum. I do not know whether he is aware that as recently as 22 February this year, the Irish Government introduced an omnibus Bill consisting of no fewer than 15 pieces of legislation across the responsibilities of nine Government Departments. Yesterday, just three weeks later, it was unanimously approved by the Irish Senate with cross-party support. Is that an example of what might have been achieved in this place had we had a Government who were willing to follow the example of our friends and relatives across the Irish sea?

Ian Blackford: My hon. Friend makes a good point. When the Prime Minister called the election and lost her majority, one would have thought she would have reflected on the fact that minority government meant she needed to work with other parties and build a consensus, yet all that time has been lost.

The choice is clear. Scotland is already a fairer, healthier, happier nation. We feel closely bound to our historic bonds with Europe. We in the SNP will fight to keep Scotland moving forward. We will not be dragged down by the narrowness of Westminster. We want to build an

independent nation—a nation that welcomes everyone, that works for everyone and that believes opportunities should be for everyone. Brexit will not stop Scotland.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to inform the House that with immediate effect we will need to have a six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. How long that limit lasts will depend on colleagues.

3.6 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): In following the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), may I tell him that the people of the United Kingdom will not be kept in the European Union against their will? I hope that he will support and respect that.

In June 2016, the people of the United Kingdom demonstrated our collective common sense and self-confidence by voting to take back control of our national destiny and to reassert our parliamentary sovereignty. The people's vision expressed in the referendum result was that of a strong United Kingdom, holding its head high, free from the shackles of the European Union, while promoting international free trade as the key to future national prosperity and the best antidote to global poverty.

We should be expecting to leave the EU in 15 days and there should be an air of excitement about all this, but I detect a certain gloom, because today Parliament is being asked to endorse what is no less than an act of national humiliation—to renege on the decision it took two years ago triggering article 50 and to repeal or amend the Act it passed last year to leave the European Union on 29 March. By dishonouring the decision on article 50 and the result of the referendum, the Government motion before us is a gross betrayal.

As a member of the Exiting the European Union Committee, I have witnessed at first hand on our visits to Brussels the extent to which the Government are now a laughing stock. The most serious criticism of the UK is focused on our Prime Minister for signing up to a deal that she has subsequently disowned. They see that in Brussels as an act of bad faith, which is one reason why they have refused to make changes to the withdrawal agreement.

My amendment (g) is on the Order Paper. It has not been selected for debate, but had it been, it would have allowed the Government to seek to agree with the European Union an extension of the period specified in article 50(3) until 22 May, for the specific purpose of replacing the United Kingdom negotiating team. We need to replace our current team because it has gone back on so many of its promises to Parliament and to the people. The only way to regain self-respect is to have a fresh team of negotiators. I include among that team its head—none other than the Prime Minister.

Two years ago the House endorsed the Prime Minister's negotiating approach as set out in the Lancaster House speech. The Prime Minister contemplated a scenario of the European Union imposing a punishment deal on us. That is why at the time she waxed eloquent about the benefits of no deal over a bad deal, which included delivering our freedom to negotiate trade deals and, ultimately, enabling us to set out our own economic model to deliver prosperity and growth.

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

The Prime Minister promised that the divorce settlement and the future relationship would be negotiated alongside each other, that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed, and, on the substance, that we would leave the single market, the customs union and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. None of that is guaranteed in her deal. For all her protestations, the Prime Minister's deal does not meet her own criteria, and her negotiations have sadly resulted in the punishment deal that she feared. Her insistence that her deal is a good deal is not accepted by the House; indeed, the House has overwhelmingly rejected it on two occasions. But instead of accepting the verdict of the House, she is stubbornly continuing to assert that her deal is a good deal, and now she is holding a pistol to our heads by threatening that we will lose Brexit altogether. It is intolerable that the Prime Minister is asking those of us who oppose her deal to tear up our manifesto commitments, and to break our word to our constituents and electors.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis that the Prime Minister's negotiating position and skills have been pathetic. If the Opposition table a motion of no confidence, will the hon. Gentleman vote for it, because it is the logic of his position?

Sir Christopher Chope: Frankly, I would seriously consider that issue. I expressed no confidence in the Prime Minister when we had a vote within our own parliamentary party and my considered opinion now is that, were a similar vote to be held, there would be an overwhelming vote against the Prime Minister and an expression of no confidence in her. One then thinks about the logical extension of that. I am not going to make any promises to the hon. Gentleman now, but obviously it would need the Leader of the Opposition to initiate such a move. I think that Government Members who felt that they were being betrayed would then actually look at the implications flowing from that.

Obtaining a parliamentary majority for the Prime Minister's deal is now beyond reach. It is pure fantasy to think otherwise. The Prime Minister's deal does not even satisfy the requirement, for which the Prime Minister herself voted, of replacing the backstop. Nor does it provide a legal answer to the Attorney General's concern that the Prime Minister's deal would leave the UK with "no internationally lawful means of exiting the Protocol's arrangements, save by agreement."

Who would want to sign up to that? It means that we would have less ability to leave the agreement than we have at the moment to leave the European Union. How can the Prime Minister think that we are seriously going to support that?

Our current negotiating team no longer enjoys the trust of Parliament, the European Union or even many members of the Government, as was graphically illustrated last night. The feeling on the Conservative Benches now is really strongly against the Prime Minister and her team. She has lost control, and at this most critical moment in our modern peacetime history, we need to change the general. If we were to change Prime Minister now, there would be a case for a short extension to article 50, but in no other circumstances.

3.13 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I will speak to amendment (i), which stands in my name.

Our country faces a crisis: we have rejected the Prime Minister's deal twice; we have affirmed that we will not support leaving the European Union without an agreement in any circumstances; and it is now inevitable that the Government will apply for the extension to article 50. Amendment (i) seeks to do two things. The first is to set out the purpose for which an extension would be sought, and that is, very simply, to enable the House of Commons to find the way forward that can command majority support. That should not be contentious. Indeed, I am somewhat surprised that that was not included in the Government's own motion. The second aim is to enable the House of Commons next Wednesday to discuss how we are going to organise that process.

It would be preferable if the Government, in response to recent defeats they have suffered, had come forward to propose their own specific plan, but they have not yet done so. I listened very carefully to what the Minister said about reaching out in the two weeks after the March Council, but he seemed to be saying that the Government would only do that if it were a long extension rather than a short extension. I do not understand, for the life of me, why it could not happen with a short extension, because the problem is not that the House does not want to try to find a way forward—I think we all understand the responsibility we have—it is that the House has never been given the chance to do so.

We all recognise, however, that whatever view we have about what should happen next—there is a multiplicity of views in the House, and every one of them should be listened to—we have to find a way of agreeing a plan that can command majority support. The Prime Minister is correct when she says that, in the end, the House must be in favour of something. There are a number of different ways in which that can be done, including holding a series of votes on different options—as the Brexit Committee, among others, has recommended, and I support that approach—but the amendment does not specify what the method should be. That would rest with the motion to which the amendment seeks to give priority next Wednesday—a motion that would need to win widespread support to appear on the Order Paper. Members are not being asked to agree the precise process today. All the amendment seeks to do—I am afraid, in the current jargon—is to book a slot so that we have the chance to debate how we are going to resolve this.

In response to the objections raised by the Minister—he read out his speech diligently but I was not entirely sure that his heart was entirely in it—the amendment is not seeking to usurp the role of the Executive. Indeed, if the Executive were doing their job right, then the amendment would not be necessary. It is about enabling the House to debate a way forward and then vote on it. Doing that can never—never—be described as undemocratic; it is us doing our job as Members of Parliament.

The requirement in paragraph (3) of the amendment that at least 25 Members from at least five different parties would need to back a motion is not constructed to deny anybody a voice. As I made clear to the Minister when he kindly took an intervention from me, anyone can put down an amendment to that motion, but the amendment is worded in that way to encourage different

Members from different parties to come together to propose a way forward that can win the support of the House.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's speech and I have some sympathy with this amendment. Can I confirm whether he will support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) in terms of its proposed time limit for when we leave the European Union?

Hilary Benn: I will indeed be happy to accept that amendment, which I understand is going to be voted on separately. I say that because, if the House does not reach an agreement and still does not want to leave without a deal, it may, at some point, ask for a further extension.

The reason we need to do this today is the way that section 13 of European Union (Withdrawal) Act is structured. The Government's draft withdrawal agreement and political declaration were of course defeated on Tuesday. Under section 13(4) of the Act, the Government are required to make a statement on how they propose to proceed and then to propose a motion in neutral terms that can be amended. The problem, particularly because the Government have not yet specified when they propose to bring that forward, is that the Act gives the Government 21 days from the day on which the House of Commons decided not to approve the deal, which was this Tuesday, and then a further seven Commons sitting days from the date of the statement to lay a motion in neutral terms. What that means, very simply, is that the Government will not be obliged to give the House a chance to amend any proposals on a way forward until after 29 March. Clearly, given the crisis we face, that will not do. I hope that Members will feel able to support this amendment, not least given the cross-party support that it has attracted.

I turn now to the extension of article 50. It is of course essential that we achieve that, because without it, the House would be faced with only one choice if it wishes to avoid a no-deal Brexit on 29 March. That would be to revoke article 50, unless between now and then the political declaration can be amended in a way that commands the support of the House. Given that, for more than two and a half years, the House has not really been given the opportunity to express its view on what it would support, that is very unlikely to happen in the two weeks that are left. That is why this amendment is needed.

We must be honest about the difficulty that we face. The leaders of the EU are paying close attention to our deliberations. They want to see a purpose. We have a credibility problem. There are different views about the length of any extension, but the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central would be helpful, and I am happy to support it.

The House is being watched by the British people. They see chaos and uncertainty. Businesses have no idea what is going to happen next. EU citizens do not know what is going to happen. We have a responsibility to demonstrate that this Parliament can and will do its job.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Well, a particular Member I was going to call is sadly not in his place. What an extraordinary state of affairs. In fact, there were two Members I was going to call—whom I had advised I was going to call—and neither is present.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): Shocking.

Mr Speaker: I concur with the Minister. Shocking. I call Neil Parish.

3.21 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Perhaps their loss is my gain, because I am speaking a little sooner.

It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate because I feel that we have somewhat lost the plot here in Parliament. I have done a lot of canvassing throughout my constituency—in all my major towns such as Honiton, Tiverton, Cullompton, Seaton and Axminster—and as far as people are concerned, they voted in 2016 to leave. They had the people's vote and they decided. What they cannot understand is why we have not actually left or will not leave on 29 March. They really do not understand it at all. What I cannot understand from one or two of my hon. Friends is why, when we have a strong economy and growing employment and we want to spend money on the health service, education and police, we do not just get on with it and leave the EU.

I was a remain voter, but in the end the EU is becoming more federal and an institution that we will want to leave. But we want to leave with a deal and a trade deal. You would have thought that we could have done it, that we could have all joined together. In the past I have supported the Prime Minister because, first, I believe that she is right and, secondly, I cannot go into the opposite Lobby.

I have a great deal of time for the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), and if he was here I would say the same thing. He stands in the Lobby like a big spider, and we know what spiders do to flies—spiders eat flies. So our Members who take an extreme position on a different type of deal for Brexit walk into the same Lobby as the right hon. Member for Exeter. But the right hon. Gentleman is clear that he does not want to leave the EU. He wants to revoke article 50 and remain in the EU. My colleagues going in there with this spider want a much tougher Brexit; they do not like the deal that is on the table. They are completely contrary positions.

This Parliament and my party have to decide whether they want to go along, rightly, with what the British people said. I stood on a manifesto to deliver Brexit, like all my colleagues, and Labour Members all did the same. All we are doing is thwarting Brexit. People might wrap it up in all sorts of different clothes, but that is exactly where we are. Therefore, we have to come together and vote, believe it or not, for the Prime Minister's deal.

The Prime Minister's deal is a withdrawal agreement. It is not a trade agreement. It leads to the trade agreement. It means that we leave in an orderly fashion. It means our businesses can trade across borders—we will not have the problem in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that a tariff may be charged on lambs coming into Northern Ireland but not on going out, or vice versa—and it will deal with all of the problems that can happen to our businesses. Travel arrangements are covered by the withdrawal agreement so that we can travel. Human rights, workers' rights and all of those things are in this withdrawal agreement.

All we spend our time in this House doing is nit-picking just to see what we can find wrong with the withdrawal agreement. It is a bit like selling a house, Mr Speaker.

[Neil Parish]

You take ages trying to sell a house because you cannot get the price for it, but as soon as you have sold it, a whole load of people come along and say they would have paid you more for it. Everybody's got a different idea, but they are not actually doing the negotiations.

As far as my residents are concerned—and, I reckon, most residents in most constituencies in this country—they just want the deal done. They believe that we just make it complicated. They believe that the majority in this House voted for remain, and that therefore we will not carry out the wishes of the people. I voted remain, but I will carry out the wishes of the people, because I believe we need to leave, and leave with a deal.

We like to lambast the Prime Minister all the time in this place. Again, I go out all the time and talk to my residents on the streets, and I assure hon. Members that the Prime Minister is actually very popular still. They think she was dealt a very bad hand of cards, and all we have done is to make it more difficult. Believe it or not—hon. Members will all laugh at me when I say this—I think the withdrawal agreement will come back once more, and I actually believe that it might well go through this House, because the British people expect us to leave on 29 March.

3.26 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): I rise to speak to amendment (h) in my name and that of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). It seeks an extension to allow us to obtain the consent of the British people to whatever deal is approved by this House, with an option to remain.

Many of us believe that consent is at the heart of this argument. We are repeatedly told that the Prime Minister's deal is the will of the people. The truth of the matter is that it is not the will of Parliament. It has been voted down by this place by 230 at the first time of asking, and by 149 at the second time of asking. However, I would say that there is no evidence that it is the will of the public either. It is certainly not the will of the 48%, nor is it the will of a very significant number of those who voted to leave—both in this place and outside—because they write to tell me so very vigorously that they do not think that this is the Brexit they voted for.

The truth is that the great Brexit charlatans have been exposed for the lies they perpetrated during the campaign. This Brexit is nothing like the sunlit uplands that they were promised, and I would ask people how many of them would have voted for this dog's Brexit if it had been presented to them at that time.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): My hon. Friend is talking about consent, and there has been discussion about that. As a surgeon, I have always had to have explicit, signed, informed consent, and such a discussion is always based on risks and benefits. We did not have that debate before the referendum, and we have had it only now, so it is only now that people have had the chance to learn how this Brexit deal will affect them.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for that, and she is absolutely right. For someone to be able to consent to something, they need to know what they are consenting to. Let us face it: the risks and benefits of

the various versions of Brexit are very different. The risks and benefits of no deal, WTO, the Prime Minister's deal, Norway and Norway plus the customs union are very different procedures, if we talk about this in strictly clinical terms.

The other thing about consent is that nobody would seriously proceed on the basis of a consent form that was signed nearly three years ago. Furthermore, young people in this country face being wheeled into the operating theatre for major constitutional, social and economic surgery based on a consent form that was signed by their grandparents nearly three years ago. This is the point: given the sheer weight, significance and implications for all of their futures, what is the constitutional outrage or the democratic outrage about pausing to check that we have their consent?

I say to those on the Government Front Bench that they will never be forgiven for the consequences of Brexit, unless they have taken the time to pause and ask for explicit consent for their version of it. Even if the House were to approve a Norway-style Brexit, with or without a customs union, that will still not represent what many people out there thought Brexit should be. There is therefore a compelling case for all hon. Members to be honest about the way people feel about this issue, and to pause to ask for explicit consent. If the Prime Minister were a surgeon, she would be struck off if she proceeded without consent.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Perhaps I could butt in on this medical love-in. When making her diagnosis, the hon. Lady seems to ignore that the patient is the EU. Does she seriously think that the health of the EU has improved so much after the last three years that the view of the public in this country would be any more endeared to it, given that 75% of the eurozone is in recession? It is Europe that has changed, not us.

Dr Wollaston: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention—I still consider him a friend, even though I am on the Opposition Benches—but I gently point out that it is good he is not a surgeon if he cannot recognise who the patient is.

Many Members have made the point that now is not the time for this amendment and that we should table it later, but it has been a bit like "Waiting for Godot". "Now" will never be the right time, and we are just 15 days from falling off the cliff. I was there in the summer with 700,000 people who marched through the streets. Their call was: "We demand a people's vote". When did they want it? They wanted it now. They were not saying, "We want it when it is convenient for the Labour Front Bench".

I am sorry—I say this with great sincerity to Labour colleagues—but there was a clear promise to move to support a people's vote, and it is simply no good to keep backtracking on that. Today is the time for us to vote for this amendment. It may fail—I accept that—but there is nothing to stop us bringing it back and voting for it again.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Wollaston: I am afraid I am not able to give way. I urge all colleagues who know that they support a people's vote to vote for this amendment today, and again when

they get the opportunity. If people never demonstrate that they supported a people's vote that will be their greatest regret, and I am afraid the chances are that those on the Labour Front Bench will never move to wholeheartedly and unequivocally support a people's vote, unless there is significant pressure to do so. Those of us, from many parties, who have come together to press for a people's vote will support the amendment today. We urge hon. Members to join us, and to support it again next week.

3.33 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Above all else, Brexit is about reclaiming power from the globalist elite. We owe a great debt to the 17.4 million people who voted for Brexit. Not only did they bravely risk taking back control of our sovereign governance; our laws, our borders and our economy, but they exposed an arrogant self-serving elite in this nation, some of whom sit in this Chamber. As the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) spoke about her day out on the march for a people's vote, I could just imagine it: Glyndebourne, the Henley regatta, and the people's vote march—it is all part of the season for certain kinds of people. Following their democratic defeat in the biggest vote—

Anna Soubry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Hayes: I will just make a little progress. I want to flesh out my case against the elite—[*Interruption.*] Not quite yet. I may give way later when I have finished fleshing out my case against the elite, which the right hon. Lady has decided to join. I say join, because she was not born to it.

Following that democratic defeat in the biggest vote for anything in British history, much of the liberal establishment has responded with stunned entitlement and deafening hysteria. The essence of the reason for that hysterical reaction is that these people are not used to being told that they are not right. They are not used to having their sense of entitlement challenged. That sense of entitlement is not just a material thing—an advantage in terms of place and progress—it is also the self-serving entitlement that prohibits views other than their own and wants to delegitimise the opinion of the vast majority of law-abiding, patriotic, decent British people who voted for Brexit. That is the truth of it, and it needs to be said in this Chamber.

Anna Soubry *rose*—

Chuka Umunna *rose*—

Sir John Hayes: I will happily give way to the right hon. Lady, as she was first and as a matter of chivalry.

Anna Soubry: Fascinating. May I ask the right hon. Gentleman—a knight of the realm, of course, and perhaps a member of a new elite—whether he understands that across the length and breadth of this country, in places like Redcar, where the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) is more than able to make the case, as I know she does, people are supporting a people's vote? Is he saying that the people of Nottingham, a city with which he is well familiar, are an elite? In Nottingham, in Redcar, in Sunderland, in south Yorkshire and indeed in Streatham—are they elites?

Sir John Hayes: I will tell the right hon. Lady what happened in Redcar the last time we had a people's vote—for we have had a people's vote in this country; it was called the referendum—since she draws attention to Redcar: 66.2% of the people who voted there voted to leave the European Union. In Middlesbrough, Redcar, Bassetlaw, Ashfield, Mansfield, Hartlepool, Stoke-on-Trent, Barnsley, Kingston upon Hull and Blackpool—I could go on—more than 65% of the population who voted in the biggest ever reference to the people voted to leave the European Union. They expect this House to deliver on that.

When this House chose to delegate its authority to the people—I do not say that that should be done lightly; I am not a great fan of referendums, frankly, because they create binary choices about what are very complicated arguments—we, by nature, invested our faith in what the people decided. To breach that faith now, to break that promise, would undermine confidence in the democratic process in a way that scarcely anything has done before.

Heidi Allen *rose*—

Sir John Hayes: Speaking of the democratic process, I will happily give way to the hon. Lady, who was elected as a Conservative and has now chosen not to be one.

Heidi Allen: I feel fortunate that I did not actually hear what the right hon. Gentleman called me. Regardless, I just wanted to check whether it was an act of chivalry not to allow the good people of Redcar, Barnsley and Nottingham to have their voice again. Is it an act of chivalry not to allow them to say how they feel today?

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Lady must understand that once you have agreed to have a referendum, which is what this House did by an overwhelming majority, and once you have stood on a manifesto that pledged—as both Labour Members and she did, by the way—to honour the result of that referendum, if you then choose to delay, defer, obfuscate or dilute that commitment, you will be seen to have breached the trust in which people deserve to hold those they choose to speak for them in this mother of Parliaments.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Hayes: I am not going to give way again, because I am conscious that others want to speak, I have a short time limit, and it is interrupting my lovely flow.

The truth is that there are people here who campaigned for remain—many Opposition Members and many Government Members—who respect the result of the referendum, who want to honour the pledge that we made, who want to do the right thing by the people and who want to leave the European Union, but there is a minority who are unreconciled to the result of the referendum and who are using every means at their disposal, fair and foul, to frustrate its result. They are hiding behind all kinds of improbable and incredible excuses for so doing, and frankly, the people's vote campaign is among them.

[Sir John Hayes]

You need to know, Mr Speaker, and I am sure the House needs to know too, that some of us stand resolute in opposition to this further reference to the people—as if we've not had a people's vote. If we were to agree to it, what if, on a lower turnout, people voted to remain? What if it was a marginal decision once again, by a smaller margin than last time? Would we have a third referendum to settle the matter? Is it going to be the best of three, the best of five, or perhaps the best of seven? How many referendums must we have before the settled will of the people is established?

I stand for the people, of the people and by the people. I am proud to have got to this place from where I began, but unlike some hon. Members, I have not forgotten my origins and will stick by the people, and the people want to leave the European Union on time, lock, stock and barrel.

3.41 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Normally it is a pleasure for me to follow the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), and normally he is warm and inclusive, but I must say to him that I think that was a divisive speech that was not the right one to make in these circumstances. I will refrain from asking him whether by the global elite, he meant Eton-educated millionaires at the heart of a European Research Group campaign for no deal who can afford to move their assets around, because that is the kind of discussion we get into when we start those sorts of speeches. I do not actually think that is going to help us to come together, and we are going to have to come together somehow, somewhen.

In fact, it is the failure of the Government to attempt to bring people together since the referendum that is why we are in this mess now. It is the failure of the Government and the Prime Minister to put any deal to this House until 22 of the 24 months of article 50 were already run down. They have been running down the clock, just putting the same deal back to us again without actually listening or ever giving this House and the country the opportunity to properly debate what kind of Brexit we should be pursuing—whether it should be nearly Norway or close to Canada—and what really we should be talking about. We have a responsibility now to find a way through this very difficult situation.

That is why I think it is so important to back amendment (i), tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), which is about trying to set forward a process for Parliament to do what the Government, frankly, should have done ages ago. We should have had indicative votes ages ago. It was good to hear the Minister putting forward proposals for indicative votes, but this is way later in the process than it should have been. Also, I do not accept the conditions that he put on us having the indicative votes in the first place, and that is what I want to address.

The Minister seemed to be arguing that to be able to have a proper debate on indicative votes—or whichever kind of approach it is in order for the House to come together on what we should be for—we either have to have a very long extension or we have to have European elections, or we have to do both. I do not accept that we have to do that, because I do not think the Government

are credible in their use of time. They make time a political issue, rather than a sensible issue. Time is a weapon that they use to somehow say that they can do everything incredibly quickly when they are using brinksmanship to get a vote through, but then they say the process will take an incredibly long time when they want to get the same meaningful vote through that we have already debated and rejected twice, basically because so many of us on both sides of the House think that it will weaken us for the negotiations ahead. We want an approach that can be a strong one for our country, not a weak one.

I think that it should be possible for us to come to some decisions much more quickly than the Minister suggested. I think that, in the interests of securing consensus on some steps forward, the House should support the amendment to amendment (i) tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell). I also think that we should have an opportunity next week to debate what a sensible process should be. Let us bring some common sense back into this process so that we can get some agreement.

The issue of the European elections is important. It makes no sense for a state that is in the middle of article 50—a departing state—to have to hold European elections. A letter from President Juncker suggested that we would have to hold elections if the extension went beyond 23 May, which is clearly an inappropriate approach. That is why I think that what has been said, and tweeted last night, by Eleanor Sharpston, an advocate general at the European Court of Justice, is so significant. I urge Members to look at that tweet if they want to see the details. She has said that

“were there to be an extension of the Article 50 period, it would (clearly) be inappropriate for the UK to hold EP”—

European parliamentary—

“elections in May”.

However, there are precedents; there are approaches that could be taken. Eleanor Sharpston says that article 50 is the mirror provision of article 49, which was used as a basis for special arrangements for Croatia so that it did not have to hold European elections at the time of its accession. She points to other possible mechanisms as well.

None of this is easy, and I wish that we were not in this position, but the reason we are is the way in which the Prime Minister has handled things up to now. We must find a way forward that respects our constituents and enables us all to come together. I hope that we can do that, rather than just going round in the same circles time and time again.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. A four-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches now applies.

3.46 pm

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): This is an important debate, but I think that most members of the public who are listening to it or watching it are probably losing the will to live, as I am. Yet again Parliament has confronted a long-term issue, on this occasion Brexit, and has failed to find a long-term path forward. I think that the only difference with Brexit is that there was a

deadline for it, and today we are discussing the fact that that deadline is about to be missed, because we are simply not prepared for a departure on 29 March.

There is gridlock in this place, and we must find a way through it. I am sorry to say that while I think there may be a consensus here, I also think that the steps the Government have taken to keep bringing back so-called meaningful votes have actively got in the way of Parliament's finding a consensus on a way forward. Ministers need to understand that there is no point in calling those votes meaningful any more, because they are actually meaningless.

Tim Loughton: Although we are on different sides of the argument, I have great respect for my right hon. Friend, but does she not remember that the “meaningful votes” considerations were inserted in the legislation not at the will of the Government but at the will of Back Benchers, and that the House agreed to the 29 March deadline across all parties? Now, for some reason, some of those Members do not want to agree to it.

Justine Greening: Indeed, and the purpose of the meaningful vote was to ensure that Parliament could give its assent to a path forward, which was a very sensible step.

The original deadline of 29 March was part of the outcome of the Lancaster House speech, in which the Prime Minister said, “We will have agreed a future partnership by the end of the two-year article 50 process.” That, of course, has not happened. The speech also set out for the first time the Government's position that no deal was better than a bad deal—“no deal”, in that context, referring to a future partnership. We are effectively leaving with no deal, and that is one of the reasons we have reached the point today of having to discuss the fact that we still cannot find a route forward, although we absolutely need to. After last night, it is clear that there is little appetite in the House for leaving with what I would now call a double no deal—in other words, no future partnership, and no agreement on how we even withdraw from the European Union itself.

A meaningful vote 3.0 is, as I have said, an oxymoron in the context of the votes that the Government plan to bring forward. Yet again, it will risk Parliament failing on a long-term issue, because achieving consensus on one vote at one moment does not achieve real consensus. It is a fake consensus that will simply unravel, again disappointing the public, who want to see us get behind a real route forward. The Government now need to understand that their deal is simply not popular, either here in this House, for very valid reasons, or with the public.

Heidi Allen: I appreciate the right hon. Lady allowing me an intervention. The repeating of meaningful votes seems somewhat ironic, in that Parliament can vote repeatedly on the same deal yet the British public cannot do so, but let us gloss over that for a moment. Does this not do a disservice to Parliament? Surely the 52:48 referendum result and the disastrous 2017 general election result are the only reasons needed to prove that this Government are in office but not in power, as we saw again last night. This House has a job to do, but we are being deprived of our ability to do that job for our constituents and to be involved in finding a solution.

Justine Greening: I agree that we need collectively to find a way forward. Party politics and both Front Benches have got in the way of our doing that. In the context of the steps we now need to take, I agree that we need to have votes on the alternative proposals—common market 2.0, Malthouse or whatever—so that we can test whether there is consensus behind any of them, but those votes should be free votes. Brexit is not about party politics. The party machine constantly whipping votes does not serve our country or this vitally important issue well, and it is getting in the way of the House genuinely finding out whether we can agree on anything apart from the fact that we do not like the Prime Minister's deal.

I personally think that the way to achieve this is to recognise that there is a spectrum of opinion in this House. People hold their views in totally good faith. They represent very different communities and they themselves have different views on Brexit. This is perhaps one of those naturally binary and quite divisive topics, and we have to confront that fact. That is why I do not think we will reach a conclusion on this gridlock. We have to stop circling around the issue. Ministers now need to show some leadership and unblock a route forward with parliamentarians in this place.

Frankly, I would be happy for people to pick from a spectrum of very different outcomes for this country's path forward. The reality is that we had a referendum about leaving the European Union, not about where we were going to go. We cannot agree on what people think the destination should be, and we therefore need almost to finish off the referendum. We need to go back to the people with a further one to find out where they actually want to go. That is the choice. We will end up with a public vote on Brexit. It is a question of whether it will be a general election, which I do not think will resolve the issues that this House continues to grapple with, or a public vote on Brexit—the actual issue at hand, on which we desperately need to find a direction for our country.

If an extension allows us the space to finally come up with a strategy for a route forward, it will have been worth it purely for that. From my perspective, it should be the shortest possible extension that will give the House the space to do that. It should not be an open-ended extension that would simply give us the chance to go round in circles, achieving nothing and destroying investment in this country.

3.53 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I wonder why the Conservative Benches are so empty. Is it because Conservative Members are all at the Uxbridge Unicorn Tavern being sold Golden Brexit beer? And when they taste it, does it taste so awful that they spit it out in the street, only for Boris the barman to say, “No, no, no—you ordered it, you've got to drink it”?

I stand here speaking on behalf of people in Swansea who voted leave because they were told they were voting for good things such as more money, more trade, more jobs and more control. They are now finding that they are not going to get any of those things. They are going to have to spend another £40 billion on the divorce bill, and the economy is shrinking by 10%. Trade is going to shrink, and we are going to be outside Team EU when

[Geraint Davies]

we negotiate with China, with Trump and with other countries. We are going to get a worse deal, not a better deal. They voted to control immigration, but immigration will not be controlled with an open border in Northern Ireland. Of course, the risk that we will not have an open border may also put the peace process at risk.

Frankly, any Brexit will make us poorer, weaker, more divided and isolated and will risk environmental rights and workers' rights, so to go ahead with it, given all the knowledge that we now have, would be a collective act of wilful negligence. It would be a betrayal of those who voted leave and a crime against democracy not to give the people the opportunity to judge whether they are getting what they ordered. If we do not give them that opportunity or just simply revoke article 50, we will never be forgiven. Some say that there will be anger if there is another vote—a vote on the deal as opposed to a vote on the principle—but people will be completely enraged if, having voted leave for more money, more jobs and so on, they find that they lose their jobs. There will be turmoil and carnage, and we will never be forgiven.

We have had referendums throughout Britain over the years, including on Wales, Scotland, mayoral elections and so on, and the people have subsequently changed their minds. In the referendum on whether to have a mayor in Manchester, the people voted not to have one, but the Government imposed one. These referendums are advisory, and the Brexit one was characterised by cheating, lying, betrayal and broken promises. In the name of democracy, the people expect to have a vote and to move forward.

It may be the case that we cannot reach an agreement, and it is obvious that people do not agree with the current deal, because there is either too little or too much alignment with the EU. That is why we keep failing to get an agreement. We are running towards the end, and if we say, "Let's have an extension," what if the EU says, "You can't have an extension because you cannot make your mind up"? The choice will then be between crashing out without a deal, with all the carnage, medicine and food shortages and laws not working that that would entail, or revoking article 50 and continuing as usual. I have supported a public vote on the deal to give the people the final say, but if we end up with the choice that I just outlined, we need to revoke article 50 and stay where we are. The people now know how good the EU is, what a good deal we are getting and what we stand to lose.

In conclusion, we need to have faith in the people to decide on what is now on the table. If they do not want it, we should keep the existing deal, which is a very good one.

3.57 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): To say that we have arrived at a moment of constitutional crisis is, if anything, to understate the seriousness of the position in which we find ourselves. The moral authority of this Parliament, which is the keystone of our constitutional arrangements and our democracy, is rapidly ebbing away. All those who participated in the referendum, not least the 17.4 million who voted leave, will be watching our proceedings with a mixture of despair and revulsion.

They are the people who were unequivocally told by the Government in the leaflet circulated to every home in the country:

"This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide."

Every man and woman who voted in the referendum was entitled to take the Government at their word and to trust the Parliament that set up the referendum. However, they now see a political class apparently intent on renegeing on the promise made by the Government, trying every trick in the procedural book, and even some others, to frustrate the will of the people.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): I think the people now see a political class that has twice voted against the Government's commitment to implement the referendum result. We have tried twice to get it through Parliament, but it is that political class that has stopped the will of the people being implemented.

Mr Jones: The vote was on whether we wished to leave the European Union or remain. It did not refer to any particular deal, and it is this Parliament that has voted the deal down. The intention of all this is to stop Brexit. The plain and simple fact is that Parliament contracted out the decision on whether to remain in the European Union to the people of this country, and the decision of the people was absolutely clear: they wanted to leave. Parliament has put in place the legislation to enable us to leave, with a clear departure date that is now just over two weeks away. I remind all hon. Members that that is what this House voted for.

Yet today we have arrived at a point where the Government motion before us seeks to delay the date of our departure. That is after more than 100 repeated assurances by the Prime Minister that we will certainly be leaving on 29 March. We are told that the way to avoid any delay is to support the deal that the Government have concluded with the European Union, yet this House, as my right hon. Friend just mentioned, has twice rejected that deal—most recently only two days ago. The deal is dead. It cannot be resurrected. There is no deal.

The legal position of what this House voted for is that we now leave without a deal on 29 March. That is the law, but that is what the Government's own motion shamefully seeks to frustrate, and I believe that every Member who supports the motion will equally be acting shamefully. He or she will be expressing, as clearly as possible, contempt for the outcome of the referendum and for all those who voted to leave the European Union. Those voters will see what is behind the extraordinary exercise that has taken place over the last three days: a determined attempt by people inside and outside this House to halt Brexit and impose on the British people a second referendum in the hope that Brexit will be stopped altogether. I have no doubt that that ambition is not shared by the people who sent us here.

I am absolutely convinced that people out there are sick and tired of the gyratory antics of parliamentarians. They want an end to the apparently interminable Brexit process. They know the law provides that we leave on 29 March, and they expect this House to do its best to ensure that we do. They have made their decision, and they expect that decision to be implemented.

If we break our promise to the British people, which we will be doing if we pass the motion this evening, we will risk completely destroying the already fragile trust that the people of this country have in this country's constitutional arrangements, in its political institutions and, to be blunt, in each and every one of us. That would be a profoundly dangerous state of affairs. No Member of this House should be willing to put that trust at further risk, which is why I urge the House to reject this motion.

4.2 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): If I am honest, all this just reminds me of the Muppets. It is that moment when Gonzo, I think it was, sings “The Windmills of Your Mind.” As he sings and runs faster and faster, with his legs wheeling like the Isle of Man's coat of arms, he becomes wilder and wilder and goes out of control. We are

“like a circle in a spiral, like a wheel within a wheel, never ending or beginning on an ever spinning reel”.

It is just going on and on and on, and every two weeks we come around on the merry-go-round and we make the same speeches all over again, and we still ride our own hobby horses. Frankly, it is not doing us or the nation any good medically or emotionally.

My amendment is a simple one, and it tries to put a stop to all this gyratory nonsense, as the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) rightly mentioned. My amendment is the embodiment of a very old principle of this House. When James I became King in 1603—do not worry, I am not going to do every year—he summoned Parliament, and that Parliament became so fed up with MPs constantly bringing back issues on which it had already decided that the House expressly decided on 4 April 1604:

“That a question being once made, and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again, but must stand as a judgement of the House.”

That has been our rule.

James Heapey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: No, I will not give way. I am terribly sorry, but there is not much time and I am sure we have already decided the matter anyway, so it stands as a judgment of the House.

This ruling has been repeated many, many times. On 30 June 1864, Sir John Pakington wanted to give more money to nursery schools—hoorah! On 17 May 1870, Mr Torrens wanted to relieve poverty by enabling the poor to emigrate to the colonies. On 9 May 1882, Henry Labouchère wanted to allow MPs to declare, rather than swear, an oath so as to take their seats. On 27 January 1891, Mr Leng wanted to limit railway workers' very long hours. On 21 May 1912—this one would probably have the support of every Member—George Lansbury wanted to allow women to vote.

On every single occasion, the Speaker—Speaker Brand, Speaker Peel, Speaker Denison and Speaker Lowther—said, “No, you can't, because we've already decided that in this Session of Parliament”. That is why I believe the Government should not have the right to bring back exactly the same, or substantially the same, measure again and again as they are doing. It is not as if the Government do not have enough power. They decide

every element of the timetable in the House. They decide what we can table and when. They decide when we sit. They can prorogue Parliament if they want. They have plenty of powers. The only limit is that they cannot bring back the same issue time and again in the same Session because it has already been decided.

What do the Government not understand about losing a vote by more than 200 and losing it a second time by 149? For me, the biggest irony of all is that the Government repeatedly say, “The people can't have a second vote”, but the House of Commons? “Oh, we'll keep them voting until they come up with the right answer”. We should stand by tradition—Conservatives should be a bit more conservative about the traditions of the House—and stop this ludicrous, gyratory motion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A three-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches now applies.

4.6 pm

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): As ever, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who rightly pointed out the importance of tradition. I backed remain in the referendum, but there is a tradition in our country of democracy and of respecting public votes, which is why I respect the two thirds in my constituency who voted to leave the EU and why I believe we should get on with it and not extend article 50. To do otherwise would badly undermine public trust in our democracy.

James Heapey: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) made the point very eloquently that we should not consider the same matter again and again. Does my hon. Friend think that the same should apply to the repeated putting of questions about second votes—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but he has not been here for most of the debate—

James Heapey *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not very courteous to make long interventions that slow things up.

Charlie Elphicke: My hon. Friend is quite right, and I will come to that in a minute.

First, let me underline the importance of honouring the referendum. This was the biggest democratic exercise in our history, and 17.4 million people made the clear decision that we should leave the EU, yet amendment (h) seeks yet another referendum—a so-called people's vote. It is not a people's vote; it is a losers' vote, because it is promoted by the very people who lost last time. I completely agree with the Labour Front-Bench team when they say that they cannot support the amendment; I agree with the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who made a point of order earlier on this subject; and I agree, I hope, with a majority of the House in thinking that we should vote on this amendment and reject it. We should put to bed the idea of further referendums and delays and get on with leaving the EU and dealing with the future of this country. We cannot have endless Brexit.

[Charlie Elphicke]

I hear that the Independent Group, under pressure, might wish not to press the amendment. It will be interesting to see what the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, who are also signatories to the amendment, will do. Will they have the courage of their convictions and see it through, or will they be frit and run away, as they are asked—begged—to do by the Labour party Front Bench? We do not need to extend article 50. We need to get on with it. We do not need a referendum of the losers. We need to listen to the British people. A snap poll today by YouGov finds that a majority want to get on with it: 43% to 38%. The 43% want MPs to vote against delay. The British people are as sick of endless Brexit as most people in this House. That is why I shall be voting against every amendment tonight, and against the main motion, making it clear that we need to honour and respect the verdict of the referendum.

We also need to put maximum pressure on the European Union to provide an exit from the backstop, either unilaterally or through a sunset provision. We must not have the affront of European parliamentary elections, which would see Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson elected. The hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) would be elected as well. What we need is true democracy. We also need to see some integrity; not only should we honour and respect the result of the referendum, but those Members who wish to set up a new party should have the integrity and courage of their convictions and put to the people, in a true public vote, the question of whether they should continue to be Members of this House. They should face the people in a by-election, rather than running away from them. They should honour our democracy, as we should honour the referendum result.

4.10 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I will try to keep my remarks brief. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for selecting my hurried, last-minute manuscript amendment to amendment (i), which stands in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn).

As other Members have said, what a mess we are in. We really are not covering ourselves in glory right now. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), in what I thought was an amazing speech, referred to the muppets. He is right, but to me this also feels like the last scene in “Thelma & Louise”, with the Prime Minister pressing down ever harder on the accelerator pedal as we head towards the cliff, with banners coming off the back of her car saying, “It’s my way or the highway.” She just keeps putting up these false choices. This really has to stop, because it is now beyond a joke.

We need to find out once and for all—we have been asking for this for months now—whether there are other directions of travel that the House could agree on. Amendment (i) is now the only way—we can no longer trust the Government to bring forward the process—to allow Parliament to express its view.

Whether or not we want a second referendum, we still need to resolve what leaving the EU looks like and what Parliament says it should look like. For most people, that is about addressing the political declaration that sits alongside the withdrawal agreement and that could

be done in good time. There is no reason why that should take very long at all. The Minister for the Cabinet Office seemed to contradict himself earlier. He suggested that indicative votes or votes next week would mean a delay of a year. Well, if the Government think that, and if the amendment is agreed to tonight, they need to bring forward an extension for that time. That is up to them to determine.

The reason for my hurried manuscript amendment is to try to maximise support in this House, because I know that many colleagues are concerned about the forthcoming European elections and about a long extension to article 50. But let us just remember that, if this amendment is passed tonight and we say that we want an extension to article 50, it is up to the Government to come forward with the necessary legislation, with the date therein, to decide how long it should be for. I hope that the House will agree to my amendment to my right hon. Friend’s amendment, so that we can maximise support for that process and allow us, at long last, to have a say on the way forward.

4.13 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is astounding to me that we are in this position. The British people made their decision in June 2016, yet here we are in March 2019 debating by how long we should be extending article 50, or even whether we should have a second referendum. We need to get on with this. We need to leave decisively on 29 March. That is the democratic expectation across the country, because 29 March 2019 is a date in so many people’s heads across the country. Millions of people, whether they voted to leave or to remain, or indeed whether they abstained, are expecting us to leave on that date.

It is not just good for democracy to deliver our promises; it is also good for business. If there is a suspension, whether short or long, or a series of suspensions, that will be bad for business planning, whether in manufacturing, clinical trials, life sciences or in the universities sector.

Just look at the EU’s approach to science to see why it is not working now and will not work in future. The clinical trials directive was thought of in 2001 and introduced in 2004. The EU wanted to change it to the clinical trials regulation in 2016. Thus far, it has failed to make that change and we do not know when it will be delivered. The failure to change from the directive to the regulation is holding back trials. If trials do not go ahead, life-saving or life-enhancing treatments will not be invented and brought to market to serve people’s interests.

The EU is still going in the same direction. Against the advice of the advocate general, the European Court of Justice decided to treat gene editing as the creation of genetically modified organisms, which means that that technology will be held back in the EU. Professor Nigel Halford said:

“If adopted by the Council and Parliament the decision could set back agbiotech in Europe by another 20 years. We are already a generation behind. Young scientists interested in agbiotech are likely to move to places where common sense and scientific evidence prevail”.

That is not the European Union. I believe the EU is 1950s politics applied to the 21st century. We need to leave on 29 March this year.

4.16 pm

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): The Prime Minister is not alone in failing us. The Government Back Benches are full of former Ministers who claimed, “I am the man who can!” The first Brexit Secretary said he could, but he could not. The former Foreign Secretary said he could, but he could not. The second Brexit Secretary said he could, but he could not. Now, they join the hardliners on their Benches who all say they can, but we know they cannot. It is not just the Prime Minister who has been let down by their mis-selling. The country has been misled, and now the plan has been mislaid. Ultimately though, this comes down to a failure of the Prime Minister—her leadership, her incapacity to build consensus or to hear what is said, and most alarming of all, her contempt for Parliament. This Parliament has been voted in more recently than the referendum. This Parliament is a more recently anointed authority than the referendum result. My town sent me here as someone who did not trigger article 50—many of my constituents did so because of that fact. We are a Parliament more representative of the changing picture we see.

On at least three occasions, in normal times the Prime Minister's record would have cost her her job. Those three occasions were opportunities for her to change tack: to offer the UK a tonic, with a deal that united the country through unity in this House. We are told that Parliament needs to decide what it is for, but we have been given no chance to decide. We have pored over this, many of us spending time doing the heavy lifting to understand why the people felt so deprived of a say, so overlooked, that they pulled the leave cord in 2016 to stop the show.

We must extend article 50 and establish what we are for, through indicative votes and a process of gathering the way forward. Fill a deal with content that speaks to the support in this House for a deal—one with a customs union and a direction to deal with the world and the protection of our people and our planet. Then take this deal and seek further permission on it, not from the pomp in the Tory party but from the public. Go back and seek further instruction from the people. Let them hold it up to the light, for their final say. Let Britain have her last word—to stick or twist, to back it or keep what we have.

Britons voted to leave or remain in their millions, then this changed Parliament was ushered in. Division is still palpable, and all the doorstepping and polling in the country tells us that there is no magic healing number. Compromise is a must. So the content of a deal with the permission of the public marry this changed Parliament to the changing picture we see—and of course everyone reserves the right to vote the same way again. At that point, I will support a deal before arguing we don't know what we've got till it's gone.

4.19 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I want to say a few words about the legal advice from the European Parliament. I have great respect for the deputy Prime Minister, but I have concerns about the representation that he has made of the legal advice that he has received on the question of whether the European Parliament elections do or do not need to take place. I simply restate that in the legal advice I have seen it is the case that, if the UK did not hold elections, the new European

Parliament could validly be constituted. That seems to me to be in complete contradiction to what the deputy Prime Minister said earlier. I hope that when the Minister responds he will clarify what the Government's position is on that.

The spokesman for the official Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), said that he thought there were people here who were pushing a people's vote amendment for “another reason”. I do not think he specified what that reason was, but I am pushing a people's vote, as are many of the people here today, because we want there to be a people's vote and we want people to support that. This will be the opportunity to do that and, frankly, we are running out of time in which to express support for a people's vote. That is the only reason we are doing this.

I wonder whether there is any sense of humility or embarrassment from leading Brexiteers about the chaos and political maelstrom that they have created. This is their responsibility through and through. They cannot blame remainers, civil servants, the weather or the Turks—they cannot even blame their nanny. The blame rests fairly and squarely on their shoulders. This is chaos that they have created.

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

Tom Brake: I will not give way. The question today is not whether we have an extension or not, because I think everyone here knows that we need one. When I asked the Prime Minister about this a couple of days ago, she said that she was going to work with the usual channels

“to see what is necessary in relation to getting legislation through the House.”—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 224.]

All of us here know exactly what that means. It means that she accepts that there will have to be an extension, so the question really is whether we are having a short extension or a meaningful extension—one that will facilitate the will of Parliament, which has expressed a clear desire to find a different deal. I hope it will be an extension that will allow for a people's vote. A short one would be to enable the Prime Minister to tie up her loose ends after she has bludgeoned us black and blue with her baneful deal and her robotic mantra of, “It is my deal or no deal.” I hope that we will secure a meaningful extension. Of course, if that is not granted by the European Union, we will, as others have said this afternoon, simply need to revoke article 50.

4.22 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I was struck, as I reflected on the huge frustration my constituents feel with the way this process is going, by the speech by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who is not in his place. He described our Government as a “laughing stock”—a laughing stock in Europe and in this country. I think about why that is. I think it is because of the path that he and his colleagues have taken this Government down. They have absolutely held this Government to ransom. Having argued for a long, long time for things that we all knew were not going to be achievable, they won the referendum and are now blaming the Government for failing to achieve them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) said just a few minutes ago, the Prime Minister

[Toby Perkins]

put in charge of these negotiations the very people who had promised us how easy this was going to be. Of course, they entirely failed to deliver on the referendum result and on what they had promised in the campaign.

I will support this motion to have a delay, but it occurs to me that Vote Leave said throughout the campaign that this would be “a careful change”, that there would be time for it to be made and we would not be leaving the EU until our future relationship was resolved. I am now confused as to why they seem to be in such a rush for us to leave, given that it is so clear that we have not got a deal on which we can agree.

As for what my constituents ask for, it seems that Labour's deal fulfils the vote that 60% of Chesterfield constituents cast. It would enable us to continue trading with the customs union, but it would also ensure that we were not a part of the single market and we were able to have control on immigration. We all know that that was so powerful; it was the issue of immigration that enabled what had been previously a minority concern—the European Union—to become so powerful; the campaign was run on the issue.

Despite the fact that I hugely regret the fact that we are leaving the European Union, I will vote for Brexit and I will do so by voting for Labour's deal. When I vote for Labour's deal, I will be voting for something that would enable us to leave on 29 March. I will be able to go to my constituents and say, “If only the Government would back Labour's deal, we would be able to leave the European Union on 29 March, as we have said all along.” It is important that that message gets across, because there are people on the Government Benches who suggest that the only way to fulfil the referendum result is to vote for the Government's deal. We all know that there are other ways we could leave the European Union, if only the Government supported the Labour party deal.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. If Members who now speak take interventions, they will do so knowing that they are preventing colleagues from speaking, so I hope they will not.

4.25 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins). I rise to support amendment (h), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) in support of a people's vote.

The people's vote is not about the four of us who attended the event just over a year ago when we launched the People's Vote campaign, although I am proud that the hon. Members for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) and I will all tonight be true to our word and vote for a people's vote. At the launch we were members of four parties; we are now, of course, in different positions. But as I say, it is not about us. We are not the people's vote.

The people's vote is not even Susan and Linda, who go out every weekend as members of the Nottinghamshire People's Vote campaign, not only in West Bridgford,

where we were on Saturday, but in all weathers and all circumstances. They have been to Ashfield and to Mansfield. They have stood and made the case for a people's vote, not only in bad weather but, frankly, in other adverse conditions, and they do it with a burning passion. They do it because they believe that our great nation has made a mistake, but they do not do it to thwart Brexit. They do not do it to stop Brexit; they do it as I do, and as I know many other Members do: because we believe with passion that this matter must now go back to the British people. It is the only way through the mess.

It may be when I am long gone, but there will undoubtedly be an inquiry into what happened and how this great country came to find itself in a position of leaving the European Union—and, notwithstanding last night's vote, I still gravely fear that we could do so without a deal. The inquiry will record that there was a lack of honesty, courage and leadership, not only in this place but among journalists and businesses—among people who said things in private but simply failed to do the right thing in public when it was needed for our country.

The moment is now. I apologise if I caused offence by crying out “Shame” earlier, but I say gently to colleagues in the Labour party, many of whom I have huge respect for—they know that I work cross-party with them on all manner of campaigns and will always continue to do so—that they know in their hearts the courage of my friend the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). Her constituency voted leave in the numbers it did, but she has led in her constituency and persuaded the people of her constituency to back a people's vote. She has shown courage, honesty and leadership. We cannot wait for the Labour Front-Bench team—they are Brexiteers. They do not want a people's vote because they are frightened that the people will change their mind. If we do not do the right thing, that will be our legacy, knowing that people did not want it. We cannot let it happen.

4.28 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Since I became an MP, many people have asked me what it is like in this House at this time. I have always said to them that it is a very difficult and painful time in the House. There are not only Divisions in the Lobbies, but divisions within our own parties, in terms of our thoughts and feelings around Brexit, and our frustrations and energies. The disturbing feeling that we have is how it feels for the public. What plays out in here is often how the public feel, and vice versa. These are difficult and trying times, not only for us as a nation but for individuals, for our communities, for our constituencies and for our nation. It is a very difficult time.

The weight and seriousness of the decisions that we have to make mean that we cannot take them lightly. We need to show leadership and direction for our country, and we need to make the right and the best decisions. It is not good enough for us just to throw out our own—sometimes selfish—views and strong opinions, and to think only about ourselves and not the wider context. We must consider that point.

I agree that we should have voted down the deal in the meaningful vote, as we did the first time and the second time. But there is no point in bringing it back to the House a third and a fourth time. It would be a waste of time in this Chamber and it should not happen.

We should be mapping a way forward, and the way forward is to extend article 50 and then consider how to progress. There is no other way.

In our conversations, we are failing to tackle some of the issues that we need to. People in our country are suffering and in grief because we are missing these matters—because we are not discussing them and decisions are not being made in this Chamber. These are real, tangible issues such as in-work poverty, the housing crisis, the climate change crisis and improving our education system. We need to be thinking about these things and so many others, including public services and tackling serious youth violence. It is not good enough just to invest in the police; it is a partnership, and we should be investing in partnerships to tackle this problem. I will therefore be supporting an extension to article 50 and I invite others to join me.

4.31 pm

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): After sitting through the entirety of this debate, I think that the UK is about to get a rude awakening as to what the consequences of this Prime Minister's irresponsibility are going to be. The reality is that even if we do come to a consensus to extend article 50, any one of the 27 countries in the EU could veto that extension. We already know that Farage and his pals have been going around and lobbying different countries like Italy, Hungary and Poland; it is ironic that he wants other countries to block the will of the very Parliament that he apparently wants to have so much control. Like I say, all it takes is one country out of 27 and we are out on 29 March with no deal, because the EU is a nation of equals.

Now that we can see the no-deal train coming down the tracks towards us, all these new suggestions are coming out of the woodwork, including rumours of a cross-party consensus for an EFTA-type deal, or to stay in the single market or the customs union. We proposed this two years ago and it was ignored. The people of Scotland will be watching this, and despite being told to vote no to independence to stay in the EU, despite voting to remain in the EU, despite sending back a majority of MPs on an anti-Brexit manifesto twice and despite the Scottish Government putting forward compromise proposals, here we are anyway—still ignored.

I challenge one Unionist Member in this place to tell me what more SNP Members could do that we have not done to prevent Scotland from being dragged out of the EU and into no-deal chaos. *[Interruption.]* I can hear their voices saying, "You should have voted for the deal", but they just make my case for me, because even if every single Scottish MP had supported the Prime Minister's deal, she would still have lost. It makes no sense. This is not a Union of equals.

A good friend of mine and a former Member of this place, Jim Sillars, summed it up best when he talked about Scottish independence. He said that, between the hours of 7 am and 10 pm on 18 September 2014, Scotland was in control of its own future, and that the question was whether, at one minute past 10, we handed back that power or kept it for ourselves. Now, we chose to hand that power back to this place. And look what has happened. I tell you, Mr Speaker, if this is a Union of equals, the next time that Scotland is asked whether we want to be part of this Union, I'll bet my money that the answer is different.

4.34 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I rise in support of amendments (e), (i) and (j).

The Prime Minister has made a huge mistake. She has not sought to unify this country—to reunite us—but to reunite her party. Since 10 December, it has been abundantly clear that there is not a majority in this House for the Prime Minister's deal. Three months on, she still insists it is her deal or no deal. Her approach has been flawed from the start, and it is what has led to us being in this humiliating, disastrous mess. Rather than reach out across the country and across Parliament, she asserted her infamous red lines and just focused on securing her legacy. Now we must exhaust other realistic options, in a short timeframe, to understand where there is a majority in this House for some form of Brexit. We owe it to this country, which has been misled not once but twice: first, by the promises of the leave campaign; and secondly, by the disingenuous claims of the Prime Minister that hers was the only way of delivering Brexit.

For several months, I have been making it clear that I believe it incumbent on those of us in this House, as representatives of a currently very divided nation, to work collaboratively to find solutions to this impasse, with the primary aim of seeking to heal these divisions. We must work to determine the forms of Brexit that are, first, realisable, and secondly, least damaging to the UK and to Europe. To enable this, it is essential that we extend article 50. As I said very publicly back in mid-November, we must do that, confirm it with the EU, and then decide which of the Brexit options has the most public support.

Let me be clear: yes, I support a public vote, as I have said before. This place cannot decide what form of Brexit we follow, and the public must confirm what they want versus remain. Today's votes are all about achieving an extension to article 50 that will facilitate the right outcome that is in the best interests of this country. If won, we must then agree across this House the mechanisms for achieving this, and amendment (i) does that. Again, let me be clear: yes, I voted remain and I favour remain. As someone who sits on the International Trade Committee, it is obvious to me that coming out of the European Union on 29 March is the first paragraph of the first chapter of a very long book. It will last for eight to 10 years. For that reason, and, more importantly, with the ambition of trying to reunify this country of ours, and for the reasons of avoiding the economic catastrophe so well described by business leaders, the CBI, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Federation of Small Businesses, we must extend article 50 and find majority agreement across this House.

4.37 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Before I explain my party's position, I would like to add my voice to those who have been calling for the House of Commons to have a full portfolio of votes on the various options. On 15 January, I wrote an article for *The Huffington Post* making the case for using a voting system designed to create a majority. I was delighted to see the Father of the House bring forward an amendment to that effect a few weeks ago. I hope that if amendment (i) passes this evening, that will be looked at in all seriousness.

[Jonathan Edwards]

The key question that will face us after this evening if we support an extension to article 50 will be this: for what purpose? Without finding a purpose for the extension, we still face the prospect of no deal by default. The publication of the Government's tariff proposals gave us a good idea of what that would mean. It would be a disaster for Welsh agriculture, in particular, because if we set very high import tariffs, that would be reciprocated in terms of exports. Half of all Welsh lamb goes to the European Union, and that sector would be decimated. In keeping an open border between the Republic of Ireland and the north of Ireland, the British Government signalled their intention to sink the ports of my country.

Our amendment (a) would extend article 50 to cover phase 2 of the Brexit process. That would help to deal with the backstop. Although I do not share the concerns of hon. Members in relation to the backstop, that issue would be dealt with by our suggestion. It would deal with the problems of a blind Brexit. It would deal with the problem of no deal. It would encourage a more sensible approach to other trade negotiations. There is something for everybody in our suggestion, apart from those who seem obsessed with leaving on 29 March.

I look forward to voting for amendment (h). I say to Labour colleagues that the right moment does not always come in politics—there is only the moment, and the moment is now.

4.39 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): When the Prime Minister set out the timetable for this week a couple of weeks ago, she did not say that the vote on an extension was to be linked to acceptance of the deal. When she set out those arrangements, the premise was that we would come to this point after the defeat of her deal, which is what has happened. Now we find, from her reaction to the vote last night, that the Government's proposal to extend article 50 is linked to their strategy of one more heave, two more heaves, however many more heaves it takes.

The amendments that I will support tonight are the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench or the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). They seek to remove that conditionality and to extend instead for the purpose of clarifying our future direction. That is the reason why we should extend. For four months we have been having the wrong conversation with Europe. Instead of disappearing into five different levels of legality over the backstop, which looks to the rest of Europe as if we are trying to wriggle out of our commitment to no hard border in Northern Ireland and to supporting the Good Friday agreement, we should have been having the conversation that we need to have about what Brexit really means, what the choices are and what the trade-offs are. Let us not pretend that the reason that has not happened is that somehow it is impossible until we leave. The reason it has not happened is that to do so would expose the deep divisions within the Conservative party, but the public deserve better than that. That is why extension should be for the purpose of clarification.

As for timing and other conditions, far too often in our discussions we forget that there are two sides at the table. An extension has to be applied for and agreed

unanimously. It will not just be up to us how long it is for. Whatever happens in the votes tonight, it is important that we understand that.

I understand the public impatience with politics right now. It is our job to get stuff done, but the leadership response to parliamentary votes matters. We heard a great speech yesterday from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who defended parliamentary democracy. It is just a pity that our Prime Minister, the leader of our country, never defends parliamentary democracy. Continually setting Parliament against the people is at best disappointing. It is thoroughly irresponsible and it is not the leadership that we need through these troubled waters.

Mr Speaker: As the clock strikes 4.44, the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) must sit down.

4.42 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): Two years ago when we debated article 50 and I voted against invoking it, I said that we would get on an escalator with no brake and no way of getting off. I now understand why the Prime Minister invoked it at that time. It was because she wanted to stop a European Parliament election. The timetable of agreeing an article 50 process 18 months before the Government had even got an agreed position, which lasted about three days before the resignations, was driven by fear inside the Conservative party. They did not want UKIP to come back in a European election, so they triggered article 50 at that point.

The reality is that the Government are now trying to get us out as quickly as possible, and amendments that refer to the end of June are also trying to get us out quickly because people fear a European election. The reality is that if we do not have a European election, we will have no voice, no say and no vote within the councils of Europe when we may still be in a transition. That will give us a great period of weakness in any future framework negotiations.

In the 1970s this country was the sick man of Europe. We are now the joke of Europe.

Mr Speaker: Kneeling while speaking is a new phenomenon in the House of Commons.

4.44 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): We are in a desperate position. That has been reflected in many serious speeches today—too many to list—but that of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was a real highlight, and we support his amendment (j).

In her closing remarks yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the House needed to say not what it did not want, but what it did want. It is a fair point, but the problem we face is due to her refusal to give us that opportunity at the start of the process. She herself went to the EU27 not with clarity on what she wanted, but with red lines on what she did not want. Those red lines boxed her into a corner and produced this damaging deal that fails the country and has been rejected twice by historic margins.

What is the Prime Minister's reaction? To try again. It was my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) who coined the

phrase “meaningful vote” when seeking to ensure that Parliament had a role in this process, and it is a phrase that the Prime Minister has embraced. We have had meaningful vote 1 and meaningful vote 2, but how, as the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) asked, can meaningful vote 3 be meaningful in any sense of the word?

On 26 February, the Prime Minister set out the process for this week: vote on her deal, vote on no deal and then vote on an extension. She set out the options to be considered at that stage—her deal, no deal, another deal or a public vote. This week we have ruled out two of those options, so we should now be looking at the other two and seeing what consensus can be built, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bury North (James Frith) and for Lewisham East (Janet Daby), among others.

The Chancellor was right when he reminded the nation on the radio this morning that the 2016 referendum decision was carried by a narrow margin—a painfully narrow margin—and was not the overwhelming mandate that some Conservative Members claim. It was a vote to leave, but not an instruction to rupture our relationship with our closest neighbours and allies. If there was any doubt, the Prime Minister gave the people a second vote: she called a general election, accusing this House of trying to thwart her plans and seeking a mandate for a hard Brexit—and she lost her majority. She could then have reached out to build a consensus.

The Prime Minister could also have done so after her deal was defeated in January, but she did not. Yes, she spoke to people across the House, but she did not listen to what they had to say. She focused on the backstop, which may be an obsession of the party within her party, but is not the primary concern of the majority of the 432 MPs who voted against her deal. Of far more concern to us is the way that deal damages our economy, damages jobs, damages livelihoods and damages public services, and does not offer the certainty that business needs. The political declaration is deliberately ambiguous, and we know there are those on her Benches who intend, if she gets her deal over the line, to remove her and to rip it up.

Last night, the Prime Minister had another chance to reach out and build consensus, to deliver on the expectations that she had given the House, and to create the opportunity to explore all the options and find a way forward. The Government's shameful decision to go back on their word and frustrate our democracy with this motion should be rejected by the House. Our amendment (e) provides the way forward that this House expected and wanted, and it would not have been necessary, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) pointed out, if the Government were doing their job.

The Prime Minister should also listen to her Chancellor. However much he proclaims support for her deal, he recognises that it is dead and that she should reach out across the House to look at the sort of deal that might be forged around a customs union, single market alignment, membership of the agencies and partnerships we have built together and, indeed, a further public vote between a credible leave option and remaining in the European Union—a vote that we support. An extension needs clear purpose—a purpose of building a consensus, which

the Prime Minister has failed to do. An extension should be as short as possible but as long as necessary, because we have seen the folly of fixed deadlines.

We warned the House and the Prime Minister that throwing red meat to her Brexit extremists by fixing 29 March in law was a mistake. Now she must legislate to remove that date. We should also reject her new bullying tactic, which states that failing to back her deal means UK participation in the European elections. It does not, as many Members—notably the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—pointed out. Powerful legal voices have been cited, but let me quote a Minister on this issue. The Advocate General for Scotland said in another place on 27 February that “the noble Lord's point that the EU Parliament could sit without the UK having had an election...is correct”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 February 2019; Vol. 796, c. 292.]

We must not be deflected by threats. We cannot succumb to the Prime Minister's obstinacy. Her deal has been rejected. No deal has been rejected. We must now seek the extension of article 50 that is needed to move on and consider the remaining options: a different deal, or a further public vote.

4.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The shadow Secretary of State opened this debate, and he has long indicated his commitment to a second referendum and to remaining in the European Union. I disagree with him, but I respect the integrity with which he holds that position. Other Members of the House, such as the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), have been prepared to make the difficult decision to leave their parties and make the case for a second referendum, and few doubt the sincerity with which they hold their views.

Amendment (e), in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, does not reflect such principle or integrity. It is fundamentally flawed. As the European Council statement of 12 March makes clear, any extension to article 50 must be on the basis of providing clarity about its duration and credible justification for it. The amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition meets neither of those tests. First, it does not clarify the duration of the extension that it seeks. Perhaps that is because the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry)—she is not in her place—said on Saturday that Labour would back an extension to article 50 only until July, because it would be inappropriate for us to stand for the European Parliament. Just the next day, however, the shadow Chancellor contradicted her and said that any extension should be “as long as necessary”. To be fair, the manuscript amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), which would amend amendment (i), tabled by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), does address the duration of the extension, but the Leader of the Opposition's amendment fails to do so.

The Leader of the Opposition does not set out a credible justification for his extension, as demanded in the EU statement on 12 March, and merely calls for “a different approach”. That different approach is based on a fiction that he can deliver his deal, while also securing participation in EU trade policy and full participation in EU security, and holding his own position on state aid—all things that the EU has ruled out as non-negotiable. He speaks about the Prime Minister's

[Stephen Barclay]

red lines, but what are his red lines when he puts forward completely unrealistic ideas? Indeed, his commitment to a second referendum is so strong that in his statement on Tuesday he failed to mention it once.

Wes Streeting: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: Of course I will. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can explain why the Leader of the Opposition failed to mention a second referendum. I am sure that those who defected from his party would like an answer to that question.

Wes Streeting: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, but may I gently point that whatever problems he may have with Labour's propositions for Brexit, they do at least have the advantage of not having crashed to such a big defeat as the Government's own proposition?

Stephen Barclay: We thought the hon. Gentleman used to support a second referendum, but he failed to even mention it in his intervention.

The Leader of the Opposition called this week for cross-party consensus, but he refused even to meet the Prime Minister. [Interruption.] He met her once, after weeks of delay, and he has blocked the Labour Front Benchers from engaging with the Government. When he talks of cross-party consensus, perhaps what he really means is having meetings with the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson). There are no limits to the inconsistencies of his approach. He talks of listening to this House, yet when the House spoke on his amendment on 27 February, defeating it by 323 to 240 votes, he failed to listen to that judgment. Today, the Leader of the Opposition presents an amendment that fails the tests set out by the European Commission on Tuesday, calls for cross-party talks when he himself has resisted them, and calls for listening to this House when he fails to do so for his own amendment.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): This country is on the edge of an economic precipice. We want leadership from the Government. We do not want the Secretary of State to be taking pot-shots at the Opposition at the last moment.

Stephen Barclay: Well, the hon. Gentleman should have a word with the Leader of the Opposition, so that he puts forward credible proposals that have not already been ruled out by the European Union and do not fail to address the statement issued just two days ago.

In the limited time left, let me turn to amendment (i). The right hon. Member for Leeds Central raised a specific point. He said that we needed to vote for that amendment because the House would not have a vote on another amendable motion until after 29 March. We will make our statement under section 13(4) of the withdrawal Act tomorrow, setting out how the Government propose to proceed in relation to negotiations. There will be the option of an amendable motion no later than Monday 25 March.

Amendment (j), tabled by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), raises an issue that I think you, Mr Speaker, have already addressed in your response to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). I will therefore not

dwell on it, other than to suggest that it is an issue for the Chair and will be shaped by the motion that is brought forward by the Government.

On amendment (h), tabled by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), it is clear Government policy to resist a second referendum. That policy has not changed.

Ian Blackford: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: I have two minutes left, and I have given way a couple of times already.

It was Tony Blair who said that the way to stop Brexit was first to vote against the Prime Minister's deal, then to vote against no deal, then to seek a long extension. In his votes on Tuesday, Wednesday and tonight, that is the precise script followed by the Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps he could share with us whether it was Tony, Peter or Alastair who wrote it for him. How proud those envoys of the elite must be with his late conversion to the cause. His approach has become more Davos than Don Valley.

Some Members will remember the Banksy painting that went through the shredder. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) had it on his Christmas card. The reality of the Leader of the Opposition's approach this week is that he is shredding the votes of 17.4 million people by turning his back on the referendum, going back on his word in his own manifesto and failing to listen even to his own Front Benchers. The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) said just last night:

"I think that it would be disastrous for us as Members of Parliament to go back to the people".

That is the very issue that others in his party are campaigning for.

This is a time for responsibility, yet we have a motion from the Leader of the Opposition that ducks the choice, ducks the time, ducks the clarity and ducks any sense of national responsibility. It is time for this House to act in the national interest. It is time to put forward an extension that is realistic. I commend the Government motion to the House.

5 pm

The Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, this day).

Amendment proposed: (h), to leave out from first "House" to end and add

"instructs the Prime Minister to request an extension to the Article 50 period at the European Council in March 2019 sufficient for the purposes of legislating for and conducting a public vote in which the people of the United Kingdom may give their consent for either leaving the European Union on terms to be determined by Parliament or retaining the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union.".—(Dr Wollaston.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 85, Noes 334.

Division No. 360]

[5 pm

AYES

Allen, Heidi	Black, Mhairi
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Blackford, rh Ian
Bardell, Hannah	Blackman, Kirsty
Berger, Luciana (<i>Proxy vote</i>	Brake, rh Tom
cast by Mr Chris Leslie)	Brook, Deidre

Brown, Alan
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Duffield, Rosie
Edwards, Jonathan
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Gapes, Mike
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Grogan, John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hosie, Stewart
Jardine, Christine
Killen, Ged
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Leslie, Mr Chris
Linden, David
Lucas, Caroline

MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McMorrin, Anna
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
O'Hara, Brendan
Owen, Albert
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Smith, Angela
Smith, Owen
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Swinson, Jo
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Umunna, Chuka
West, Catherine
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Stephen Gethins

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
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
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian

Cooper, Rosie
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
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
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 Frank
Field, rh Mark
Flint, rh Caroline
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
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
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
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
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
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
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, Mr Ivan
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
Madders, Justin

Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, John
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Peacock, Stephanie
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
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul

Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Snell, Gareth
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
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
Twigg, Derek
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:
Jo Churchill and
Paul Maynard

Manuscript amendment proposed: (i), leave out from
“Article 50 (3)” to end and add

“to enable the House of Commons to find a way forward that
can command majority support;

2. orders accordingly that on Wednesday 20 March—

(a) Standing Order No. 14(1) (which provides that government
business shall have precedence at every sitting save as provided in
that order) shall not apply;

(b) precedence shall be given to the motion specified in
paragraph 3;

(c) the Speaker shall interrupt proceedings on any business
before the motion specified in paragraph 3 at 1.30 pm and call a
Member to move that motion;

(d) debate on that motion may continue until 7.00 pm at which
time the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of
proceedings on that motion including the questions on
amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved;

(e) any proceedings interrupted or superseded by this order
may be resumed or (as the case may be) entered upon and
proceeded with after the moment of interruption; and

3. the motion specified in this paragraph is a motion in the name
of at least 25 Members, including at least five Members elected
to the House as members of at least five different parties, relating
to the Business of the House on a future day or days in
connection with matters relating to the United Kingdom's
withdrawal from the European Union.”—(*Hilary Benn.*)

Amendment proposed to manuscript amendment (i):
before

“to enable the House of Commons”

add

“for a period ending on 30 June 2019”.—(*Lucy Powell.*)

Question put, That the amendment to the amendment
be made.

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 314.

Division No. 361]

[5.16 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Bryant, Chris
Abrahams, Debbie	Buck, Ms Karen
Ali, Rushanara	Burden, Richard
Allen, Heidi	Burgon, Richard
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Butler, Dawn
Amesbury, Mike	Byrne, rh Liam
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cadbury, Ruth
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Bardell, Hannah	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Bebb, Guto	Carden, Dan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Benn, rh Hilary	Champion, Sarah
Benyon, rh Richard	Chapman, Jenny
Berger, Luciana (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Chris Leslie</i>)	Charalambous, Bambos
Betts, Mr Clive	Cherry, Joanna
Black, Mhairi	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Blackford, rh Ian	Coaker, Vernon
Blackman, Kirsty	Coffey, Ann
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cooper, Julie
Blomfield, Paul	Cooper, Rosie
Boles, Nick	Cooper, rh Yvette
Brabin, Tracy	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cowan, Ronnie
Brake, rh Tom	Coyle, Neil
Brennan, Kevin	Crausby, Sir David
Brock, Deidre	Crawley, Angela
Brown, Alan	Creagh, Mary
Brown, Lyn	Creasy, Stella
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cruddas, Jon
	Cryer, John

Question accordingly negated.

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
Halfon, rh Robert
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
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
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
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
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
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
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, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh John
Starmar, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stevenson, John
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:
**Jeff Smith and
Nick Smith**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin

Bone, Mr Peter	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Keegan, Gillian	Pow, Rebecca
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Frazer, Lucy	Kennedy, Seema	Prentis, Victoria
Bowie, Andrew	Freer, Mike	Kerr, Stephen	Prisk, Mr Mark
Bradley, Ben	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Pritchard, Mark
Bradley, rh Karen	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Knight, Julian	Pursglove, Tom
Brady, Sir Graham	Garnier, Mark	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Quin, Jeremy
Braverman, Suella	Gauke, rh Mr David	Lamont, John	Quince, Will
Brereton, Jack	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Lancaster, rh Mark	Raab, rh Dominic
Bridgen, Andrew	Gibb, rh Nick	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Redwood, rh John
Brine, Steve	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Brokenshire, rh James	Girvan, Paul	Lefroy, Jeremy	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Bruce, Fiona	Glen, John	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Robinson, Gavin
Buckland, Robert	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewer, Andrew	Robinson, Mary
Burghart, Alex	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Brandon	Rosindell, Andrew
Burns, Conor	Gove, rh Michael	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Ross, Douglas (<i>Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch</i>)
Burt, rh Alistair	Graham, Luke	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Rowley, Lee
Cairns, rh Alun	Graham, Richard	Lidington, rh Mr David	Rudd, rh Amber
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Grant, Bill	Little Pengelly, Emma	Rutley, David
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopez, Julia	Scully, Paul
Cartlidge, James	Gray, James	Lopresti, Jack	Seely, Mr Bob
Cash, Sir William	Grayling, rh Chris	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Selous, Andrew
Caulfield, Maria	Green, Chris	Loughton, Tim	Shannon, Jim
Chalk, Alex	Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig	Shapps, rh Grant
Chishti, Rehman	Griffiths, Andrew	Maclean, Rachel	Sharma, Alok
Chope, Sir Christopher	Hair, Kirstene	Main, Mrs Anne	Shelbrooke, Alec
Clark, Colin	Hall, Luke	Mak, Alan	Simpson, David
Clark, rh Greg	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Malthouse, Kit	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hammond, Stephen	Mann, John	Skidmore, Chris
Cleverly, James	Hancock, rh Matt	Mann, Scott	Smith, Chloe
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hands, rh Greg	Masterton, Paul	Smith, Henry
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harper, rh Mr Mark	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, rh Julian
Collins, Damian	Harrington, Richard	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Smith, Royston
Costa, Alberto	Harris, Rebecca	McPartland, Stephen	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Courts, Robert	Harrison, Trudy	McVey, rh Ms Esther	Spencer, Mark
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hart, Simon	Menzies, Mark	Stephenson, Andrew
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Bob
Crouch, Tracey	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Merriman, Huw	Stewart, Iain
Davies, Chris	Heappey, James	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stewart, Rory
Davies, David T. C.	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Streeter, Sir Gary
Davies, Glyn	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Milling, Amanda	Stride, rh Mel
Davies, Mims	Henderson, Gordon	Mills, Nigel	Stringer, Graham
Davies, Philip	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Milton, rh Anne	Stuart, Graham
Davis, rh Mr David	Herbert, rh Nick	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sturdy, Julian
Dinenage, Caroline	Hermon, Lady	Moore, Damien	Sunak, Rishi
Docherty, Leo	Hinds, rh Damian	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoare, Simon	Morgan, rh Nicky	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hoey, Kate	Morris, Anne Marie	Syms, Sir Robert
Donelan, Michelle	Hollingbery, George	Morris, David	Thomas, Derek
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hollinrake, Kevin	Morris, James	Thomson, Ross
Double, Steve	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morton, Wendy	Throup, Maggie
Dowden, Oliver	Holloway, Adam	Mundell, rh David	Tolhurst, Kelly
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hopkins, Kelvin	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tomlinson, Justin
Duddridge, James	Howell, John	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tomlinson, Michael
Duguid, David	Huddleston, Nigel	Neill, Robert	Tracey, Craig
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Hughes, Eddie	Newton, Sarah	Tredinnick, David
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Nokes, rh Caroline	Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	Norman, Jesse	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Ellis, Michael	Jack, Mr Alister	O'Brien, Neil	Tugendhat, Tom
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	James, Margot	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Elphicke, Charlie	Javid, rh Sajid	Opperman, Guy	Vickers, Martin
Eustice, George	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Paisley, Ian	Villiers, rh Theresa
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Parish, Neil	Walker, Mr Charles
Evannett, rh Sir David	Jenkyns, Andrea	Patel, rh Priti	Walker, Mr Robin
Fabricant, Michael	Jenrick, Robert	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Johnson, rh Boris	Pawsey, Mark	Warburton, David
Field, rh Frank	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Warman, Matt
Field, rh Mark	Johnson, Gareth	Penrose, John	Watling, Giles
Ford, Vicky	Johnson, Joseph	Percy, Andrew	Whately, Helen
Foster, Kevin	Jones, Andrew	Perry, rh Claire	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Jones, rh Mr David	Philp, Chris	Whittaker, Craig
	Jones, Mr Marcus	Pincher, rh Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
	Kawczynski, Daniel	Poulter, Dr Dan	

Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William

Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Jo Churchill and
Paul Maynard

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That amendment (i) be made.

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 314.

Division No. 362]

[5.32 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
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
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
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
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
Gymah, 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
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
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
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
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, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stevenson, John
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:

**Jeff Smith and
Nick Smith**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
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
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
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
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 Frank
Field, rh Mark
Flint, rh Caroline
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
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
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
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
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot

Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
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
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy

Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
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
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
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew

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:
Jo Churchill and
Paul Maynard

Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
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
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
Charalambous, Bambos
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
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
Glendon, 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
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

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: (e), leave out paragraphs (2) and (3) and add:

“(2) notes that this House has decisively rejected the Withdrawal Agreement and Framework for the Future Relationship laid before the House and the proposition that the UK should leave the European Union without a Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework for the Future Relationship; and

(3) therefore instructs the Prime Minister to seek an extension to Article 50 in order to avoid exiting the EU on 29 March without a ratified Withdrawal Agreement and a Framework for the Future Relationship; and to provide parliamentary time for this House to find a majority for a different approach.”.—
(*Jeremy Corbyn.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 318.

Division No. 363]

[5.52 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike

Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
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
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
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, 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
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:
**Jeff Smith and
Nick Smith**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
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
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
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
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
Evensnett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Frank
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
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
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa

McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
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
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Jo Churchill and
Paul Maynard**

Question accordingly negated.

Mr Speaker: We now come to amendment (j) in the name of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

Chris Bryant: I do not think there is any need to move this amendment and push it to a vote, is there?

Mr Speaker: Amendment (j)—J for Jemima—is not moved.

Main question put.

The House divided: Ayes 412, Noes 202.

Division No. 364]**[6.8 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Afolami, Bim
Aldous, Peter
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Argar, Edward
Ashworth, Jonathan
Atkins, Victoria
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
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
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Brabin, Tracy
Bradley, rh Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burton, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cairns, rh Alun

Cameron, Dr Lisa	Fellows, Marion	Hollinrake, Kevin	McCarthy, Kerry
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Field, rh Mark	Hosie, Stewart	McDonagh, Siobhain
Carden, Dan	Fitzpatrick, Jim	Howarth, rh Mr George	McDonald, Andy
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fletcher, Colleen	Howell, John	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Cartlidge, James	Flint, rh Caroline	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	McDonald, Stuart C.
Chalk, Alex	Ford, Vicky	Huq, Dr Rupa	McDonnell, rh John
Champion, Sarah	Fovargue, Yvonne	Hurd, rh Mr Nick	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Chapman, Douglas	Foxcroft, Vicky	Hussain, Imran	McGinn, Conor
Chapman, Jenny	Frazer, Lucy	James, Margot	McGovern, Alison
Charalambous, Bambos	Freeman, George	Jardine, Christine	McInnes, Liz
Cherry, Joanna	Frith, James	Jarvis, Dan	McKinnell, Catherine
Clark, rh Greg	Furniss, Gill	Javid, rh Sajid	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Gaffney, Hugh	Johnson, Diana	McMahon, Jim
Clwyd, rh Ann	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Johnson, Joseph	McMorris, Anna
Coaker, Vernon	Gapes, Mike	Jones, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Coffey, Ann	Gardiner, Barry	Jones, Darren	Miliband, rh Edward
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Garnier, Mark	Jones, Gerald	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Cooper, Julie	Gauke, rh Mr David	Jones, Graham P.	Milton, rh Anne
Cooper, Rosie	George, Ruth	Jones, Helen	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gethins, Stephen	Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Monaghan, Carol
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Gibb, rh Nick	Jones, Sarah	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Costa, Alberto	Gibson, Patricia	Jones, Susan Elan	Moran, Layla
Cowan, Ronnie	Gill, Preet Kaur	Kane, Mike	Morden, Jessica
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Keegan, Gillian	Morgan, rh Nicky
Coyle, Neil	Glindon, Mary	Keeley, Barbara	Morgan, Stephen
Crabb, rh Stephen	Godsiff, Mr Roger	Kendall, Liz	Morris, Grahame
Crausby, Sir David	Goodman, Helen	Kennedy, Seema	Mundell, rh David
Crawley, Angela	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Kerr, Stephen	Murray, Ian
Creagh, Mary	Gove, rh Michael	Khan, Afzal	Nandy, Lisa
Creasy, Stella	Grady, Patrick	Killen, Ged	Neill, Robert
Cruddas, Jon	Graham, Luke	Kinnock, Stephen	Newlands, Gavin
Cryer, John	Graham, Richard	Kyle, Peter	Newton, Sarah
Cummins, Judith	Grant, Bill	Laird, Lesley	Nokes, rh Caroline
Cunningham, Alex	Grant, Peter	Lake, Ben	Norris, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Gray, Neil	Lamb, rh Norman	O'Hara, Brendan
Daby, Janet	Green, rh Damian	Lammy, rh Mr David	Onn, Melanie
Dakin, Nic	Green, Kate	Lancaster, rh Mark	Onwurah, Chi
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Greening, rh Justine	Lavery, Ian	Osamor, Kate
David, Wayne	Greenwood, Lillian	Law, Chris	Owen, Albert
Davies, Geraint	Greenwood, Margaret	Lee, Karen	Parish, Neil
Davis, rh Mr David	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Lefroy, Jeremy	Pawsey, Mark
Day, Martyn	Griffith, Nia	Leslie, Mr Chris	Peacock, Stephanie
De Cordova, Marsha	Grogan, John	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Pearce, Teresa
De Piero, Gloria	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Pennycook, Matthew
Debbonaire, Thangam	Haigh, Louise	Lewis, rh Brandon	Penrose, John
Dent Coad, Emma	Hamilton, Fabian	Lewis, Clive	Perkins, Toby
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Perry, rh Claire
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hammond, Stephen	Lidington, rh Mr David	Phillips, Jess
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Hancock, rh Matt	Linden, David	Phillipson, Bridget
Dodds, Anneliese	Hanson, rh David	Lloyd, Stephen	Pidcock, Laura
Doughty, Stephen	Hardy, Emma	Lloyd, Tony	Platt, Jo
Dowd, Peter	Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Pollard, Luke
Dowden, Oliver	Harrington, Richard	Lucas, Caroline	Poulter, Dr Dan
Drew, Dr David	Harris, Carolyn	Lucas, Ian C.	Pound, Stephen
Dromey, Jack	Hayes, Helen	Lynch, Holly (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami</i>)	Pow, Rebecca
Duffield, Rosie	Hayman, Sue	MacNeil, Angus Brendan	Powell, Lucy
Duguid, David	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Madders, Justin	Prentis, Victoria
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Healey, rh John	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Quin, Jeremy
Dunne, rh Mr Philip	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mahmood, Shabana	Qureshi, Yasmin
Eagle, Ms Angela	Hendrick, Sir Mark	Malhotra, Seema	Rashid, Faisal
Eagle, Maria	Hendry, Drew	Mann, John	Rayner, Angela
Edwards, Jonathan	Herbert, rh Nick	Marsden, Gordon	Reed, Mr Steve
Efford, Clive	Hermon, Lady	Martin, Sandy	Rees, Christina
Elliott, Julie	Hill, Mike	Maskell, Rachael	Reeves, Ellie
Ellman, Dame Louise	Hillier, Meg	Masterton, Paul	Reeves, Rachel
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Hinds, rh Damian	Matheson, Christian	Reynolds, Emma
Elmore, Chris	Hoare, Simon	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Reynolds, Jonathan
Esterson, Bill	Hobhouse, Wera	Mc Nally, John	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Evans, Chris	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	McCabe, Steve	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Farron, Tim	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon		Rodda, Matt
	Hollern, Kate		Rowley, Danielle
	Hollingbery, George		Ruane, Chris

Rudd, rh Amber
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Rutley, David
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
 by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 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
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Rory
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel

Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Mr Robin
 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
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mike Freer and
Mr Alister Jack

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bruce, Fiona
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishty, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Collins, Damian
 Courts, Robert
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Ellis, Michael
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 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
 Maynard, Paul
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 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
 Scully, Paul
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 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
Zahawi, Nadhim
Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Peter Bone and
Mr William Wragg

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House:

(1) notes the resolutions of the House of 12 and 13 March, and accordingly agrees that 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 that any extension beyond 30 June 2019 would require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May 2019.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. After the last few days of Government chaos and some defeats, all of us now have the opportunity and the responsibility to work together to find a solution to the crisis facing this country, where the Government have so dramatically failed to do so. We have begun to hold meetings with Members across the House to find a consensus and a compromise that meet the needs of this country, but the last few days have also put a responsibility on the Prime Minister: first, to publicly accept that both her deal and no deal are simply no longer viable options; and secondly, to bring forward the necessary legislation to amend the exit date of 29 March.

Tonight I reiterate our conviction that a deal, based on our alternative plan, can be agreed and can command support across the House. I also reiterate our support for a public vote, not as political point-scoring but as a realistic option to break the deadlock. *[Interruption.]* The whole purpose ought to be to protect communities that are stressed and worried about the future of their jobs and their industries. Our job is to try to meet the concerns of the people who sent us here in the first place. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Nothing further is required.

Ian Blackford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are in a crisis, and we are at the end of another week. We need to remind ourselves that the public of the United Kingdom are just two weeks away from potentially crashing out of the European Union.

While we have been debating here, the Trade Bill has been going through the other place, and, importantly, an amendment has been passed that disallows the Bill if no deal is not taken off the table. May I seek your advice, Mr Speaker, on how we can ensure that this House will be able to debate the Bill over the coming days, and that we will have an opportunity to use

legislation to ensure that no deal cannot happen? That is the responsible position that we should be taking, as opposed to—if I may say so—the utter hypocrisy of the Labour party, which funk'd the opportunity to put a people's vote on the agenda tonight.

Mr Speaker: Amendments will be considered at the point at which the Bill returns. That is the factual situation, and there is nothing that I can add at this stage.

Hilary Benn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the light of the important announcement made by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union in his closing speech that the Government intend to bring the neutral motion required under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act to the House by Monday 25 March, I wonder if, given the nature of the business that has already been announced for next week, the Leader of the House, who is present, may wish to indicate to the House whether the Government might be inclined to table that motion before Monday 25 March? We really need to get on with the process of trying to agree a way forward.

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which, of course, is not a matter for the Chair. The Leader of the House can respond if she wishes. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) is getting over-excited. He is a young pup—a new young Member—and I know that he requires encouragement.

If the Leader of the House wants to respond to the point of order she can, but she is under no obligation.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Let me simply say that I will of course take the right hon. Gentleman's concerns into account.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh, very well, Dr Lewis. Spit it out quickly, man.

Dr Lewis: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As one whom you described as a relatively new Member, I was rather puzzled when the Leader of the Opposition said something about a people's vote. Is there any way in which to register, within the rules of order, that as more than half the House of Commons voted against a second referendum tonight, the fact that so many Members abstained has nothing to do with it, and the matter is completely dead?

Mr Speaker: Well, the right hon. Gentleman has registered his view with his usual force, and we are grateful to him. I do not think that he is interested in a response from me, and he will be pleased to know that he is not getting such.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to make it. It concerns a matter unrelated to today's proceedings, but I believe that it is of the utmost importance.

Yesterday the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) made disgusting comments on LBC radio, saying that investigations of historical sexual abuse were a waste of money. His exact words, Mr Speaker, were

“spaffed money up the wall”,

“spaffed” being a well-known colloquialism for ejaculation.

I represent a constituency where many survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of the predatory paedophile Barry Bennell live. I represent a constituency where men such as Gary Cliffe and Steve Walters, and many others, spoke about the abuse that they suffered, which resulted in the imprisonment of Barry Bennell. They did so after decades of struggle in dealing with the shattering consequences of being abused. I represent a constituency—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have got the thrust of it, but I cannot allow a great speech to be made. I am sorry. If there is a request, the hon. Lady should please make it. She has made her point with considerable force and eloquence, but I know that she is approaching her last sentence.

Laura Smith: I understand that the Member did not make the comments in the House, but that should not place him beyond reproach. What advice can you give me, Mr Speaker, that I can pass on to those affected in Crewe and Nantwich on how best to proceed to hold this Member to account for his actions, which in my opinion fall far below the standards expected of parliamentarians?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. My answer to her is twofold. First, she can, and I suspect will, engage with the Member concerned, perhaps by correspondence, to register very forcefully her views. Secondly, if she wishes to approach that Member directly—in a very seemly but robust way—she can do that. She can also send her constituents a copy of today's *Official Report*, in which her very forceful and clear point of order and my response to it will be recorded. By the way, in interrupting her, I intended absolutely no discourtesy to her. I just wanted to expedite proceedings. She has made her point with great force, and it will be communicated to her constituents and to those at whom it was directed.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: Oh, very well. Go on. Blurt it out, man!

Luke Graham: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I ask for your guidance on a security matter. Last night, two individuals approached my constituency office and banged on the windows and shouted at the one member of staff who was in there. She was on her own, and she approached the individuals. She was told:

“In an independent Scotland, all of you will be hanging and we will be there at the front cheering on.”

They also said:

“I can't wait to come and drag you from this office and get you to the noose.”

My member of staff was on her own. If she were here now, she would say that she was a tough St Ninians woman who was happy to take them on, but she should not have to do that. May I ask for your guidance on what we can do in this House to ensure that everyone is as respectful as possible, both in this place and on social media, and what can be done to help the security of our staff in constituencies?

Mr Speaker: I say to the hon. Gentleman that that behaviour was despicable and should be condemned unreservedly, as it will be by all right-thinking people in this House and beyond. I am sorry for the ghastly experience that his staffer has undergone. It should not happen to anyone. In terms of what we do, these are difficult watchwords, and none of us observes them unflinchingly, myself included, but my watchwords in terms of how we all conduct ourselves would be these: political difference, personal amiability. It ought to be possible and the norm—as exemplified by, for example, the Father of the House—to express a robust view and to play the ball rather than the man or woman. People who think that because they disapprove of somebody's views they have a right to subject them to bile, calumny, vituperation and threat, not to mention actual violence, need to be shown that that is not acceptable and that where they are breaking the law, its full force will be applied to them. I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point of order, and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) for raising hers.

Clyde House and A2Dominion

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stuart Andrew.)

6.34 pm

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I want to raise an issue that has been raised by residents who live in Clyde House in my constituency. It is a block—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. It is not fair that the right hon. Lady cannot be heard at all. Let us just have a moment while everyone leaves the Chamber a little more quietly. That is better. Thank you.

Justine Greening: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Clyde House is a block of flats where residents have experienced problems pretty much from the word go after it opened several years ago. The issues came to a head several weeks ago when a huge water leak from the heating system rapidly spread through the electrics, causing huge concern for residents, who were worried about the inevitable health and safety issues. As the local MP, I did my best to see what I could do to get A2Dominion, the agent that manages the property, to respond more promptly to residents' concerns, but residents have experienced major issues in trying to get urgent repairs done. I have encountered similar problems and was initially unable to find someone at A2Dominion who was prepared to take some responsibility to ensure that the necessary repairs were done.

I have held three meetings for residents of Clyde House and have had the chance to inspect some of the flats. I saw potential electrical faults, water damage close to electrical fittings, and severe condensation due to poor ventilation, which residents told me had been a problem right from the start. Those are just a few of several issues with the block. Another problem is that the lifts that serve the flats were extremely unreliable to the extent that, on several occasions, elderly and disabled people have been literally unable to get into their homes because the lifts were not working. They could not even be carried or get upstairs some other way, which is totally unacceptable. Other families have been worried about health and safety issues, and some with children who suffer asthma have suspicions that it had been brought on by the damp and mould.

After those three meetings, we did get a plan of work from A2Dominion, and it was vital that the organisation finally responded to the issues that Clyde House residents were experiencing. Since then, although some deadlines were initially missed, which only led to concerns being raised even further in the first week that we were trying to get some action, I can tell the House that more progress has been made. To be even about A2Dominion's record, it has now done much more to address the urgent and broader issues affecting Clyde House.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene and congratulate her on securing this debate. I have experienced similar issues with A2Dominion, and her sequence of events mirrors mine. I have had issues with blocks run by A2Dominion for eight or 10 years since I was councillor—three and a half years before I came here.

I also recognise the long-standing lack of maintenance and communication with residents. However, like the right hon. Lady, I have also noticed a recent improvement in communication with my office, with residents and with the London Borough of Hounslow, which has also experienced issues, so I am hopeful that things are improving. However, does she agree that there is an issue of accountability when it comes to housing associations and their key stakeholders?

Justine Greening: Indeed, and I will come on to what I think could be some of the solutions. The hon. Lady highlights one of the other issues that came out of the experience of Clyde House residents, which is that nobody is willing to take responsibility. On the one hand, A2Dominion said initially that the responsibility for rectifying some of the major urgent issues was down to the developer, which was responsible because it had built the building. On the other hand, the developer was clear with me that it had handed over that responsibility and that the issues within the footprint of the building itself had been passed on to A2Dominion, which is responsible for maintenance. While that discussion was happening between those two organisations, my constituents were left with no action, from which there are lessons to be learned.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the right hon. Lady for securing this debate. She is making a clear case about the lack of responsiveness and responsibility from the housing association, A2Dominion. It is incredible how common these issues and stories seem to be.

Over the past two months I have had an issue with a broken lift at Camellia House in Feltham, where the issue has been between A2Dominion and FirstPort, with neither seeming to take responsibility for resolving the issue as quickly as it could be. There has been poor communication with residents throughout the process. They also said that a fob was available for an alternative lift, which was not available to all the residents.

Where people have been affected, whether they are families with young children or people with disabilities, it has become even more of a stress and a strain at the beginning and end of every day. Does the right hon. Lady agree that we need to do much more to ensure there is transparency of service charges and accountability so that housing associations work in the interest of residents, and not in their own interest?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The work now under way at Clyde House will steadily make a difference to residents. Communal areas on all the floors will be redecorated, and fresh flooring will be put down. Work is beginning on upgraded CCTV, and the entrance doors will be much friendlier for disabled people who will now not have to reach the doors to open them—the doors will open automatically with a fob. A whole series of improvements will be made, which is welcome, but it should not have reached a crisis point for my local community and residents before action was taken. They should not have had to call me, as their local MP, to step in and force the issue to get action.

I will briefly address some of the possible solutions, because it strikes me that people see housing and homes as the ultimate public utility, yet whatever expectations

we have of any other utility, whether mobile phones, water or energy, we have a completely different approach to the one on which we are most reliant, the home we live in. Who built it and to what standard?

I know the Government are looking at how we can have a more streamlined approach, but I will finish by setting out where positive differences could have been made in the case of Clyde House. First, when buildings are completed, obviously an independent inspection is needed to sign them off. My suggestion is that there should be a further follow-up inspection in, say, one to two years to consider whether issues have emerged since the building was finished and occupied that simply were not there to be identified at the beginning.

In cases like ours, the issues were clear from the first three months of residents moving in, but there was no independent person to pick them up. This suggestion would allow the industry to take quick action before problems become worse and more costly to rectify. It should also happen on an independent basis so that residents have the reassurance that somebody entirely separate from both the developer and the managing agent is able to come in and look at whether the building is performing and being maintained as expected.

I thoroughly agree on the need for more transparency on service charges and the whole range of costs that residents often experience in such homes. I do not know why we cannot have an approach like our approach to energy ratings, which is more consistent and transparent across buildings, wherever they are in the country, so that residents can get a sense of whether the various charges they are being asked to pay to live in their flat are at the high end or the low end for an average flat of the same nature. People are used to seeing that for other utilities and should be able to see it for the flat they live in.

We need a more pan-regulatory system that allows us to identify issues that are not just specific to a particular residence but symptomatic of an organisation with failings. Based on what other MPs have said to me about A2Dominion—I must repeat that it has now responded to the issues at Clyde House and is working hard to resolve them—my sense is that my constituents are not the only ones who have had issues. Organisations such as A2Dominion need to consider whether particular issues are in fact symptomatic of wider organisational problems around promptness, the efficacy of what they do and whether they follow up to make sure residents are content with the work done.

From what I can gather, the ventilation at Clyde House might not have been the best approach for that building, given its circumstances. Where such issues are systemic—for example, if the developer at Clyde House is repeating them in block after block—we need an approach and a regulatory system that can pick that up so that developers can learn from building mistakes and suboptimal approaches and get them rectified and so that the industry as a whole can rectify problems. It would also enable people thinking of living in a particular property to find out whether it was built by someone who tends to get these buildings right or someone who tends to get them wrong.

We urgently need a broader review of this area. It is unacceptable that people are living in the sorts of conditions I saw in Clyde House. It does not matter on what basis they are living in those conditions. People should know

they have redress to get urgent action taken, and taken effectively, so that they do not have to live like that for long.

Seema Malhotra: The right hon. Member is making an important point about the need for a wider review and rightly draws a distinction with developments where there have been positive experiences. On the management of properties, particularly where there is shared ownership, is it not also important that there is fairness in the system—that people feel they are being treated fairly—and that the system works for those doing their best to have a home they can feel secure in, not exploited in?

Justine Greening: Indeed. It is really important that residents have access to redress, independent oversight of the quality of the work and somewhere to go when there are issues, and it is important that the system be streamlined so that it is simpler for residents. They should not need to have access to expensive lawyers to get proper advice about how to get their problems sorted out.

This is important. I was shocked at the kinds of environments that Clyde House residents were having to live in. I am pleased that A2Dominion is now responding to them, but the situation has raised some systemic issues and it would be good to hear from the Minister about what action the Government can take to ensure they are addressed.

6.48 pm

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) on securing this important debate. I understand her concerns and those of her constituents about the terrible situation at Clyde House, the state of their homes and how this has been addressed by the landlord, A2Dominion. I also congratulate her on the obviously pivotal role she played in resolving the situation. It is obvious from events that her intervention has brought A2Dominion up short and made them acknowledge its mistakes and errors. Indeed, I read in *The Guardian* that the director of property services had issued an apology saying:

“We recognise that things are not right and we’re going to put them right. We haven’t performed well, and you have my personal apology.”

She no doubt has the gratitude of her constituents and my congratulations as the Minister and those of the many Members who deal with these sorts of issues on a daily basis, as I do in my constituency.

Let me first make it clear that everyone has the right to be safe and to feel safe in their home, and they should expect their complaints to be dealt with promptly and effectively. The Government have taken steps to ensure that happens. Last year we published our social housing Green Paper, which sought views on how to improve redress for social housing residents in particular, and on a number of other issues that my right hon. Friend has raised this evening.

We engaged extensively with residents to inform and shape the Green Paper. We heard that residents want redress quickly when things go wrong, and for processes to be clearer and simpler. The Green Paper asked a range of questions on how we could deliver that, including a question on the future of the democratic filter, which

[Kit Malthouse]

is the process whereby a complaint is referred to the ombudsman via a designated person, or the complainant must wait eight weeks, which can further delay the complaints process.

The Green Paper also set out proposals to hold landlords to account more. To that end, we are reviewing the regulatory system for social housing so that the regulator can take action when a landlord consistently fails its residents. We want to rebalance the relationship between landlords and residents, and we will underpin that with a robust regulatory framework. We will publish our response to the Green Paper and the outcome of the review of regulation in due course.

I held roadshows across the country with hundreds of residents, particularly in social and affordable housing. I made a pledge that at some point before the summer we will publish that action plan. It will have a clear sense of direction and a clear timetable, because I was asked repeatedly by residents whether it was worth attending the roadshows, and whether they will actually see some change. I have made that pledge. How long I will be in this job, I am not sure—Housing Ministers do not often last that long—but I will try.

I also want to mention the other actions that the Government are taking to help all tenants. The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 will strengthen all tenants' rights and protect them from poor practice. The Act, which comes into force on 20 March, will empower all tenants, both private tenants and those in social housing, to take their landlord to court if their property is unfit for human habitation. Under the Act, landlords must ensure that their properties are fit from the start and throughout the tenancy. If they do not do so, the tenant has the right to take legal action. We have published guidance for tenants to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the Act, and guidance for landlords and local authorities on how the Act might affect them.

Seema Malhotra: Can the Minister clarify whether, under the new arrangements, which I think we are all pleased to see coming into force, if a resident takes a landlord to court and wins, there are any circumstances in which they might be required to pay the landlord's legal fees?

Kit Malthouse: That is a very good question, to which I do not actually have the answer, but I will make inquiries and write to the hon. Lady. In most cases, as I am sure she knows, it is at the judge's discretion where costs fall, and often it is decided on the merits of the case.

The 2018 Act does not place any additional responsibilities on social landlords, as they are already required to maintain their homes to a decent standard; it will act only as a backstop. We expect any problems with properties to be resolved far before they reach that stage.

The first step for residents with a complaint is to report problems to their landlord. The regulator expects all social landlords to have in place a complaints process that deals with issues promptly, politely and fairly. The onus is on individual landlords, working with residents, to set their approach and timescales for handling their

residents' complaints. I want to stress that if any hon. Member, acting on a constituent's behalf, is unhappy with the response provided by a registered provider once their internal complaints process has been exhausted, that hon. Member may take the matter further.

Social housing residents can also approach the Housing Ombudsman Service at any time to seek advice. However, in order to refer a complaint formally to the ombudsman, a resident's complaint must pass through the democratic filter. That involves referring a complaint to a designated person—a local councillor, a Member of Parliament or a tenant panel—for them either to deal with the complaint or to refer it to the ombudsman, or waiting eight weeks after their landlord's complaints process has been exhausted. If the ombudsman determines that a complaint falls within its jurisdiction, it will investigate the complaint to determine whether there has been maladministration by the landlord. It will then issue a determination letter, which may include orders and recommendations to resolve the dispute. The landlord is expected to follow any orders within a specific timeframe.

Ruth Cadbury: A2Dominion is one of a number of large housing associations that, by definition, are charities, and yes, it is a registered social landlord. Almost all of its residents, certainly in my constituency, are either social rent tenants or leaseholders under the shared ownership scheme, many of whom are on fixed incomes. I see again and again seriously poor management practices and lack of repairs, such as those the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) has described. These residents do not have the time or energy to go through the process that the Minister has just set out. What they want is a decent-quality housing service that is at least as good as the local authority, and it should be as good as anyone would expect.

Kit Malthouse: I completely agree. I have a large number of housing association properties in my constituency, too, and my postbag as a constituency MP is filled with similar complaints. When I first became a Member of Parliament, I was astonished and dismayed to find I was effectively the postbox for local housing association's complaints service. Were I the chief executive of such an organisation, I would be mortified if local Members of Parliament were receiving the level of correspondence that some of us do, and I would be taking action.

We have recently seen some large housing associations acknowledge their failures: A2Dominion has acknowledged its particular failure in Clyde House, and L&Q, one of the G15, has come out very publicly and acknowledged its failure. Action has been taken—for example, in the past couple of years on Circle Property, which also failed on service—but there is more we can do, particularly on regulation, about which the Green Paper will say more. We can swing the pendulum of regulation toward a sense of customer service and away from purely financial regulation. As I say, there is more to come.

Sometimes things go wrong, and where that happens it is of the utmost importance that any safety concerns are resolved as soon as practicable. All registered providers of social housing must comply with the regulatory standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. That includes ensuring that all their properties meet and are maintained at the decent homes standard, which means

that homes should be free of any category 1 hazards, in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities, and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. The regulator's standards also require landlords to provide a repairs and maintenance service that responds to the need of tenants and offers them choices. The objective is to get repairs and improvements right the first time.

Justine Greening: It would be helpful if my hon. Friend covered the question of compensation. Often there are very serious problems with people's properties, and they may even need to be moved out. Those are extremely disruptive times for families with young children, and they end up living in hotels. Will the new framework provide more redress to compensate people who are affected by bad performance, as my constituents have been?

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend poses a good question. I do not want to front-run the publication of the plan document, but she can be assured that one of the critical issues for the Government is to make sure that tenants are dealt with professionally and quickly, and that their problems are sorted out the first time. We are considering devising a performance framework for housing associations and other registered social landlords, making performance transparent to tenants, which might be useful to them when comparing landlords.

Where landlords do not provide a proper repairs and maintenance service, tenants should complain and have the right to expect that something is done. If my right hon. Friend's constituents consider that their property has serious hazards that present a risk to health and safety, they can report that to their local council, which can inspect and assess the property using the housing health and safety rating system. If the local council becomes aware of a serious category 1 hazard, it has a duty to take appropriate action to address it. Hazards can include, among other things, damp, excess cold or heat, poor sanitation and fire risks. Councils have a

range of powers to ensure that landlords take appropriate action to rectify the problem; in extreme cases, the council can take emergency remedial action itself and charge the landlord to do the work.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend has reminded me that it was remiss of me not to give thanks to Wandsworth Council for the work it did when issues of safety in Clyde House were raised. I put on record my thanks to the inspectors who went and made sure that health and safety measures were in place.

Kit Malthouse: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's intervention. I am pleased to hear that the system is working and that Wandsworth Council has played its part in resolving what was obviously a difficult and trying time for the residents of Clyde House. I hope the work we are doing on the social housing Green Paper and on shifting regulation generally more towards consumer standards and away from financial regulation will mean that the time in question will become a piece of history that we can all forget.

I thank my right hon. Friend again for securing this valuable debate. I have tried to set out the arrangements that are already in place to protect tenants, and I hope I have also made clear my commitment to improving things further. Nevertheless, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the issues at Clyde House, and I will be asking A2Dominion to come into the Department to explain what happened, what went wrong and where things might be improved. I would be more than happy to sit down with my right hon. Friend to discuss her ideas so that we can feed them into our work on the social housing Green Paper. As I have said, I am committed to ensuring that everyone can seek timely and effective solutions when they have a housing problem and can live in a home of which they can be proud.

Question put and agreed to.

7 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 14 March 2019

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

Future of the Oil and Gas Industry

1.30 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Sixth Report of the Scottish Affairs Committee, *The future of the oil and gas industry*, HC 996.

It is a pleasure to serve under such a distinguished member of the Panel of Chairs today, Mr Walker. I am grateful to see so many members of the Scottish Affairs Committee in their places and ready to go for this very important debate.

The Scottish Affairs Committee decided to hold an inquiry into oil and gas because of the unprecedented uncertainty caused to the sector by the dramatic fall in oil prices at the end of the last decade. We were interested in assessing how—or indeed whether—the sector had recovered and in better understanding the contemporary issues in the industry and how new innovations and interventions had played out.

Critically, we wanted to explore the readiness of the sector for transition and decarbonisation. We also wanted to look at its preparedness for diversification of the skills acquired over 40 years of production and development in the North sea.

We are, as always, grateful to the many people who gave evidence and contributed to our inquiry, and for the support we received from the sector. We held six evidence sessions and received more than 30 written submissions to the inquiry. We are particularly grateful to the Oil & Gas Technology Centre in the constituency of the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson), which hosted one of our evidence sessions and kindly lent us their premises to launch the report a few short weeks ago.

I should say first that the sector is in a reasonably good place. The resilience shown by our oil and gas industry in the face of such turbulence is to be commended. The tenacity that has been shown by the workforce and others involved in the industry is something we all recognised, and which has supported the sustainable recovery that has been put in place in the past few years. There remains a strong and positive future for Scotland's oil and gas sector, and the opportunities of a just transition to a decarbonised future are there to be grabbed.

Scotland remains at the forefront of the global oil and gas industry, which contributed £9.2 billion to the Scottish economy in 2017 and supports 135,000 jobs in Scotland. Only this week, the Oil and Gas Authority predicted that 11.9 billion barrels will be extracted by 2050—a hike of almost 50% from the forecast four years ago of 8 billion barrels. That shows an industry and a sector in a reasonably healthy condition.

More than that, Scotland's oil and gas is central to the UK's energy security. It is forecast that two thirds of the UK's primary energy needs will be met by oil and gas until at least 2035.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is speaking of the benefits to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I have some constituents who depend on the Scottish oil and gas sector for their employment. The skills that they have learned are not specific to Scotland—they are for everyone. Does the report acknowledge that all regions of the United Kingdom benefit from the Scottish oil and gas sector and it is therefore good for everyone?

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is of course absolutely right—this is a UK-wide industry, which has a footprint in most nations of the United Kingdom. Practically every region of England has some link to the supply chain serving the oil and gas industry across the UK. He is absolutely right to remind us that this is a UK-wide industry and one that we should all be very proud of, whether we are in Northern Ireland or in rural Perthshire.

It will not surprise hon. Members, however, that the inquiry found that the sector is still facing unprecedented challenges. Fluctuation in the oil price has hit companies with extreme uncertainty, particularly those working in the supply chain, while the rate of new well exploration has nose-dived. At the same time, the industry needs to properly prepare for the decline in production that will inevitably happen, to ensure that the economic benefits and highly skilled jobs the sector has acquired in and brought to Scotland are not lost.

The industry also has to find new ways to reduce its carbon footprint and use its skills and engineering knowledge to help develop low-carbon and renewable technologies. That is no small task, and those challenges are at the heart of the Committee's report. We address how the Government should support the industry while it gets ready for production to decline. How do we meet the UK's energy needs, of which oil and gas will remain a major component, while meeting our climate change obligations?

We believe that the best way for the Government to support the industry through those challenges is to agree an ambitious sector deal. A sector deal backed by a combined investment of £176 million from industry and the Government could deliver £110 billion for the UK economy, with particular benefits for Scotland and the north-east of Scotland. The funding would support three centres of excellence, focused on transformational technology, underwater innovation and decommissioning.

When the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), appeared before the Committee in December, she said that she was not able to go into the detail of the deal, which we totally accepted given that the Government were still to properly design it and come forward with what would happen. She said that progress would be announced in weeks, not months. It is not many months since December, but it is certainly weeks. I know the Energy Minister could not join us today because of other pressing business, but we are fortunate to have the Minister responsible for sector deals with us. Perhaps he can update us on the progress and shape of the sector deals.

[*Pete Wishart*]

I am certain that any delay will, of course, be down to the Government's taking very seriously the recommendations in our report, and designing the deal around some of the very useful recommendations that we made—that the sector deal is forward-thinking and sets up the industry to meet the challenges of climate change, decommissioning and of the industry's future beyond the UK continental shelf head on, rather than focusing on the usual support for maximisation of production in the short term. The days of short-termism in the North sea are over. Long-term planning and strategic thinking is required, and those are the priorities for the deal that the report outlines.

I will explain the detail a little further. First, a sector deal must capitalise on the opportunities arising from decommissioning. The North sea is not only going to be the first major basin to go through large-scale decommissioning; without doubt, it is also one of the most challenging environments anywhere in the world for decommissioning. As one of the witnesses said to us in an evidence session, if we can decommission a rig in the North sea, we can decommission a rig anywhere in the world. Scotland has an unmissable opportunity to export its decommissioning knowledge to the rest of the world and the Committee has therefore called for the sector deal to be accompanied by a Government decommissioning export strategy to anchor a global decommissioning industry in the north-east of Scotland.

The sector deal also needs to deliver on reducing the cost of decommissioning. We were surprised when we heard the range of estimates of the cost of decommissioning—the gulf between the lowest and highest point was quite extraordinary. We need to see that cost reduced for UK taxpayers, because half of the decommissioning cost will still be met through the Treasury and by taxpayers through tax relief.

The sector must find ways to transfer its unique expertise to other sectors of the economy so that the jobs are not lost when oil production stops. One of the most impressive features—I think all members of the Committee recognised this when we were taking evidence for the report—is the range of skills available to us from North sea exploration. The skills acquired over four decades of production are among the most impressive to be found in the oil and gas sector anywhere in the world. It is absolutely imperative that the skills, expertise, talent and energy that have been built up in the sector are not lost as we move towards decommissioning and the ending of production.

We heard that there is no end to the opportunities available if we get decommissioning right. Sectors including aerospace, data analytics, marine and offshore engineering, digital manufacturing, satellite technology and offshore wind are all open for skills and technology transfer. We were particularly taken by the opportunities in the renewable sector, and we call for the sector deal to contain specific and measurable proposals for how it will improve skill and technology transfer to the sector. Scotland gained by acquiring North sea oil. It is questionable whether we secured the benefits of discovering North sea oil; we must not lose any benefits of what happens next with renewable technology. The skills acquired in the North sea are perfectly fitted, and could be adapted, for use in renewable energy.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is speaking very well about the work of the Committee in this regard. We worked very well to produce the report. On the redeployment of skills as the supply of oil continues to diminish, paragraph 82 of the report identifies fracking as an opportunity for these skills to be redeployed. Colette Cohen, the chief executive of the Oil & Gas Technology Centre, said that fracking would provide

“increased opportunities for the workforce”

and

“for the technologies and skills we already have.”

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is an opportunity to continue to use these skills in fracking and connected industries?

Pete Wishart: I had a sneaking suspicion that I would secure an intervention based on the hon. Gentleman's desire for fracking to be included in all this. As he knows, there was a robust debate among Committee members on the value of fracking and what we should say about it in the report. He knows that I do not share his views, although I am aware of the evidence that was given sincerely by some members of the sector. The Committee agreed a consensus that this was something we were not really concerned with as we went forward, and we have left it as such in the report.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Yesterday in his statement the Chancellor talked about banning gas from new homes in 2025. Surely we have to look to the benefits of oil and gas in the future. Is that not a worry for us?

Pete Wishart: Absolutely. I was intrigued by the message from the Chancellor yesterday, when this was mentioned. Yes, there are huge opportunities for us. I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that it was mightily impressive to see the things that could come and how these skills could be applied and transferred. Perhaps the Minister can say what more work could be done to ensure that we get this. We would be grateful for any insight into the conversation he has been having with the sector on skills transfer.

The sector deal must bring forward proposals for how the sector will address its carbon footprint, both in the process of producing and extracting oil and gas, and by finding ways to reduce emissions from their use. The report received a mixed reaction from some environmental groups—I will put it as delicately as that. That surprised me, due to the range of recommendations we made and the care and diligence that we gave to shaping up some of the transition recommendations. We believe in a just transition and said as much in the report. We believe that if that is achieved, we will get to a new future—a green and transformative future for the sector.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I agree with the Chairman of the Committee, who is speaking very well about the report. We received criticisms from Friends of the Earth, for example, which said that there was no coverage of the impact of climate change. Does he agree that the organisation had clearly not got as far as chapter 6?

Pete Wishart: Absolutely. When the report came out, all of us on the Committee were quite surprised by the scale of the response. I do not think there was a true examination of what we had in the report. We say in it that a transition is required, but it has to come from a position of strength. We cannot do anything that would compromise our ability to have a viable and sustainable sector that is in a position to carry out the just transition that environmental groups are looking for.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous with interventions. One of the things that I noticed in the report was the impact on fisheries. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation referred to the retention in the seas of artificial rigs and so on, which might disadvantage the local fishing community. What consideration did the report give to that?

Pete Wishart: I was not going to mention this, but it was a fascinating feature of the report; I am really grateful that the hon. Gentleman has drawn my attention to it. We took a lot of time speaking to environmental groups, particularly some of the wildlife groups, about sustainable fisheries. There was a suggestion of switching from rigs to reef: to leave the infrastructure in place as a magnet and attraction for wildlife and fish species.

We received very mixed evidence on that. One group told us that in the gulf of Mexico, where this project had been initiated, people had to drag the reefs off the seabed, take it onshore to clean it, and then put it back again. One recommendation in our report is that the environmental groups have to decide among themselves about the best way forward. We encourage that debate among our friends in environmental sustainability groups, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue.

We were struck by the importance of carbon capture technology for the long-term future of the industry. The Committee on Climate Change told us that without this technology, decarbonisation of the sector will happen much more slowly and be more costly. This is one area where the Government are ahead of the industry, having announced £45 million of funding for carbon capture innovation, with more potentially available from industrial strategy funds. I know that particularly pleases the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), because most of that investment will be in his constituency. It is right that it should be, because of the infrastructure that exists there.

We believe that the industry needs to step up its contribution in this area, and that the sector deal must contain a detailed proposal from the industry on how it will support the development of carbon capture technology and how that progress can be measured. The oil and gas sector has a bright future ahead of it.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): I am very impressed by the report. Oil and gas obviously have an enormous footprint in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that the UK continental shelf oil and gas industry operates in what is recognised as one of the best fiscal regimes in the world, and does he welcome Her Majesty's Treasury's fiscal policies on oil and gas?

Pete Wishart: Obviously. It goes without saying that some of the fiscal support that has been given to the oil and gas sector has been welcome, and it is of course

necessary. I think we are going to the next stage, which is the sector deal initiative. That is now critical, according to the report and what we found in the course of the inquiry. That type of investment will be required to try to ensure that some of the things highlighted in the report take place.

We believe there is a bright future for the industry; it is now up to the Government to respond with how they will help the industry to secure it. I hope that the Government and industry rise to the challenge of the report and secure Scotland's future as a global leader in energy technology for decades to come. We have 30 to 40 years, and we have the opportunity to maximise economic recovery. We now have the ability to ensure that we can transition to a new type of future for the North sea. I am sure that with the right type of approach and the right type of mentoring and support, we can get there. Our oil and gas industry still has a viable future.

1.48 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. As a member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, and as someone with 25 years' experience of working in the oil and gas industry, I have taken a particular interest in this inquiry and very much welcome the report's publication. Like all parts of north-east Scotland, my constituency has a deep relationship with the oil and gas sector. Many of my constituents work in the industry, as I did. The industry has helped bring prosperity to the area over the last half a century or so.

It is clear that the industry is moving into a new era, which is why the report is so important. While the industry is emerging from the downturn of the last few years, the medium to long term promises smaller reserve finds, reduced production rates, more decommissioning and the challenge of a wider transition towards a low-carbon economy. The prosperity of north-east Scotland relies on the industry making the most of this transition. The report makes a valuable contribution to the important debate on how we can achieve that. The industry has led the way in that debate, and its recognition of long-term risks and the need to address them will give many people confidence in the industry's future.

It is worth recognising the work that many of the large oil and gas companies have been doing to encourage a transition towards low-carbon energies. They are often cast as cartoon villains in relation to climate change, but throughout the inquiry I have commended them for leading the way in the sector, and for taking climate change seriously. That commitment was exemplified by the creation in 2015 of the Oil and Gas Climate Change Initiative, initially made up of the BG Group, BP, Eni, Pemex, Reliance Industries, Repsol, Saudi Aramco, Shell, Statoil—now known as Equinor—and Total. Significantly, it was joined in the last year by American companies—Chevron, ExxonMobil and Occidental. Having worked for many of those companies as a member of staff, mostly for BP, and as a consultant for some of the others, I can confirm that that commitment to a low-carbon future is not just lip service.

The Committee's report praises industry efforts such as Vision 2035 and the "maximising economic recovery" strategy, which aim to ensure that the industry continues to thrive in the medium to long term. As recommended

[David Duguid]

in the report, I hope that the UK Government continue to listen to the call for an oil and gas sector deal to help the industry achieve those aims.

We need to use the next couple of decades to diversify the industry beyond just exploration and the production of hydrocarbons. Decommissioning technology and expertise will not only accelerate the reduction of decommissioning costs in the North sea but open up new export opportunities for the industry. Similarly, the subsea or underwater sector has great export potential, provided that we act quickly and do not fall behind other countries with expertise in this area, such as Brazil and Norway.

I am particularly pleased that the report recognises the potential of carbon capture, use and storage for the future of the industry. As the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) mentioned, that is particularly important in my constituency. CCUS technology will be vital if we are to continue to use oil and gas in a low-carbon economy. In assets that have ceased or are due to cease production, decommissioned infrastructure can be converted to use for CCUS purposes. This report is certainly not the first time that that potential has been recognised. Banff and Buchan has been the location of previous proposals for CCUS projects, which were sadly deemed not viable at the time. I continue to believe that CCUS can be part of a great future for the energy sector in Banff and Buchan, provided that the right proposals come along.

I am particularly excited by the Acorn project by Pale Blue Dot. Unlike previous proposals, it focuses on the St Fergus gas terminal, which is the third-largest emissions site in Scotland. The St Fergus gas terminal is an attractive proposition because it is already linked by pipeline to the Grangemouth industrial complex. Unlike previous proposals, Acorn aims to achieve commercial viability by starting small and growing through additions to the core project later. Whereas a previous proposal for a CCUS power station at Peterhead would have cost about £1 billion, the cost of the initial Acorn project is estimated to be just £300 million.

I pay particular tribute to the Oil & Gas Technology Centre, run by Colette Cohen. Its vision is to become more about the technology than the oil and gas. The trade body, Oil & Gas UK, led by Deirdre Michie, provides a huge amount of co-ordination and expertise for the industry. Finally, the Oil and Gas Authority, run by Dr Andy Samuel, is an exemplar of how a UK Government body can be hugely effective when based closer to the action.

I look forward to the Minister's response to the report and, in particular, the recommendations on the sector deal. The report's tone and the industry's approach are constructive and optimistic, so I hope that the UK Government's response will be similarly constructive and encouraging. Together, we can build on the work already done, and take the necessary steps to help the oil and gas sector continue to contribute to the economy, not just for Aberdeen and north-east Scotland, but for the whole United Kingdom, sustainably and for decades to come.

1.53 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Mr Walker. I thank all my colleagues on the Scottish Affairs Committee for their work in producing this report.

It would be an understatement to say that the oil and gas industry is a vital part of the Scottish economy. It contributed £9.2 billion in 2017 and, as we have heard, it supports about 135,000 jobs. It is essential to the UK's energy security, and forecasts suggest that oil and gas will account for two thirds of the UK's primary energy needs until at least 2035.

The industry has suffered in recent years, but is starting to come through a challenging downturn, although there are still worrying signs, such as the low levels of new well exploration. There are also future challenges for the industry, such as declining production, climate change targets and the decommissioning of oil and gas rigs. I agree with the report's central finding that the Government must provide serious and credible support to the industry through the sector deal. A sector deal supported by the Government and industry has the potential to deliver £110 billion for the UK economy by 2035. It must help with the development of new technology to maximise the recovery of the 10 billion to 20 billion barrels of oil that remain in the UK. It must find ways of encouraging greater decommissioning of oil and gas rigs, while reducing the cost of doing so. It must ensure that the industry's skills, expertise and technology are protected for the future, including by transferring them for use in renewable energy, subsea engineering and carbon capture. The oil and gas industry has many opportunities for Scotland and the whole UK, which we should not waste. That is why I endorse the report's findings, including its key recommendations about a sector deal.

I want to touch on some of the issues raised with the Scottish Affairs Committee, particularly by Unite and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Those unions play a crucial role in organising and representing the interests of workers in the oil and gas industry. They were both keen to emphasise the need to maximise the industry's economic recovery to its full potential. They share the sentiment of the industry and the Government.

It is welcome that the Oil and Gas Authority will lead exploration by commissioning surveys of unexplored areas of the sea bed. The creation of the Oil & Gas Technology Centre through the Aberdeen city deal was welcome. The "maximising economic recovery" strategy cannot be implemented through significant reductions in costs, given the impact that they could have on the workforce. There is a clear case for the Oil and Gas Authority working with the UK and Scottish Governments to create strategic public stakes in the implementation of the strategy. Those stakes should include infrastructure, such as pipelines, and public investment through borrowing and national investment banks. Only through co-investment by public and private stakeholders can we ensure the strategy's success.

The fall in the oil price in recent years led to an 18% reduction in the core offshore workforce between 2014 and 2016. It also led to a reduction in the workforce's terms and conditions. RMT highlights the growing use

of short-term and zero-hours contracts. The industry and trade unions have observed practices including the application of retrospective charges for training, the exclusion of trade unions from heliports, the denial of holiday entitlements and the ignoring of TUPE requirements. I believe that Unite is right to call for the full devolution of employment law to Scotland so that we can begin to address those issues, alongside investing in skills, apprenticeships and training in the industry.

Although decommissioning must be a crucial part of the sector deal, it must be done in a way that preserves skills, expertise and technology. It is clear to me that there should be a national decommissioning strategy to ensure that decommissioning delivers for workers and our economy. The strategy must be devised through discussions between the UK and Scottish Governments, local authorities, industries and trade unions.

I would like to talk about safety in the industry. As a trade unionist, I want to ensure that all workers are safe in their workplace. It alarms me to see the findings of a recent report by Robert Gordon University, which received responses from 40% of offshore workers from the major companies in the industry. It found that 52% of workers are dissatisfied with their work-life balance; 45% said that it takes them longer to recover from their shifts, and 57% believe that the conditions of their offshore sleeping environment have worsened. Let us not ignore workers' concerns about offshore helicopter safety. Some 62% said that they would be unlikely to fly in a Super Puma helicopter if given a choice.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the safety of workers and the avoidance of accidents. What does he think the Government can do to bring the oil companies to the table for discussions with trade unions about the important matter of the safety of personnel on their rigs and in helicopters?

Hugh Gaffney: I will come to that point; I take an interest in it. I recently met Oil & Gas UK, with which the unions are getting together to bring the workforce on board. Without the workers on board, no company can go anywhere. Unless companies involve their workers in the process, there is no point trying to organise the company.

I declare an interest: 27 years ago today, I took an interest in North sea oil safety helicopters when a Super Puma helicopter went down, killing 11 men, of whom my brother-in-law was one. Today is the 27th anniversary of the crash, so I welcome the report. I hope that the industry will take serious steps to address those safety concerns, particularly as employers have a duty to ensure that workers are safe in their workplace and can get home safely.

To conclude, I reiterate my support for the findings of the report, including its recommendation of a sector deal. It is clear, however, that there are challenges that we will have to address: "maximising economic recovery", decommissioning, terms and conditions and, most importantly, the safety of the workforce.

2 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I genuinely welcome the report and thank colleagues on the Scottish

Affairs Committee not only for looking at this important issue, but for taking the time to come to Aberdeen—the heart of the UK's oil and gas industry—to speak with representatives and hear the views of the industry on how we can move forward. That was much appreciated by the oil and gas companies there.

My constituents in Aberdeen South know better than most just how important the future of the oil and gas industry is and how difficult the past few years have been. The climb out of those difficult days has been long and not without challenges. I see those challenges every day when I speak with constituents and meet local businesses.

I was encouraged to hear the latest news from the OGA this week that North sea production reached a seven-year high last year. That shows that the sector still has huge potential to form an integral part of the UK's energy mix and be a major source of high-value jobs across Scotland and the whole of the UK. Last week, I was pleased to welcome my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to Aberdeen, where we met representatives from Oil & Gas UK at Aberdeen harbour. During his visit, the Foreign Secretary highlighted the huge opportunities that await oil and gas companies once we leave the European Union.

Balmoral Group, a company based in my constituency, specialises in subsea buoyancy, renewable energy products and engineering solutions. It employs 500 people and is highly dependent on the rapidly growing markets of west Africa, South America, and the gulf of Mexico. The company is clear that its opportunities for growth are truly global. Aberdeen is a global city, and oil and gas companies based in my constituency have an increasingly international outlook. The new technologies developed through the Oil & Gas Technology Centre show the great export potential that will place Aberdeen at the centre of supply chains reaching around the world into mature and emerging markets.

Oil & Gas UK's Vision 2035 has the ambitious aim of doubling the supply chain's share of the global market from 3.7% to 7.4% by 2035. Those new technologies will be key to achieving that goal. They will not just unlock the future potential of the UK continental shelf, but secure the future of companies throughout the sector, as they diversify their interests. I welcome the Government's continued work with industry to invest in technology that maximises recovery, improves efficiencies and extends the life of the UK continental shelf, while boosting the potential for export growth.

From the day we arrived in Westminster, my colleagues and I have worked hard to secure much needed support for this vital industry. I remember vividly lobbying the Treasury at every opportunity, and we were successful in securing transferable tax history for the sector, which unblocked billions of pounds of investment. Maintaining certainty on tax relief and reducing barriers to investment will be crucial to attracting the investment that the sector requires to maximise economic recovery and secure the long-term future.

The UK's position as a market leader at the centre of global supply chains rests on the industry and Government working hand in hand to attract talent and investment as the sector prepares to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the coming years. I welcome the report on the future of the oil and gas industry, as it sets out the case for a sector deal for the industry and calls on

[*Ross Thomson*]

the Government to commit to securing the long-term future of this vital industry. I look forward to the Minister's remarks on the progress of that sector deal.

The future of the oil and gas industry rests on innovation not only in extraction to ensure that we maximise recovery, but in decommissioning. Decommissioning represents not the end of the oil and gas industry, but a huge opportunity to use the expertise and talent of a globally focused industry to turn a liability into an opportunity. The UK will be the largest market for decommissioning spending over the next decade, and is placed at the forefront of a rapidly growing market. I welcome the report's emphasis on the benefits of a sector deal to unlock the global potential of the oil and gas industry not just in my constituency, but in constituencies across the United Kingdom.

There is a lot of life left in the North sea, and a bright future for the oil and gas industry. Investment in new technologies and the growth of the sector at the centre of a global supply chain are key to grasping future opportunities. I welcome the report, which sets out how industry and Government can work together to secure that future.

2.6 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Walker.

As has been mentioned, Scotland's oil and gas industry is a world leader in many areas, health and safety being a notable one. Of course, we know the reason for that and we should pay our respects to the memory of the workers who have lost their lives in the industry, particularly in the Piper Alpha explosion and fire, but also in other incidents, including helicopter crashes, which the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) mentioned.

We should acknowledge that other workers have suffered serious injuries over the years while working in the industry. The safety record of North sea operations is better now, but that did not come easily or free of charge. The North sea industry has come a long way since its beginnings in the 1960s and the first gas from the Sea Gem rig, which gave us the first large-scale loss of life three months later. The industry has delivered substantial sums in wages, profits and taxes over the last half century, and it is incumbent on the Government to make a substantive contribution to decisions on the future of the industry, as the Committee's report lays out.

That should include the transfer of skills to new industries, and it seems to me that renewable energy should be a major recipient of those transferred skills. Offshore wind farms and marine energy schemes would be ideal recipients of those skills. I recently had the privilege of visiting Nova Innovation, which is headquartered only a few hundred yards from my constituency office in Leith, and I was extremely impressed by the advances it is making and the pace of change in the offshore renewables industry. Nova leads the way in the tidal energy industry, and the Shetland tidal array looks like it may be at the leading edge of a new energy revolution. Just as Shetland was important in the development of the oil and gas industry, it may well be important in the development of the next energy industry.

While the Government are developing their future plan for the oil and gas industry, they really should be developing a parallel plan for the future of renewables that offers proper financial support for research and development and for connection to the grid. I have a bit of trouble having confidence in the UK Government to do that, however, given the record of past UK Governments when it comes to the North sea. Regulatory and taxation changes have come abruptly and swept in with very little consultation. Frankly, there is little in the current Government's approach to legislating that gives me much hope of an alternative way of working.

David Duguid: Does the hon. Lady, my Committee colleague, agree with me and the testimony of witnesses that locating the Oil and Gas Authority, which is responsible for the regulations, in Aberdeen, close to the action, has already shown benefits and should show more in the future?

Deidre Brock: I agree that that was a definite point of progress and much to be welcomed, but the industry has been going for some 50 years, and some within it would argue that it was too little and almost too late. It is great that that came along, but much more can be done to support the industry.

As I mentioned with regard to improved support, I hope that the Government will surprise me, because the industry still has a lot to offer. The industry has plans to increase productivity so that in 16 years' time it will be producing an additional £920 billion in revenue—not bad for an industry that we get told regularly is finished.

The scale of the contribution that the industry has made over the years is breathtaking. Scots will be aware of the famous, or infamous, McCrone report that was uncovered in 2005 by a friend of mine, Davie Hutchison, but written some years before he was born, in 1974. Professor McCrone was a UK Government civil servant at the time of writing, when he pointed out that the resources in the North sea were so enormous that they destroyed all the economic arguments against Scottish independence. Recently, Professor McCrone said that he regrets that the UK Government wasted that resource, frittering the income away, rather than investing in a sovereign wealth fund.

Furthermore, the McCrone report was written some years before the biggest discoveries in the North sea. Peak annual production did not come until 1999 and, as we have heard throughout the inquiry, new extraction techniques are increasing the potential recoverable resources even now. With another half century of extraction still possible, and new fields coming on stream in other areas, the industry has a long future yet. The Government need to step up to the plate.

One of the issues that has been mentioned is the protection of the environment and the development of serious carbon capture and storage proposals. Previous attempts to develop such schemes fell foul of Government inaction and broken promises. We need to see some serious commitment to making progress. I once heard about a pilot project, I think in Poland, where the carbon was captured and pressurised only to be driven a couple of hundred miles in tankers to the injection site, possibly defeating the purpose.

Some schemes that have been suggested before may well be capable of revival, and I am sure that more ideas would emerge when asked for. I hope that the Government will open the door to those ideas and help fund them, perhaps even hypothecating some of the revenue gleaned from the offshore industry, which should have gone into a sovereign wealth fund for Scots but is instead frittered away by successive UK Governments. The Government should consider doing a lot more for the environment with the resources brought in by the offshore industry. They could match the Saltire tidal energy challenge fund launched by the Scottish Government earlier this year, or reinstate the marine energy subsidy. If oil and gas were the energy choices in the second half of the 20th century, renewables will fill that role in the 21st century. We urgently need Government investment to make that industry a world leader.

The oil and gas industry is not dead yet, not by a long way. With at least as many years of exploitation left as we have already seen, there is still some way to go. The UK Government should sit down regularly with the industry to help plan the next half century. Vision 2035 is the industry view of the next few years; it would be good to see a UK Government vision or, better still, one agreed by the Government with the industry.

2.13 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the Scottish Affairs Committee on producing this informative report and on securing the debate.

The oil and gas industry is extremely important in the north-east of Scotland, but it also has other clusters, although not quite as large, in the north-east of England and East Anglia, which I represent. I chair the British offshore oil and gas industry all-party parliamentary group. It is important to remember that the industry is a national one and that it has a supply chain that extends throughout the whole of the UK.

The industry has been, I would say, the British industrial success story of the past 55 years. The results of extracting hydrocarbons on the UK continental shelf have been the creation of thousands of well-paid good jobs, the generation of an enormous amount of money for Her Majesty's Treasury, and the development of expertise that can be taken, and has been taken, all around the world. Go to Libya, the gulf of Mexico, Kazakhstan or China, and one hears Scottish, Geordie and East Anglian accents.

David Duguid: Following on from something the Chair of the Committee said in his opening remarks—I meant to say this in my speech—I have benefited from that skills transfer, having worked not in Libya but in some of those other places around the world where oil and gas are prevalent. Does the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) agree that an important aspect of the sector deal, and the urgency of it, is to encourage the retention of those skills in this country in order to develop the technologies and innovations that we have discussed?

Peter Aldous: My hon. Friend is right. We have developed enormous expertise in the oil and gas sector which it is important to retain and build on. We are just

beginning to see that in the offshore wind sector as well and, as I will come on to, the two are inextricably linked.

Yesterday was an important day for the industry. The APPG had its annual parliamentary reception, and those attending were in good heart and had a positive outlook for the future. We also had the Chancellor's spring statement. Normally, the APPG lobbies Government hard coming up to annual Budgets and statements, but yesterday the Chancellor made no mention of the industry. I think that was mainly because he is keen for statements to be just that and not mini Budgets, but in many respects that was good news, because the industry wants a stable fiscal regime with no unforeseen, unpleasant or unhelpful surprises. That said, as we anticipate the autumn Budget, I suggest that we should all be back in top lobbying gear.

I acknowledge that we are now entering the second half of the contest—perhaps I should say challenge—of extracting oil and gas on the UKCS, but we should emphasise that this is not a sunset industry, as indeed colleagues in all parts of the Chamber have said. As in many matches, the best performances, goals and tries come in the second half. The industry has come through a great deal in recent years, but while challenges remain—in particular the low level of drilling activity and exploration—it is largely in a good place. Last year, significant final investment decisions were made on a number of major projects, production performance was strong, and unit operating costs had stabilised.

I shall highlight three areas in which the industry, the Oil and Gas Authority and the Government need to work together in the immediate future to maximise the sector's potential for the benefit of all those who work in it and for the UK. First, attention needs to be given to strengthening the industry's supply chain. Many companies' revenues and margins are under extreme pressure, and increased collaboration and innovative contracting models are needed. If those are put in place, as a country we will be able to continue to compete for international investment, to provide security of energy supply, and to create and support highly skilled and fulfilling jobs.

Secondly, we need to build up expertise and create specialist hubs to carry out decommissioning. A good start has been made with the launch of the National Decommissioning Centre, but we must have it in mind that that is an enormous prize, not just on the UKCS—and, from my own perspective, most immediately in the southern North sea—but in basins all around the world.

Thirdly, the sector has made a good start in promoting and facilitating the transition to a low-carbon economy. Instead of the Danish oil and natural gas company and Statoil, we talk about Ørsted and Equinor. Gas has an important role to play in the transition to a low-carbon economy. In the southern North sea, the oil and gas and offshore wind sectors are collaborating on such innovative projects as gas to wire, which involves gas being generated into electricity offshore and transmitted to shore via spare capacity in the subsea cables that are used for the wind farms.

There are plenty of challenges, but my sense is that the industry is resurgent and brimful of ideas. With the right nurturing, promotion and collaboration, it can play a key role in the UK on the post-Brexit global stage.

2.20 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I thank the Committee members and the witnesses for helping to reach the well-considered conclusions and recommendations, and I thank the Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), for his push to consider matters of real significance to Scotland. If one sector has been a dominant industry in the political discourse of Scotland in the past 40 or 50 years, it has been oil and gas.

Today's Scottish oil and gas sector is in a strong position. With up to 20 billion barrels of oil equivalent remaining, there is enough to sustain production for the next 20 years and beyond. Recent discoveries such as the Capercaillie and Achmelvich wells by BP, the huge and significant gas reserves west of Shetland and Clair Ridge, and Nexen's phase two of developing the Buzzard field, demonstrate the significant untapped potential that this industry holds should we wish to exploit reserves.

Figures published in the last week by the Oil and Gas Authority forecast that 11.9 billion barrels will be extracted by 2050, up almost 50% from the estimated 8 billion barrels predicted just four years ago. That is why the Scottish Government are keen to do everything they can to support the industry and its workforce. In 2016, the Scottish Government launched a £12 million transition training fund to help oil workers retrain and make the most of their transferable skills to forge careers in other sectors. Some 4,000 applications have been approved, with training satisfaction at around 90%.

We have helped the Scottish supply chain to capitalise on an expanding decommissioning market that is forecast to reach £17 billion by 2025. The decommissioning challenge fund has offered grant funding of £3.1 million for projects focused on delivering innovative infrastructure improvements and technological advances in this area. As part of the Aberdeen city region deal, the SNP has committed £90 million over the next decade to support the Oil & Gas Technology Centre.

We are looking at an uplift of over £194 million in the enterprise and energy budget to support entrepreneurship, construction and productivity. That additional funding will contribute to an investment of almost £2.4 billion in enterprise and skills through our enterprise agencies and skills bodies.

The Scottish Government offer an impressive range of support for the industry. As we move forward, I hope the UK can step up to the plate and do more to support the industry as it moves into its next phases of production. However, successive Tory and Labour Governments have continually exploited the oil and gas industry for cash, with little regard for its future sustainability. They have been quite content to rake in a tax take of £350 billion from North sea revenues alone over the past 50 years. The Tories failed to deliver any real fiscal support when the sector was in depression after the oil price dropped. I hope that is a lesson learned. This is an extremely important sector for the future, and we need to support it to allow it to continue, maintain jobs and transition out of oil and gas into other areas.

Deidre Brock: On successive UK Governments' management of the oil resource, I should say that in recent years Norway's state-owned oil sector has generated

many billions of pounds in Government revenue, while the UK has lost many. Does my hon. Friend agree that that points to a gross mismanagement of this valuable resource over many years by successive UK Governments?

Douglas Chapman: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Norway's population is very similar to Scotland's and it has a similar ability make good from the resource it found on its doorstep. It now has the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, yet in Scotland and the UK we have not put anything aside for future generations. That is a huge lost opportunity for the industry and the UK people.

David Duguid: We often hear about the Norwegian sovereign oil fund. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the same fund is investing heavily in the UK market as we prepare to leave the European Union?

Douglas Chapman: That is a fantastic option that Norway has, but in the UK we do not have that wealth fund to decide how we will invest in the future. That makes a bit of a mockery of us. We have had all that wealth; Norway has done a huge amount with theirs, but we have taken ours off our balance sheet and spent it as it came in. We should have put some away for future generations.

Ross Thomson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there is no sovereign wealth fund in the UK, but the revenues generated from the oil and gas industry in the UK were used at the time to invest in what we enjoy now: hospitals and infrastructure. That money was used for huge investment in infrastructure that is still used today by people across the United Kingdom. In the 1970s, it was used to help lessen the costs of unemployment.

Douglas Chapman: The UK Government has had a spend, spend, spend approach, but as I said, I would like us to put away much more of that wealth for future generations. Perhaps it is a bit late to do that now; we probably should have started doing it from the beginning. It is easy to say in hindsight, but it should have been part of the overall oil and gas strategy right from the start.

It was interesting to hear the Chancellor's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) during the spring statement yesterday. He said:

"Scotland gets its share of...capital and resource, but precious little thanks do we ever hear from...the SNP Benches".—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 360.]

The fact that £350 billion went into Treasury coffers but not a brass farthing went directly into the Scottish economy underlines the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) about what Scotland has got out of oil and gas. We could have had an awful lot more to benefit every man, woman and child in our country. The Chancellor's concept of pooling and sharing is much different from mine.

I am grateful that the control, stewardship and the tax take will soon be back in Scotland's hands—"stewardship" is the key word rather than "management". I return to the eloquent point made by the hon. Member

for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) on safety: if companies are being brought to the table to talk about how to license certain fields, surely that is a fantastic opportunity to talk about their responsibilities for trade union recognition, and the safety and security of people who work on rigs far out in the North sea.

Scotland does not underestimate the vital part the oil and gas sector plays in meeting our energy needs; as the Committee points out, it is forecast that two thirds of the UK's primary energy needs will be met from the North sea until at least 2035. However, we must also appreciate that we need to transition to a low-energy, low-carbon economy. Our world-leading, export-oriented supply chain already plays a positive role in that respect by looking at ways to reduce its carbon footprint at every turn. Average emissions per unit of production on the UK continental shelf have fallen year on year since 2013, and total emissions have been in decline since their peak in 2000.

Our oil and gas industry is awash with highly skilled individuals in possession of world-leading expertise. The sector currently supports 283,000 jobs across the UK. We must seek to hold on to those workers to retain the value they add to our economy. As I said, the Scottish Government's transition training fund has made good progress in that regard, facilitating training for many oil and gas workers to move into renewables such as tidal, onshore and offshore wind, wave power and solar. However, the UK Government's decision to slash funding for the renewable energy sector does not give us much encouragement. In fact, it does exactly the opposite, removing opportunities for talented individuals to utilise their skills to develop new wind technology and other low-carbon technologies such as carbon capture and storage—not so much opportunity knocks as an opportunity lost.

Brexit looms large in many people's minds. We stand at a Brexit crossroads, with freefall into no deal on one side and a car crash of a bad deal on the other. It is inevitable that business across the UK will suffer if we ever actually leave the EU, but the oil and gas industry is likely to be one of the hardest hit, due to its highly globalised nature. With approximately £61 billion of oil and gas-related goods traded with the rest of the world, the threat of tariffs looms over the industry. In a worst-case scenario where the UK reverted to World Trade Organisation rules with the EU and the rest of the world, the cost of trade would likely almost double to around £1.1 billion per annum, assuming trading behaviours remained unchanged.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we want to share the time out: if he could wrap up in two minutes, that would be great.

Douglas Chapman: Certainly, Mr Walker; I will move on to my final comment.

The report's conclusions focus on the positives: developing an ambitious deal for the sector as a whole, which I hope will be supported; developing new technology, which many Members spoke about, so we can recover more of what we need; reducing the costs of decommissioning; exporting the sector's skills and experience, not just in exploration but in subsea work; and making the vital transition from carbon energy such as oil and gas to renewables—especially hydrogen, which could be a game changer and might just help save the planet. The opportunities

remain immense, and the sector deal outlined by the Committee would offer energy security for decades to come and allow Scotland to remain a sector leader.

2.33 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I congratulate the authors of the Select Committee's excellent and wide-ranging report, and everyone who took part in the Committee's proceedings. The report goes well beyond some previous considerations of the future of the North sea by putting it in the context of a number of other issues relating to where we stand on the exploitation of North sea oil and gas and what the future looks like.

As the report states, the North sea is a very mature basin. Hon. Members mentioned that its exploited resources total some 43 billion barrels, and estimates of what is left vary from about 8 billion to 10 billion barrels. Some of the discoveries to the west of Shetland notwithstanding, it is extremely likely that there will be no more Brents and that we will see the exploitation of smaller pools, which are more difficult to exploit. Clearly, there will be great emphasis on the efficiency of exploitation. The report emphasises the extent to which the oil and gas industry has increased its efficiency; it needs to continue to do so for that exploitation to be effective.

The report also goes into considerable detail about not just the future alternative paths, but what we might call the future imperative paths for the North sea as a mature basin. My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) mentioned that the oil industry has come through a challenging period—it is in a better position than it has been in for quite a while, given its efficiency achievements and what is happening with the exploitation of future fields—but he drew attention to the need to look at a future industry for decommissioning in the context of the climate change imperative. I was pleased to see that the report did not duck climate change; quite a few of its passages actually centred on the challenges that the fight to get us to a low-carbon economy will present for the oil and gas industry, and on how the industry can take part in that process rather than opposing it.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) is right about the need to consider how decommissioning can be turned from a liability into an opportunity and, indeed, become a substantial part of the industry. We need only reflect on what is at stake: 250 fixed installations, 250 subsea platforms, 10,000 km of pipeline and 5,000 oil wells need to be decommissioned. The potential decommissioning industry is huge, not just in its own right but in terms of the expertise that already exists, which could be added to. The UK could be a world leader in decommissioning, exporting its expertise and methods. I commend the report's attention to the detail of decommissioning and how it can be undertaken to the advantage of jobs, skills and exports for UK plc.

We must recognise that the imperative of climate change will cause us to take a considerable number of decisions about the oil and gas industry. Indeed, the report identifies a number of those decisions, one of which is the question of what we do about carbon capture, use and storage. That is not just a possible extension of activity and industry for the North sea as fields are depleted—indeed, those fields are enormous

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

potential repositories for carbon dioxide—but can be used to the benefit of the North sea fields in their own right.

I would link that to the decommissioning efforts that are under way, because the next phase will be about exploiting smaller fields. That needs to be done on the back of existing infrastructure, which arguably should not be decommissioned but rather kept in place, so that those fields can be exploited without the infrastructure having to be completely replaced. If we decommissioned all that infrastructure when a lot of it could be used as the carrying capacity for carbon capture and storage, we may well live to regret it.

We need an understanding about future roles for the North sea. We should not only think about potentially depleted fields that could be repositories for carbon capture and storage, but look at practical considerations in respect of how the capture, transport and sequestration chain can be completed, possibly by using installations that are already there. The same applies to the future North sea wind industry. As the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) said, there is a close link between the skills and practical measures involved in developing offshore wind energy and maintaining the structure and infrastructure of the North sea oil and gas industry. Those two industries should work in tandem, rather than separately. As is mentioned in the report, that is important for satisfactory developments in the North sea and for the transfer of skills to the new industries. The skills, facilities and techniques that are already there in the North sea can greatly aid us in creating world-beating offshore wind energy installations and similar technologies, and ensure that the North sea plays its part in the transition to the attainment of a low-carbon energy economy.

In conclusion, the report marks an important milestone. It shows where we need to go next with the North sea oil and gas industry, and its recommendations and suggestions will stand the test of time. In the immediate future, I commend the report's suggestion that we need to get on with a sector deal for the oil and gas industry. I do not need to say more about that, because I am sure the Minister will update us about it in his response. I emphasise my support for the need to get that deal over the line. In addition to milestones for the future, we have ambitions for the immediate time ahead to ensure that the oil and gas industry continues to be in a better position than it was in before and that it has the wherewithal to make its mark over the decades to come.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Minister, please could you leave two minutes at the end for Mr Wishart to wrap up?

2.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): Certainly, Mr Walker. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. The Chairman of the Scottish Affairs Committee referred to you as a distinguished member of the Panel of Chairs. The next time I appear in front of him in a different capacity, I will remind him of that, as it implies that he is less than distinguished. I

am sure nobody could say that about him; in fact, Mr Walker, I think you would agree that the opposite is true.

I congratulate the Scottish Affairs Committee and its Chairman on bringing forward the report, which I have read. One never knows what happens with Committee reports behind the scenes—the whole idea, of course, is that that information is privileged to the Committee—but from what I can gather, the Committee is an exemplar in the way that its members work cross-party. With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), the spokesman for the Scottish National party, most of the comments today were of a non-partisan nature. I will try to answer in that spirit.

Ministers in Westminster Hall debates either give a prepared speech—written by civil servants, then checked and rewritten by Ministers—or respond to comments; the difficulty is that so many comments were made today, and I disagree with so few of them, but I will absolutely do my best.

The former Prime Minister referred to this sector as the real jewel in the crown of the UK economy. Of course, I would refer to the former Prime Minister as the jewel in the crown, but he is not here to answer that. I briefly held the energy portfolio, but I am here today because there was a fight of a verbal nature between myself and the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth as to who should appear at this debate. I cover sector deals generally and she covers the oil and gas sector, but we are not both allowed to speak. I discussed the subject extensively with her and I am trying to speak for us both.

When I held the energy portfolio I went on a visit to Aberdeen, and I was amazed by the way the industry was fighting back from a real recession, if not depression, caused entirely by the reduction of the oil price on the international markets. I have not had any experience in oil and gas, but I realised that the cycle was similar to those in the mining sector that I had read about, though I have no experience in mining, either. Once skills disappear, it can be difficult to restart. In mining, as in oil rigs, some sites can become disused, and it is difficult to get them back into action. Exactly the opposite has happened; I was amazed by the way the oil and gas industry fought its way out of the recession, especially given that the core bit—the international commodity price of oil—is completely beyond its control.

To paraphrase some of the Brexit debate—the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife brought Brexit into this, so I felt I should—the oil companies are market takers, rather than market makers. They cannot control the international oil price—the price of what they have to sell. At least, I assume they cannot; nothing I have read suggests that they can. The sector has changed itself into a lower-cost, more nimble industry, which is interesting. Some big companies found that difficult because of their high overheads, but other companies have come into the market, are more nimble and have new sources of cash. I found that fascinating.

On setting a regulatory environment in the oil and gas industry and funding for research and development—that funding can come about in different ways, including from Government—Government's work has been absolutely brilliant. In these discussions, it is easy to criticise Governments generally, but please do not think I am

making a party comment; any sensible Government would have done this. I am pleased to say that we have had a lot of sensible Governments in this country. My comments are not a reason for complacency, though; I hope hon. Members do not think that I am saying that.

I am completely ignoring the speech that I prepared because I was so excited by some of the things that were said. To an outside person, perhaps a reader of the *Daily Mail*, it may seem as if North sea oil is finished and the continental shelf is clapped out. The exact opposite seems to be the case. I am pleased that the report reiterates that, and that it has been confirmed by hon. Members. There is huge potential. I hope the Government are on top of it.

A formal response to the report will be made in the usual way. However, the major conclusion, as far as I can see, was that a sector deal—a really ambitious one—should be agreed. I absolutely share the Committee's desire to support the sector; there is a close relationship there.

I will make one comment that might be politely critical, if it is possible to be politely critical, to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) regarding what she said about the McCrone report. I know one should not talk about drinks party conversations, but I had the pleasure of meeting Gavin McCrone—I believe that is his name—once. I do not think it was quite a formal report. He was a well-respected adviser to different Scottish Secretaries of State, I seem to remember his telling me—if Gavin McCrone is the same person. The way the hon. Lady quoted him, if I may respectfully say so, was a little unfair to what has happened.

On sovereign wealth funds, Norway sounds really great—it is wonderful what it does; it invests billions of pounds all over the place—but it is a little bit selective to say that our money was squandered. First, as has been said, a lot of tax came from it. We have a big economy and a big population. It is not as though the money was spent somewhere else; it was spent for the benefit of everybody in the United Kingdom, so I do not accept the “squandering” point of view.

Deidre Brock: I think we will have to agree to disagree on the benefits or otherwise of sovereign wealth funds, but can I ask about the taxation situation and North sea oil revenues? In 2017, Norway taxed the Royal Dutch Shell company £4.6 billion, while the UK gave the company £176 million. Can the Minister talk a little bit about the implications of those figures? I find them quite staggering.

Richard Harrington: The hon. Lady has caught me unawares, because I am afraid tax is not one of my specialities; I apologise to her. I will find out about that, and if she would like me to write to her—or we could have a coffee together outwith this place—I would be happy to do so.

I should make some progress, because I am testing the patience of the Chair, and he wants two minutes left over. Trevor Garlick and the team have done a lot for the industry. He has brought a diverse sector together, which is the purpose of our sector deals; previously, most relationships between Government and companies seemed to be based on a few big companies that had very effective lobbying machines and knew the way the

Government worked. In the oil and gas sector, he has helped to break that and has brought a lot of things forward.

The leadership has been very good, as have many of the work streams; we have five areas of focus in the report, but it seems to me that work on them is already being undertaken. For example, the National Decommissioning Centre has already been launched, with £38 million in funding. The Oil & Gas Technology Centre continues to lead on new technology and to support MER UK, which I was happy to visit in Aberdeen, on transformative technology. The work on exports that was mentioned is progressing well.

The work streams on other things that are part of Government policy, such as diversity and inclusion as well as CCUS, have developed very well. I was pleased that the Chancellor yesterday called for evidence to identify what more should be done to make Scotland and the UK a global hub for decommissioning, as the Chair of the Select Committee has talked about.

Hugh Gaffney: The Chancellor yesterday mentioned, if I can rephrase him, using less gas by 2025. The Minister is talking about decommissioning. Is that not a worry for the oil and gas sector?

Richard Harrington: If I were the hon. Gentleman, I would not worry about that. We are also asking how the sector can support the development of UK carbon capture, usage and storage infrastructure through the effective use of legacy assets. The focus on underwater engineering proposed by industry, as part of a phased approach, is welcome. We are a global leader in subsea engineering, a market forecast to grow exponentially, but competition is fierce.

I am responsible for sector deals generally, and I am very much looking forward to advancing these proposals. What impresses me most about the way this sector has developed is that with Mr Garlick's work and the co-operation of many people in Government, Parliament and the industry, so many of these things are already happening. I am very impressed by that; I wish I could say that was true in other sectors that I have been involved in. I commend the Committee's report, and I look forward to developing the points in it.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): The Minister is coming to the end of his remarks, but I worry that he has not touched on the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney). Can he outline how the Government will work with the workers in the industry and the unions?

Richard Harrington: The hon. Lady has brought up an excellent point. From what I have seen—I expect to be corrected by her or by the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) if I am incorrect—I feel that there is a lot of co-operation between companies and the union. However, I was very concerned by the points that the hon. Gentleman brought up about the survey from Robert Gordon University on the stress and everything else; that is of concern. While this is, I hope, a highly-paid industry, it is one where we must be very conscious of health and safety—not just the formal things to do with safety regulations, but things to do

[*Richard Harrington*]

with the wellbeing of the workers in it. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) was correct to bring the question to my attention; I am sorry I had not answered it in the body of my speech. I will confine my remarks to that, and thank the Committee again for the work it has done.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Mr Wishart, you have three minutes, 45 seconds, or thereabouts.

2.56 pm

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to you once again, Mr Walker. I thank everyone who has contributed to a very fine debate, which has touched on and explored most of the issues in the report. It is a report that all the Committee are proud of, and I am glad to see so many Committee members here, contributing and making their own particular points.

In particular, I am impressed with the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), who reminded us of very real trade union-related issues that we touched on in the report. We took evidence from the trade unions, as he will remember from the visit to Aberdeen. We heard about his personal tragedy—something that was taken very seriously. Safety at work remains a live issue throughout the industry.

I am grateful to the Minister for the update on issues to do with the sector deal. I recognise that we are making solid progress on the global hub for decommissioning, but we need to hear a bit more about the other ambitions we mentioned—things that we believe should be included in the sector deal—particularly as regards transformational technology and underwater innovations.

We have a real opportunity to be world beaters here, and we cannot lose it, because it is so important to the sector. The skills that have been acquired over the decades of production in Aberdeen and the north-east must be utilised to full effect, and we must ensure that

the investment follows that; £178 million of investment between Government and industry could return something in the region of £110 billion for the whole UK, but primarily for Scotland and the north-east. We must ensure that we get that investment and that support from Government.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for reminding us again that this is a UK-wide industry, with a footprint in practically every nation of the UK and every region. That is something we recognise. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) for reminding us about the history of all this; I know this has been a consensual report and we have all ensured that we can agree on it, but in Scotland we still have issues about not being able to secure the benefits, and we look across the North sea at what Norway has secured and acquired. We will leave that to one side just now, but it is worthwhile our being reminded of that as we go forward, and seeing what we can do to ensure that we continue to see the fruits and benefits of the North sea.

The key point, which I think everyone touched on, is ensuring a just transition from a hydrocarbon past to a low-carbon future, and that the investment, skills and expertise carry on into the next stage. I do not like talking of doing away with what we have, or a lack of production. A new adventure is in store for the North sea, and that will include all the things in this report—transformational technology, underwater innovation and decommissioning.

We have a great future, if we are able to ensure that all the wonderful skills that have been acquired can be properly utilised in the next stage of the story of the North sea. I look forward to seeing that chapter written with the support of both Governments, and of Members of Parliament right across this House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Sixth Report of the Scottish Affairs Committee, The future of the oil and gas industry, HC 996.

Health and Care Professions Council: Registration Fees

[MR STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered registration fees at the Health and Care Professions Council.

You and I have known each other a long time, Mr McCabe, but I think that this is the first time I have led a debate under your chairmanship. I hope you will show a bit of leniency, particularly to some of my hon. Friends. I thank Mr Speaker and the Chairman of Ways and Means for making provision for the debate. In actual fact, we were granted the debate at short notice; I think somebody else pulled out. Hon. Members will have to excuse me—I have a heavy cold, to say the least. I hope they can all hear me.

The debate follows on from early-day motion 2069, which I tabled last month and which condemned the Health and Care Professions Council's unfair rise in registration fees. To date, that early-day motion has been signed by a truly cross-party group of 118 MPs, which shows the real concern across the House; it is very hard to get such a number. I hope that the debate leads to a rethink from the HCPC and the Government.

The HCPC exists to regulate health and care professionals. It sets standards, investigates complaints and keeps a register of workers in 16 different professions. Members might be interested to know what those professions are: arts therapist; biomedical scientist; chiropodist and podiatrist; clinical scientist; dietician; hearing aid dispenser; occupational therapist; operating department practitioner; orthoptist; paramedic; physiotherapist; practitioner psychologist; prosthetist and orthotist—I do not know what those are—radiographer; social worker, in England; and speech and language therapist. That covers quite a wide range, to say the least. Notably, social workers in England are still covered, despite plans to change that from 2019. Altogether, the HCPC regulates more than 360,000 professionals, 90,000 of whom are social workers.

To register, professionals have to pay an annual registration fee, which is currently £90. In autumn last year, the HCPC announced plans to raise its registration fees from £90 to £106 per year—an 18% rise. That follows a 5% rise in 2014 and a further 12.5% rise in 2015, so with the new rise fees will have risen by 40% since 2014. The HCPC argues that the rise is necessary in order to secure its financial health, giving five main reasons for the fee increase.

First, it plans to increase efforts to prevent problems before they occur. Secondly, it wants to use innovation and technology to modernise and improve services. Thirdly, it needs to address a caseload that is growing in number and complexity. Fourthly, it needs to address the impact of inflation since its last fee increase. Finally, it needs to pre-empt the transfer of social workers to a new regulatory body. While the HCPC has faced higher expenditure since 2015, these reasons cannot possibly support an 18% rise. Expenditure increased by £2.8 million

in 2017-18, but £400,000 went on redundancy packages for management staff and £1.2 million went on refurbishing the HCPC head office.

The HCPC put its plans for a fee increase to its members over the winter. Responses to the consultation were damning, with 90% of respondents opposing the increase. Despite the findings of the consultation, the HCPC decided last month to impose the 18% increase. It has defended the rise by saying that its fees are lower than those of any other health and care regulator. However, other regulators are not comparable. Some cover very few members, reducing their economies of scale.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Of course, this issue affects not only the HCPC's but other registrants, such as nurses, who have to register with the National Midwifery Council. Does he agree that, along with other things, such as car parking charges, low pay and no automatic incremental progression in a lot of health-related occupations—particularly for nurses—these kind of registration fee increases are just another tax on healthcare workers' wages?

Mr Cunningham: In considering that, we have to remember that a lot of those workers' salaries—for want of a better term—have in some instances been frozen since 2010, while in some instances they may have increased by 1% or 2%. With inflation at about 2% over that period, that is roughly an 18% cut in wages. Add the increased fee, and those workers are carrying a heavy burden that they should not have to carry. Adequate funding should be provided, rather than finding it by using hidden taxation methods. We all know that nurses and so forth in some of our hospitals have to pay car park charges. Given all those hidden costs, these workers are quite frankly bearing the brunt of the recession.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): A lot of these organisations have always said that they want to keep their independence and do not want to be funded by other sources; they are pretty keen on making sure that that continues. Is the real issue not the amount of regulation that they have to deal with? That must be one reason why the funding level has increased.

Mr Cunningham: Organisations always argue that they want to be self-sufficient, but that should not come at the expense of the people whom they actually regulate. I am not an expert on the regulations that some of these bodies govern, but we should be very careful when thinking about changing regulations or reducing their amount. We would need to test that.

Altogether, the HCPC has not given a strong reason for this huge increase, leaving affected workers frustrated and angry. In addition, the Government's response to the fee change has been very disappointing: in answer to written questions, they have just repeated the HCPC's weak defence of the fee rise. Ministers have argued that the registration fees remain the lowest of any health regulator, but that does not change the fact that the rise is disproportionate and unfair. The Government should be concerned over the threats to staff levels in the affected professions, but Ministers say they have made no assessment of the impact on staffing of this rise. That is a complete dereliction of duty, with staff openly talking of leaving due to the rise.

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

It is an irresponsible move by the Government to hide behind the HCPC's independence. They must take steps to prevent fee rises from being the norm for the HCPC, and for all regulators, and help to build bridges between healthcare professionals and the HCPC, as trust is breaking down. HCPC members are understandably angry, believing that it is exploiting a stranglehold over their jobs. The rise amounts to nothing less than a tax on practising, and it has had little scrutiny or debate. I would like the HCPC to reverse the decision to increase registration fees by 18%. The Government and the HCPC must change the way fees are decided on, to prevent such a huge change happening in the future. The HCPC must operate in a fairer and more transparent way, and the Government must play a role in ensuring that that happens. It is time that the Government and the HCPC stopped taking advantage of those who take care of us all.

In response to the rise in fees, Unison conducted a survey of affected members and found that 99% of respondents did not back it. Importantly, it found that 76% did not see the current £90 fee as good value for money. Members feel that the HCPC offers no real benefit except for allowing them to practise. They are also critical of the justification given by the HCPC for the fee rise.

First, it must be pointed out that the 18% rise completely outstrips inflation. If the HCPC was genuinely concerned to cover inflation, it could implement smaller, year-on-year rises. I doubt whether the staff could afford those, frankly, but it is one way to look at it. Secondly, it is unfair for members of other professions to cover the costs of transferring social workers to a new regulator. The HCPC faces upheaval because of the change, but it is wrong for other professionals to pay the price.

Thirdly, the case for needing more funding after the transfer of social worker regulation is dubious. Social workers make up a quarter of members, which is a substantial number of registration fees. We all know what a difficult job they do. Often they are put in a situation where they cannot win, and they bear the brunt of some of the ills of society, to say the least of it. However, they also account for more than half of all fitness to practise cases. That is the HCPC's largest area of expenditure. Despite a loss of income, the HCPC will face a sharper fall in costs at the same time. That fundamentally undermines the case for an 18% rise, and proves that it is unnecessary.

Unison also highlighted several changes that the HCPC should implement to reduce spending. First, it must take steps to make its complaints process more efficient. The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care found in 2018 that the HCPC's investigation committee refers cases too readily to the fitness to practise panel and that more than 20% of complaints are found at final hearings to be "not well founded". Overall, members are funding a system that handles complaints against 0.64% of registrants and sanctions just 0.09%. No wonder so many members are left feeling that they gain nothing from their registration.

The fee rise comes on top of many years of wage freezes and below-inflation wage rises. Although £106 might not sound much to the Government or to some higher-earners in the health sector, the rise will be a real

hit to part-time workers and those on lower wages. Professionals are left doubting their trust in the HCPC after being ignored in the consultation. The HCPC is facing growing unrest and resentment among its members. Many are now moving to non-regulated posts, and part-time working will become a lot less attractive, inevitably causing a fall in the number of workers in the sector.

3.14 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am always surprised when I am called early, Mr McCabe, but it is always a pleasure to speak in such debates.

I thank the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), who is a friend as well as a colleague, for obtaining the debate. I, along with many others, signed the original early-day motion, as he mentioned. I have had the benefit of his knowledge in studying the background and making sure we were on the same page. When he told me the story, it resonated with me and I knew it would resonate with my constituents and with people back home who work in the caring services. It will therefore come as no surprise if my comments echo those of the hon. Gentleman.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for persevering with the matters he is interested in. He was a Member when I first came to the House, and the two of us made friends quickly and have worked together on many things. I would say that he has signed all my EDMs and I have probably signed all his, so we have a mutual understanding. That is not because we are friends, but because we are of the same mind on the issues and we work together on them. I am pleased to do it. I think I signed his Coventry City early-day motion, and I think he even signed mine on Leicester City, so there we are. We crossed that divide as well.

I, like many Members in this Chamber, have been a consistent advocate of a pay increase for NHS staff. I lobbied the Government for it when my party came into the confidence and supply arrangement, and we thank them for the increase that they gave in response. I am fighting to equalise nurses' pay on the mainland and in Northern Ireland, because there is a differential and we must close the gap. I am endeavouring, with the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and the permanent secretary, to ensure that we move closer together. It is very simple to me: I see a group of civil servants working in conditions that are not acceptable and I know that what they should be paid is vastly more than what is there. We need to pay them what they should be paid. We appreciate them and all that they do, as the hon. Member for Coventry South said, and I thank them too.

I had occasion about two years ago to be cared for by nurses in hospital, so I know how much they do. I was there three times that year. The 1.5% rise does not seem like a huge amount, yet the staff felt that it was a gesture of appreciation. It was important that we made a move in that direction. The Government's agreement was 3% over a five-year period. To accept, in the same breath, an 18% increase in the fee to practise is shocking and far outweighs any gesture we have made. Such an increase will mean a 40% rise in HCPC fees since 2014. How can that be acceptable? There is no fairness or sense of balance in the process.

I always relate my speeches in the House to what happens in Strangford, so that the people there know I am industrious on their behalf. The Strangford example I want to use today is of a district nurse who approached me a few weeks ago. She complained that those who have gone to the private sector to carry out personal independence payment assessments and the like not only get to work nine-to-five, have a company car and a higher wage, and are not run off their feet in an understaffed ward; they also have their registration fees paid. They get better conditions in the private sector, and their fees are paid, so we can understand how NHS professionals feel. My constituent said it is little wonder that wards are crying out for qualified nurses, while the assessors can find people left, right and centre. We have a dearth of nurses in Northern Ireland and are 1,500 short. The Minister knows I understand that that is not his responsibility; I say it just to show the situation we are in. We simply cannot compete with the private sector, but why are we competing against ourselves with the PIP assessments, which are carried out with public money? We are robbing Peter to pay Paul, and that needs to end.

We need to take the opportunity to assure paramedics, occupational therapists, operating department practitioners, physiotherapists, radiographers, dieticians, chiropractors, podiatrists, orthoptists, clinical scientists and speech and language therapists that to ask them for a 40% increase in fees over five years is not acceptable. Yes, it may be only a pound a month, as some people have said, but the fact is that all bills, from gas to petrol to food, have risen. The issue is the combination of all those increases in bills. They all contribute to the lowering of income. We should want to encourage NHS practitioners—those in the health and care professions—to stay there and work in their vocation of choice.

I firmly believe that a message must be sent today from this place that we support health and care professionals in their fight for fairness and equality, and that we oppose the rise or will pay the fees on behalf of those who work full time in our NHS as part of our thank you to them. That would be an endorsement of their commitment to us as their patients. It is not even £9 a month per staff member, so can the Government not look after this and ensure that it is paid for NHS staff? Why are we asking them to pay it while those who work privately have theirs paid for? The issue is the imbalance. Those who work privately have this paid for, but that does not happen in the NHS. That is not the right message to send to dedicated NHS workers, and we must do better.

3.21 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) for securing this important debate. I, too, had requested a debate on this subject but was unsuccessful, so I am pleased that he has been able to bring this important issue to the attention of the House.

Before I was elected to this place, I was registered with the Health and Care Professions Council, because I worked as a clinical scientist in the NHS. As we have heard, registration with the HCPC is an essential part of the job: without professional registration, scientists

and allied health professionals in the NHS are not allowed to practise. I am no longer registered with the HCPC. Having worked for the NHS for 33 years and had a career change late in my working life, I have called time on my NHS career, so there is no conflict of interest.

The HCPC charging above-inflation fee increases is nothing new, but it is scandalous that its latest proposal is to raise fees for already hard-pressed healthcare professionals by an enormous inflating-busting 18%. If that increase is imposed, HCPC fees will have risen by 40% since 2014, outstripping inflation and going hugely above any pay rises that NHS staff have had.

I remember from my days in the NHS that the HCPC used to impose above-inflation fee increases during the years of the George Osborne 1% public sector pay cap. Any representations that the staff and trade unions made to the HCPC, at a time when many staff had had no pay rise at all, fell on deaf ears and were simply ignored. It appears that that has emboldened the HCPC to ask for more and more from its members, with no discernible improvement in the performance of the HCPC or an increase in the services that it provides to its registrants.

NHS staff are already struggling, their pay having been suppressed for many years since 2010, but more and more financial demands are made on them in order to stay in work. NHS staff in England have to pay to park at their workplace; NHS staff are paying more towards their pensions; any member of staff with any sense will be paying trade union subscriptions; many are repaying student loans; and now, they appear to be expected to finance the HCPC's excessive, unreasonable and unjustified fee demands.

The staff are just not being listened to. My trade union, Unite, submitted a 38,000-signature petition against the fee increase to the chief executive of the HCPC before the decision was made on 14 February this year to increase its mandatory fees by 18%. It appears that the HCPC is quite happy to blithely ignore the voices of 38,000 of its members. Additionally, the HCPC consulted on increasing its fees from £90 to £106 a year and 90% of those who responded disagreed, yet that seems to have had no impact on the decision made on 14 February.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree with me—she is making this case anyway—about how unaccountable this body is? I have dealt with individuals who have fallen foul of it and I have written to it on their behalf, but it appears to take no notice at all of what an individual MP or constituent has to say.

Liz McInnes: I do agree, and I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I should add that while I worked for the NHS, I was a trade union rep for Unite the union and had many encounters with the HCPC. I found it to be opaque in its dealings and difficult to deal with.

I want to mention the effect of the fee increase on part-time workers, because scandalously there is no difference in fees between full-time and part-time workers, so it will have a disproportionate effect on part-time workers, who in the NHS are predominantly female.

If we look at what the HCPC actually does, we find, from its 2018 annual report, that it dealt with complaints against only 0.64% of registrants and that it sanctioned

[Liz McInnes]

only 0.09%. Many members comment that they receive no benefit or professional services at all from their registration. As we have just discussed, the HCPC operates in a very opaque manner. Trade unions are not recognised within its own workforce, so there is no collective pay bargaining for its own employees, and so we do not even know what the HCPC pays its staff.

The HCPC says that it needs this increase so that it can deliver smarter regulation, improve services and mitigate the impact of the transfer of the regulation of social workers to Social Work England. However, I have already talked about how few fitness-to-practise cases the HCPC deals with as a proportion of the total membership. When social worker regulation moves to a new regulator later this year, that should lead to a reduction in fitness-to-practise expenditure, given that 59% of that expenditure currently goes on social work cases. The HCPC's costs should decrease, not increase, which makes this demand on registrants even more unjustified.

This is Healthcare Science Week and I pay tribute to all the scientists working across our NHS. Their work quite often goes unrecognised, but is an essential component of the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Healthcare scientists and allied health professionals are a vital part of our NHS team.

In conclusion, I call on the HCPC to pause, to delay any decision to increase fees, and instead to explore alternative ways to reduce costs and to fully assess the impact of the transfer of social workers.

3.29 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I was also registered with the HCPC and the preceding bodies. Although I am no longer registered, I recognise the impact this issue has on NHS staff.

There are nine different regulators in the NHS, regulating 32 different professions. They provide a very important function: this is about protecting not only the public, but health professionals themselves in the course of their practice. The regulators are there to set, maintain and raise standards and to give confidence to the public, as well as to hold a register and protect the title of a profession, so that other people cannot set up a business pretending that they hold the professional qualifications, which people across the NHS work hard for.

Increasingly, regulators also ensure continuing professional development. The most advanced programme of professional development has been put in place by the Nursing and Midwifery Council in recent times. The regulations around that ensure that registrants are compliant with continuing professional development. The function of regulators is to ensure that professionals who fail to uphold professional standards and their duty of care are called to account, so that sanction is applied where necessary and recourse is taken.

We have already heard that—thankfully—a miniscule number of professionals are taken through disciplinary processes. That is a tribute to the great professionalism across the NHS. However, such cases do occur, and it is appropriate that rigorous processes are in place so that individuals can defend their position and have recourse

to justice before appropriate action is taken. To have someone practising who is not fit for practice risks the whole profession, so it is vital that that is put in place.

However, the cost of that process has escalated substantially, as hon. Members have mentioned. When I first registered as a physio, I had to pay only £17. In 2015, the last year that I was registered, there was a huge increase—from £80 to £90. The suggested increase to £106 is, quite frankly, unacceptable, particularly given the background, as set out by hon. Members, of a decade of pay regression, pension cuts and student loan repayments. In my time we had grants, so things have changed significantly.

More and more burdens are being placed on health professionals. That means that more risk is placed on health professionals. When we had adequate staffing in the NHS, mistakes were less frequent and caseloads were safer. Unfortunately, in many professions people's caseloads are now too big. The pressure on those individuals increases.

I was formerly head of health at Unite. We focused on organisations' duty of care. Managers in particular must say no to the organisation and argue the case for more staff, rather than increase the pressure on health professionals by making their caseloads unsafe—that would mean that managers were failing in their duty of care, in breach of their standards of professional conduct.

Mike Hill: I am also a former Unison official. In view of that, does my hon. Friend agree that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) rightly pointed out, the professional bodies cover not only full-time and part-time staff, but student social workers and student nurses? They are under the same constraints.

Rachael Maskell: Students do have responsibility, but the registered health professional is responsible for ensuring that they are safe under their practice while they are training in their profession. Training the future workforce is an incredibly important additional function of health professionals.

The Law Commission came forward with a set of recommendations for registrant bodies in 2012. In 2019, we still have not seen the implementation of those recommendations in full. I would like the Minister to explain why that is the case. Implementing a substantial piece of work about ensuring patient safety should surely be at the forefront of the Minister's agenda. I am interested to hear the reasons for the delay, and what plans there are to put those recommendations in place. Training programmes for health professionals need to focus on the ethics, behaviour and conduct of health professionals, if we want to see a reduction in the number of cases. Managing that risk is really important.

I want to raise a number of points to move this case forward. First, as we have heard, 38,000 people signed a petition to register their discontent with the fee rise. That cannot be ignored. These are valuable NHS workers. Their call must be heard and reflected on. However, the HCPC hardly seems to have taken that into consideration. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) said, the number of fitness-to-practise cases being taken forward—currently, 59% of them involve social workers—will disappear. Therefore, surely the registrant body's costs will decrease. We want to hear how that will benefit health professionals.

This is a tax on professionals. Will the Minister consider funding that regulation fee through the NHS? It does not make sense for nurses, physios and speech therapists, for example, to pay a different amount. That is a tax on professionals who have put in the training and the hours, and go over and above the hours. Why can the Government not pay the amount for each health professional? More than a gesture, it is a responsibility of the NHS to ensure that its registrants, including part-time workers, have that support. I completely concur with the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton that there should be a part-time rate.

Dr Drew: Forgive me if I am being simple, but do we know where the extra money is going and what the HCPC is doing with it? Can it explain that? Are the Government holding it accountable? Can my hon. Friend throw some light on that?

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend makes such a good point. I wish I could explain that, but to me it seems to be more money and less work. I am as baffled as he is about why health sector workers have to pay into this institution to do less work. I worked as a part-timer when I was head of health at Unite. Although I worked at weekends, I had to pay the full fee, so I certainly understand the frustration. Of course, that mainly affects women, who are more likely to work part time.

Finally, I ask that an expansion of the number of registered health professionals should be considered—after all, this is about keeping the public safe. We should know that the title under which the professional acts is secure and represents them. Certainly psychological services, such as psychotherapists, have requested to be registered, as have community nursery nurses. It is perplexing that the registration of nursing associates on a register—not this one—has been accelerated, but the registration of community nursery nurses, who have long asked for that, has not happened.

I would go further and say that, as we are looking at the future of the social care workforce across the country, we should also look at individuals who are singlehandedly going into people's homes but who do not have the protection of being on a professional register. Ultimately, that is about keeping the public and our health professionals safe and secure. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that a greater number of professionals are protected under the existing regulatory regimes?

3.40 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) for securing this important debate, which I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in. For many years, it was my privilege to work with many healthcare professionals, so I take a keen interest in this subject. I was happy to add my signature to the letter to the HCPC to oppose the, at the time, 18% proposed increase in fees.

It is right that healthcare professions should be regulated and that those bodies should be independent of the Government, which means that fees must be attached to the registration. Having set fees, however, those bodies must have a view to the people and the professions that they regulate. Many people covered by the Health and

Care Professions Council are not big earners, despite playing an incredibly important part in our healthcare system, and they are often missed out when we talk about healthcare workers.

We talk about doctors and nurses, but we rarely talk about all the other NHS staff who are integral to our healthcare system. I have worked with paramedics, occupational therapists, dieticians and many others, who are an important part of that healthcare team. In the last 18 months, I have had personal experience in my family of the great work they do—on stroke rehabilitation, for example. It is important work, but the pay is not great. Typically, people are paid at band 5, which starts at £23,000 a year, so we are not talking big bucks.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a good argument about the different levels of pay. Does she agree that one of the most unfair arguments for raising the fees is that they are lower than for other professional bodies? Dentists and doctors get paid much more money, so there is no fairness in that comparison.

Liz Twist: I agree with my hon. Friend and I will come on to that point later.

Although we in this House talk about how valuable healthcare workers are in all kinds of debates, the fact is that their pay has not kept in line with the real cost of living, so an 18% increase in registration fees is huge and out of all proportion with the pay increases that they have had in recent years. Most of them do not have a choice about whether to register; they must be registered to be able to work. The increase will bring the total increase in registration fees to 40% since 2014, which is incredible.

As hon. Members know, one issue that the NHS is facing is staff shortages in certain areas. It cannot be ignored that something such as this increase can only be a disincentive to staff looking to do those important jobs. As other hon. Members have said, another key issue is the impact of social workers. They are currently covered by the HCPC, but they are about to go off to their own regulatory body. The significance of that should not be lost. While it will mean a reduction in income, of course, it will also mean a significant decrease in the number of fitness-to-practise cases, which are inevitably expensive to prepare. Currently, 25% of HCPC registrants are social workers, but more than 50% of fitness-to-practise cases are in the social work field. That significant factor should be taken into account when the HCPC considers its fees.

On fitness-to-practise cases, I well remember from representing people how devastating it is for any health professional to face a complaint or a fitness-to-practise case, but many people are being held in limbo waiting for their case to be heard, or even awaiting a decision that the case should not be pursued. A 2018 report by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care was critical of the HCPC and suggested that cases were being referred to the fitness-to-practise panel by its investigation committee too readily. The report stated:

“In our review of its performance this year, we set out our concerns about how the HCPC approaches the discontinuance of cases. Our view was that the approval of discontinuance decisions by the HCPC (with no additional information or evidence being

[Liz Twist]

presented since the decision of the Investigation Committee to refer the case) may indicate that the Investigation Committee is failing to identify when there is no case to answer.”

Clearly, that has a significant impact on the professional under investigation and on the operation of the HCPC, and is a factor in costs.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, the proposed 18% increase will have a disproportionate impact on part-time workers, who are predominantly women and mostly in the NHS, because it is a flat-rate fee. That does not seem reasonable.

We hope that the Health and Care Professions Council will listen to the comments made in the debate. Unison has also made some suggestions that the HCPC should consider. First, there should be a pause in implementing the decision to increase fees until the impact of social workers moving away can be assessed. It will clearly be a significant factor in the future, so it seems appropriate that the full impact should be known before an important decision to increase by 18% is made. Secondly, I am told that the Health and Care Professions Council has £18 million of cash reserves, which should be used to allow the impact of the move of social workers to be considered before fees are raised. Thirdly, there should be a more stringent look at other means of raising revenue, rather than just increasing fees.

The Health and Care Professions Council carried out a consultation on the fee increase. By its own admission there were 2,398 responses, many of which opposed the proposed increase. The HCPC has written to explain its position to those of us who signed the letter that we wrote before it made the decision. In that letter, it compared its fees with those of other healthcare regulators. Frankly, that comparison is not valid, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) has already said. A comparison with the fees paid by dentists, which are £890 a year, or doctors, which are £390 a year, is completely misleading. Typically, HCPC registrants will be paid vastly smaller salaries, so it is not just apples and pears, but apples and strawberries. There is a real mismatch and disparity in the comparisons being made, so they are not valid.

As other hon. Members have, I call on the Health and Care Professions Council to reconsider its position and to agree to Unison’s suggestions as a way to avoid the 18% increase in fees.

3.49 pm

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this important debate and highlighting the issue. If it were not for him and one or two other hon. Members, the change might have gone largely unnoticed, except by those adversely affected by it. I sincerely hope that it now gets the attention that it so deserves.

As hon. Members will know, the overwhelming majority of health and care matters involving Scotland are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. However, most of the system of regulation of health and care professionals still operates at a UK-wide level. That is because in 2010 the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution felt that those bodies that dealt with professional regulation of practitioners would best operate at a UK level. The

commission’s rationale was that that would provide clarity and assurance to patients that there was a common approach and a common set of standards right across the UK, and that it would also help to facilitate the mobility of professionals who chose to move between the nations of the United Kingdom.

The one exception to that was, of course, social work; Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had their own professional bodies in place alongside the Health and Care Professions Council, which represented social workers in England. Together, those bodies worked on a four-council basis across the UK, and had a memorandum of understanding that set out a framework for close working. As I understand it, part of the problem is that the HCPC is about to lose around 90,000 social workers in England to a new professional body—an issue to which I will return shortly.

Professional registration fees for social workers is a devolved matter; it was devolved in 2003, and the fees remained static until 2016. It goes without saying that the Scottish Government would welcome further devolution of such powers to Scotland, so that we can ensure that any planned changes to that regime are better tailored to the needs of health and care practitioners in Scotland.

As for the issue before us, the Scottish Government are on record as saying that they are more than a little surprised and confused as to why an 18% hike in fees was deemed necessary or appropriate. They seek clarification from the HCPC on how such a substantial jump, which is so out of line with inflation, could possibly be justified. In addition, they are seeking reassurances from the HCPC that it is not simply attempting to make up any projected loss in revenue as a result of the departure of social workers in England by hiking up membership registration fees.

As the hon. Member for Coventry South said, being a member of the HCPC is not an optional extra; people cannot opt out of it and still practise their profession. As the HCPC has a captive market, any price increase must be seen as fair and proportionate, and the practitioners who pay that increased fee must know why they are being forced to pay it, and what benefits it will bring to them and to the profession as a whole. As I understand it, the Scottish Government have contacted, or will contact, the HCPC to get a clearer understanding of its motivation, both in the short and the long term.

As has been pointed out by just about every speaker, this 18% rise in fees hugely outstrips inflation. Given the real-terms cuts that many health and care staff have experienced in recent years, that is another financial blow that they could do without.

In addition, as the HCPC insists on charging a flat rate, if the rise in fees goes ahead as planned, it will of course have a disproportionate effect on part-time workers, who are mainly women, and those workers who are considering reducing, or want to reduce, their working hours. I repeat the Scottish Government’s call for all workers to be paid the real living wage, which better reflects the cost of living and inflation. I am proud that Scotland has the highest proportion of employees earning the real living wage of any nation of the UK.

The contributions to this excellent debate have had a common theme. Regarding the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), it beggars belief that anyone in his constituency could be unaware of how hard he works. I

used to wonder how he did so much in this place, and I have concluded that he is one of triplets. His valuable contribution today, which compared the pay rise for NHS workers with the rise in professional fees being asked by the HCPC, was very telling.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) brought a much-needed voice from the shop floor or the coalface to this debate, and I am very grateful to her for sharing her experience. It is that experience, and her credibility, that demand that she be listened to by the people making this decision.

Similarly, the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), another former healthcare professional, gave a personal account of paying £17—I think that is what she said—at the beginning of her career, and compared that with the £106 fee being proposed. That really gave this debate context.

I thank the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for sharing the personal experiences of her family, who have been supported by a dedicated professional. I guarantee that that dedicated professional will not earn a great deal; for them, this increase will be a significant amount of money. I thank all the hon. Members who have spoken for their contributions this afternoon.

If this proposed 18% increase goes ahead, HCPC fees will have risen by 40% since 2014. That is a remarkable figure by any standard, and it is easy to see why the unions and others view it as excessive, unreasonable and unjustified. I put on the record my thanks to Unison for its enormous help in briefing Members of Parliament. I cannot think why the HCPC did not take advantage of this opportunity to brief Members as well; it seems to be entrenched somewhere and does not wish to engage. It had an opportunity to put its case and let Members understand in greater detail its rationale for this increase.

I cannot help but think that at a time when the NHS is struggling with staff shortages in many areas, this decision could have a negative impact on key parts of its workforce. The arbitrary way in which this increase seems to have been arrived at, and the lack of any adequate mechanism to prevent such an arbitrary rise, is seriously problematic.

A consultation opened in September last year. The consultation document put out by the HCPC referred to: improving capacity and services around fitness to practise; keeping pace with inflation, although perhaps the HCPC is talking about Venezuelan inflation, because this increase seems wildly out of line with inflation here; and the costs associated with the impending transfer of social workers in England to their own professional regulatory body. I think that last part is the key to this situation. There is an overwhelming sense that the HCPC is chasing money that it fears it will lose as a result of this reorganisation.

I am not naive; I understand that folk do not normally vote for price rises. However, the fact that 90% of respondents were opposed to the rise should cause concern, yet the HCPC is pressing ahead regardless with its decision to implement this rise in fees. When Unison asked about the increase, 99% of respondents opposed it, and 76% said that they did not believe that they were getting good value for money as things were, which shows that the HCPC has a problem.

As we have heard many times—indeed, I have referred to this myself—the change in the regulation of social workers in England is the key to this situation. However,

I call on the HCPC to pause before implementing this decision to increase fees. It should seriously consider why its members are so implacably opposed to it. Can it seriously justify asking its remaining members to pick up the slack resulting from the loss of social workers in England to a new professional body? I do not think it can. During that pause, perhaps it could examine further ways of increasing its revenue, rather than continuing on the road that it is on.

I finish by once again thanking the hon. Member for Coventry South for bringing this matter to our attention, and for securing this ever so important debate.

3.59 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe.

As have many other hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this important debate, and on the way in which he has led the campaign. As he rightly pointed out, 114 Members have signed an early-day motion on this topic, which shows the level of concern about the proposals across the House.

My hon. Friend set out the five main reasons why the HCPC argues that the increase is justified. However, as he correctly pointed out, it cannot be justified, particularly in the context of what he referred to as excessive redundancy packages and refurbishment costs within the organisation. He was right that it is irresponsible of the Government to hide behind the HCPC. Recent events may give us cause to believe that the Government are completely powerless in everything and unable to govern, but surely there is something they can do about this; it is a question of political will.

As always, it was a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). He put it aptly when he described the increases as having no sense of fairness or balance, and he is right that increases in the cost of everyday items make it difficult to find any justification for these fee increases.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) brought her experience to the debate, as she often does. I am sorry to hear that she has called time on her NHS career, but the NHS's loss is no doubt her constituents' gain. She was right to remark on the correlation between public sector pay restraint and increased fees, and she highlighted what I would characterise as the opaque way in which the HCPC operates. It does not recognise trade unions, we do not know what its pay rates are and, as she said, many registrants do not see any value in what it does. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the healthcare scientists and allied health professionals who work in the NHS, and agree with her that they provide a vital part of the service.

We heard from another former NHS professional, my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). She brought her own frontline experience to the debate and highlighted the importance of maintaining the integrity of the register, to protect both the professions and the public. She rightly pointed out that the number of those whose professional standards are brought into question is minuscule, and made the pertinent point

[Justin Madders]

that the risk for professionals is probably greater now than in the past, due to the continual challenges with workforce numbers.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), who made the point—as did many others—that although the staff we are concerned with today are not the typical NHS staff we spend a lot of our time talking about, they are just as important as every other member of the NHS family. She was right that this fee increase is out of proportion, and that such fees can only be seen by staff as a disincentive to stay in the professions. She also made the perfectly reasonable point that cash reserves could be used to prevent a fee increase this year and to make time for a more open and detailed examination of how such eye-watering increases can be avoided in future.

Professional regulation plays a vital role in setting and enforcing the standards of professional behaviour, competence and ethics that underpin the day-to-day interactions between patients and health and social care services in the UK. There are nine regulators in the UK, which regulate 32 professions and are independent of Government under the law. Their roles, functions and powers vary, but all set standards of competence, conduct and ethics that professionals must abide by. Professionals must register with them to practise. They monitor the quality of all education and training courses, maintain a public register of professionals, investigate complaints, and make decisions about whether registered professionals should be allowed to continue to practise. In short, they play a vital role in upholding public trust and confidence in the professions.

The HCPC currently regulates 15 health and care professions across the UK, as well as social workers in England, although as we have heard, social workers are due to move to a new regulator later this year. At the moment, that represents 366,000 health and social care professionals, including paramedics, occupational therapists, biomedical scientists, chiropractors, dieticians, physiotherapists, radiographers, prosthetists, orthotists, speech therapists and social workers—Members will be glad that they were not the only ones to struggle with some of those names. All those professionals are vital to the day-to-day running of the national health service. Registrants have to pay a fee to join the register and must then pay a yearly retention fee to remain on it and be able to practise.

A massive 18% increase in the registration fee is due to take effect from October 2019, taking the fee to £106, although that increase is subject to parliamentary approval. It comes on the back of above-inflation increases in 2014 and 2015, the second of which occurred despite the HCPC reassuring registrants that their fees would not be reviewed again for a period of two years. If the proposed increase is imposed, HCPC fees will have increased by 40% since 2014, which not only outstrips inflation—which, according to the Office for National Statistics, has averaged about 2.5% over the past few years—but is well above the pay rises that our hard-working NHS staff have received over that period. Let us not forget that the modest pay award that those staff recently secured came only after many years of campaigning, during which time their wages consistently fell behind the cost of living.

I can understand why, in that context, an 18% increase seems disproportionately high. Would the Minister care to comment on whether, in the context of the years of pay restraint that we have talked about, such an unprecedented increase in fees is indeed indefensible, and whether it is right that pay rises will not keep up with the increases in fees?

I appreciate the concern expressed by some Members that there is no real mechanism to stop the HCPC imposing fees at whatever level it sees fit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton has said, and as we all regularly hear from staff-side union members, modest pay rises are being eroded by a series of other costs, including increased pension contributions, student loan repayments and increasing car parking charges. Another increase, at a time when pay is not keeping up with the cost of living, will only reduce the disposable income of those staff. The Government must acknowledge the crisis in recruitment and retention, and that all those factors are conspiring against any improvement in the serious staff shortages the NHS faces.

The need to retain staff has never been greater; we should be doing all we can to attract new people, and to encourage those who already work in the NHS to stay. As we have heard, that is a particular concern for part-time staff. Over the years, the HCPC has declined to consider introducing a pro rata structure. Unison has expressed concern that some registrants might be pushed to move into non-regulated posts, work in posts where there is no requirement to renew their registration or decide not to continue to practise, even on reduced hours. Again, that might have a negative effect. Will the Minister comment on that disparity between part-time and full-time staff, and make representations to the HCPC about it? Does he agree that it creates a disincentive for people who might not want to work full time, but could still play a valuable role in the NHS?

Some 90% of respondents to the consultation argued against the fee rise, but the HCPC is going to press ahead with it. When Unison carried out a survey of its registered members at the end of last year, 99% did not support an increase in registration fees. Those large fee increases raise concerns about whether the HCPC is operating as efficiently as it could be, so when he responds, will the Minister comment on whether the HCPC represents value for money?

The HCPC has given a number of reasons for the proposed increase, including improving capacity and service in the area of fitness to practise, keeping pace with inflation, and costs associated with the impending transfer of the regulation of social workers to Social Work England this year. The HCPC became the regulator for social workers in 2012, and has had to invest in additional staff and accommodation to fulfil that role. The reasons why, four years later, the Government announced that they would be transferring the regulation of social workers to a new regulator are not clear to me, but it is unacceptable that HCPC registrants should effectively be paying the price for a political decision. Several Members mentioned that 73% of HCPC resources are spent on fitness-to-practise cases, and social worker cases account for 59% of that amount, so it seems reasonable to conclude that costs ought to decrease this

year. In that context, it is incumbent on the Minister to see whether any justification can be put forward for the fee increase.

As my hon. Friend the Member for York Central mentioned, the Law Commission made recommendations back in 2012 that would have enabled regulators to become more agile, to modernise and to reduce the costs associated with fitness to practise. I recall the Conservative party signalling its intention to reform in its 2017 general election manifesto. As we know, the Queen's Speech following that election did not include any reference to that legislation. Will the Minister indicate whether that reform will now see the light of day?

Does the Minister agree that the Government should accept responsibility for the lack of action on reforming healthcare regulation and for their decisions on social work regulation, which have had a negative impact on the HCPC? Will he do what he can to ensure that registrants do not pay the price for that failure? Our dedicated and hard-working NHS staff deserve better than that.

4.10 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. Like everyone else, I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this debate. He made an impassioned speech that aired his campaign, which he has led with style and impact. The Health and Care Professions Council is one of nine UK-wide regulators. It performs an important role in the health and care sectors across all four countries of the UK, acting in patients' and service users' interest to ensure the professional standards we need to guarantee safety and quality.

Right at the start of my speech, I pay tribute to all the dedicated professionals who work in the professions governed by the HCPC. It is also right to respond to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). He said, if I heard him correctly, that it was irresponsible of the Government not to intervene. There is an important point of principle here: the HCPC is independent of the Government. It is funded by registrants' fees on a cost-recovery basis. It is therefore not the Government's role to tell the HCPC what its fees should be. It is not a question of hiding or a lack of political will; it is a matter of law. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a mechanism for oversight of the HCPC, which is the Professional Standards Authority. It oversees the HCPC and its setting of fees.

It has been an excellent debate with lots of useful and informed contributions. I have been in a number of debates with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and he spoke with his usual passion not only on behalf of the people of Strangford, but in the wider context as well. I want to pick up on what the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) said; I was listening carefully to her contribution. She is right that the vast majority of registrants have very little contact with the regulator between renewals of their registration. That may be a frustration and not seen as value for money, but from the other point of view, the HCPC's largest expenditure is on delivering the fitness-to-practise function. It is therefore inevitable that it

concentrates on the very small number of registrants whose performance or conduct has fallen below the expected level.

The key thing is the need for regulatory reform, which the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston was challenging me on a moment ago. We have recognised that regulators have inherited a complex and restrictive registration practice that is often bureaucratic and administratively burdensome. As he rightly pointed out, the four UK Governments consulted on proposals for reforming the legislative structure of professional regulation. That consultation finished last year.

The reforms that we are looking to make, and are still committed to, will shift the balance in professional regulation, freeing up the regulators to concentrate more on prevention and to work directly with registrants, rather than just on fitness to practise. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not our intention to hide that. We intend to bring it forward, and we will do so in the near future.

I was listening carefully to the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). She made a point about the need for registration and also for the system to be updated. The Government are committed to that. I also listened carefully to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist). She spoke with knowledge and mentioned a number of the fitness-to-practise cases she has been involved with. She was right to point out that the vast majority of those have been social care cases over a number of years. That brings me to a key point. A number of Members raised the issue of the HCPC's costs potentially going down as a result of social workers moving out of that regulatory process. I have not looked at that in great depth, but it is highly likely that variable costs will decline for the HCPC. As a number of Members have pointed out, social workers make up the vast majority of the professions that are regulated—more than 25%—so there is an element of fixed costs. They are being helped by the establishment of Social Care England, and the costs are being met by the Government.

The HCPC currently regulates 16 professions. The hon. Members for Coventry South and for Ellesmere Port and Neston read out the list of professions, so I will not rehearse them all over again, but I reiterate my point: these valued professionals are performing crucial roles across the NHS and the wider health and care system. It is important that the public have assurance that those professionals are regulated. If they are regulated by the HCPC, the public knows that they are appropriately trained and hold the relevant qualifications, and that they meet the expected standards of conduct, performance and ethics. Where a professional falls below these standards, it is important that the HCPC is able to protect the interests of patients.

I take the point made by a number of hon. Members that the HCPC currently has the lowest registration fees of any UK-wide regulator in the health and care professions. It is clearly not right to look at that in comparison with some of the more highly paid professions, but it is true that the current annual registration is lower than that for a number of others, such as nurses and midwives. I also take the point that the proposal is for a large, one-off increase, but there has not been an increase for two years, and the registration fees are tax-deductible, so the increase will amount to about £1 a month.

[*Stephen Hammond*]

A number of Members mentioned the disparity between the fees that are payable by part-time and full-time staff. I have listened carefully to that argument, and I will write to the HCPC to ask it to look at that more carefully. That seems to me to be a fair point.

A number of Members raised points about the consultation. The legislation that founded the HCPC required it to consult on any fee increase. Accordingly, it ran a public consultation, to which it received 2,396 responses. Some 95% of those responses were from professionals whom it regulates. It also engaged extensively with professional bodies, trade unions and other bodies ahead of and during its consultation. The draft response to the fees consultation was published with the HCPC's council papers of 14 February. It is right that 90% of the respondents did not support a proposed fee rise.

However, it is fair to note that the majority of respondents also wanted HCPC to invest more in prevention and improved services, in increasing capacity, and in improving the quality and timeliness of the fitness-to-practise services that it delivers. Everybody accepts that no fee rise is popular, but the HCPC has been clear that the principal reason for this one is to allow it to deliver the services identified by registrants in the consultation.

Dr Drew: The Minister will have heard my earlier intervention. Will he assure us that he will ask for complete transparency and accountability, so that we know what the additional costs will go towards?

Stephen Hammond: I listened to the hon. Gentleman, and I will make a promise to him. As I pointed out at the beginning of my speech, it is not the Government's role to tell the regulator how to set its fees or what to set them for. However, I see no reason why the Professional Standards Authority should not ask the HCPC to give that reassurance and to publish that information. I will write to the hon. Gentleman when I have spoken to the PSA to ensure that it can do that within its remit. Given that it has oversight, I am sure that that will be possible.

Liz McInnes: It is my understanding that the changes to the HCPC rules will be subject to parliamentary approval. The Minister says that the Government will not be able to have any influence, so by what mechanism will the rule change be approved by Parliament?

Stephen Hammond: On oversight of the fee change, there is effectively accountability to Parliament through an order of the Privy Council. The Government will need to introduce an order of the Privy Council, which will be subject to the negative resolution procedure. The financial oversight is done by the PSA. The Government have to lay the order, but the oversight is done via the Privy Council.

As I said, there has rightly been much discussion this afternoon about the reason for the proposed fee rise. The HCPC makes the point that it has not raised its fees since 2015. It also rightly makes the point that the vast

bulk of the fee rise is for the services that its registrants want. I promised to write to the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) about that.

I thank the hon. Member for Coventry South for raising this issue. The debate has highlighted his campaign. I have no doubt that the HCPC and the PSA will have listened, and will take regard of this afternoon's debate. I hope that my remarks, the promise I made to the hon. Member for Stroud, and my commitment to write to the HCPC will help the campaign of the hon. Member for Coventry South. I am clear that registrants should continue to benefit from a regulator that provides value for money and services to its registrants; I know that the PSA will ensure that they do so.

4.23 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham: I thank all Members who took part in the debate: my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Blaydon (Liz Twist), the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), and of course the Minister.

I welcome the undertakings that the Minister gave. I realise that some of the national health service issues that were raised are above his pay grade; the wages and conditions of employees are really an issue for the Secretary of State, so I would not expect any undertakings from the Minister about them.

I very much appreciated the contributions made by Front Benchers and Back Benchers alike, and I hope that listening to them enlightened the Minister. It certainly enlightened me, because I have never been involved in the national health service or anything like it; I have been involved more in the engineering side of life and in industry. It is always useful to hear from hon. Members about their experience. More importantly, I also thank the trade union for the invaluable background information that it provided. Some colleagues are probably aware of the situations that it has highlighted, but others may not be.

The Minister gave an undertaking to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) that he would talk to the Professional Standards Authority; if he sent me a copy of that communication, I would be very interested. I come from an industrial trade union background. We were always taught, "Just because you get a knock-back, it doesn't mean you should give in. Pick yourself up, dust yourself down and keep campaigning until you get justice." Once again, I thank everybody who participated in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered registration fees at the Health and Care Professions Council.

4.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 14 March 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Energy Council, March 2019

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): The Energy Council took place on 4 March 2019.

Tyre labelling regulation

The presidency sought a general approach on the updated regulation on tyre labelling. The Commission, represented by Carlos Moedas (Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation), stressed the importance of this file, citing that road transport was responsible for 27% of final energy consumption and 22% of emissions in the EU.

Some member states raised concern about the proposed label not including consumer information on tyre abrasion. In its intervention, the UK supported the text, highlighting that the proposed tyre label will be more effective and overall provide better information for consumers. The UK also noted the seriousness of the environmental and health impacts from tyre particulates caused by abrasion which the UK Government are actively reviewing and considering options to reduce. However, as suitable testing methodologies were not yet in place that could accurately and fairly measure abrasion rates, the UK agreed that the information on tyre abrasion should not yet be included on the label. The presidency concluded it had reached a general approach.

Clean planet for all: strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy

The Ministers discussed the Commission's long-term strategy for a climate neutral economy, for which the presidency had asked member states to provide views on three questions, relating to the structural changes needed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the impact of new technologies and how to facilitate a "fair transition".

The Commission highlighted that the strategy was necessary to ensure compliance with the Paris agreement while also focusing on the social dimension and job creation.

In its intervention, the UK welcomed the publication of the strategy, highlighting the UK clean growth strategy and its role in increasing the use of renewables. It also noted the importance of international partnerships in achieving the stated goals, in addition to the importance of North seas energy co-operation. Some other member states echoed this point.

While all member states spoke to welcome the proposals, there was a wide variety of responses, both in terms of EU priorities and the level of ambition needed. While some member states called for the Commission to work on an additional scenario of 100% renewable energy by 2050, other member states raised concern over any

100% net-zero target by 2050. Member states also highlighted the importance of involving the public in the "just transition", and ensuring that growth and wellbeing of citizens was addressed alongside environmental transition. All member states raised the need for improved research and development, in particular with regard to hydrogen and energy storage.

Any other business items

The Council discussed the recently agreed revision to the gas directive. The UK, alongside a number of member states, welcomed the agreement.

The presidency updated member states on ongoing negotiations on the Connecting Europe Facility, for which it hoped to reach a deal with the European Parliament on 7 March.

Additional activities

The Minister also met with multiple other counterparts in the margins of the Council to give reassurances regarding EU exit, discuss our ambitions on energy co-operation and highlight the UK's bid to host the COP26 climate summit in 2020.

[HCWS1415]

DEFENCE

Defence Prosperity Programme

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Ministry of Defence (MOD) direct spending with industry supports 115,000 jobs throughout the UK. Our investment in training benefits both defence and the wider UK economy. The armed forces are one of the largest apprenticeship providers with over 20,000 personnel on our apprenticeship programme. Each year several thousand people leave the armed forces and help to fill skilled professional or technical jobs in the private sector. The UK is the second largest exporter of defence equipment, with recent successes including the Department for International Trade-led Type 26 campaign. In 2016-17 we invested £1.6 billion in research and development, the majority of which is spent with UK businesses.

The 2015 strategic defence and security review, introduced a new national security objective to promote UK prosperity. We have subsequently launched the defence innovation initiative and published strategies for shipbuilding and future combat air. We have refreshed our defence industrial policy with a new emphasis on supporting growth and competitiveness. Last March, I invited my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) to review opportunities for "Growing the Contribution of Defence to UK Prosperity". His report, published in July, represents a major piece of work, which has been welcomed by both Government and industry. It contained over 40 substantive recommendations. Some of these are already being incorporated into the Department's overall defence prosperity programme. We will continue to review our response to the outstanding recommendations, but I wanted to take this opportunity to update Parliament on the progress made since the publication of the Dunne review. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has agreed to work with the Department to review the response to his report in due course.

We have designed our approach to prosperity to ensure that, while growing our contribution to the economy, we do not put at risk our objective of delivering defence capability at the best value for money. We have

grouped the recommendations from the Dunne review and the defence industrial policy Refresh into four major areas of work set out below:

Embedding prosperity into the Department's policy, process and culture

We intend to ensure that people across the Department understand our prosperity objectives and have access to the training and guidance needed to deliver these in a consistent and coherent way. Each of our main budget areas and frontline commands has now nominated a senior-level "Prosperity Champion" to help embed change, share lessons learned and identify best practice. We have put additional central resources into this area and we are working jointly with industry to develop common training material and case studies. We are publishing a defence prosperity guide which will help staff across the Department, civilian and military, understand their role in growing defence's contribution to UK prosperity. We are striving to make it easier to do business with Defence, something we recognise is especially important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We are working with prime suppliers to increase their engagement with smaller businesses, improving how we advertise both direct and sub-contracted opportunities, and have held a defence suppliers forum SME conference to understand barriers to working in the defence supply chain. Beyond this, we are working to simplify our tendering process, and will publish our SME action plan this month.

Quantifying the defence contribution to the UK economy

Defence has a complex and diverse supply chain, spanning companies of all sizes and spread throughout the UK. The Dunne review highlighted the difficulty of measuring the economic benefit of defence and the need for better data to inform our decision-making processes. It recommended the development of a common MOD/industry approach and format for collecting data on the defence supply chain. In response, we have been working together with the Defence Growth Partnership and the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on a proposal for a new joint economic data hub within the UK Defence Solutions Centre (UKDSC) at Farnborough. The UKDSC has world-class expertise in managing data on export markets and will apply these skills to collect and aggregate economic data from across the sector. The Government will provide guidance and support from defence economists together with advice from the Office of National Statistics. The output from this work will be overseen by an independent advisory board to ensure that both the Government and industry have confidence in its quality and impartiality. The review also highlighted the need for greater academic research into the economic value of defence. We recognise that the academic base in this area is small in comparison to the scale and importance of the UK's spending on defence. We are working with academic institutions to look at how we can encourage greater debate and engagement in this area of public policy, including the potential for sponsoring an international conference later this year.

Sustaining an internationally competitive and productive defence sector for the UK

The UK has a world-leading defence sector, but if we are to sustain capability and continue to achieve export success in increasingly competitive markets, the Government and industry need to work together to drive innovation and improvements in productivity and efficiency. The

Government have invested in a range of supply chain development initiatives across different sectors and helped established facilities such as the high value manufacturing catapult network. I am today committing £500,000 from the defence innovation fund for a pilot project to develop, test and validate how defence can make better use of this infrastructure in the design, manufacture and support of future equipment and to help create more resilient and efficient supply chains. There are benefits both to the defence customer and to industry from taking this forward and part of the pilot will involve trialling the approach on a number of our acquisition programmes.

We understand it can be particularly challenging for smaller companies to access the expertise and resources to bring their good ideas to market. Working with industry, BEIS has already established a successful national aerospace technology exploitation programme (NATEP) for civil aerospace. Drawing on the experience from this programme we have reached agreement with BEIS and Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) to pilot a new defence technology exploitation programme (DTEP) in Northern Ireland. It is expected that research and development investment, as a result of the pilot programme, will be approximately £1.2 million, which in addition to supporting innovation within Northern Ireland's vibrant defence SMEs, will help to develop stronger links and new routes to market through primes and upper tier companies across the UK. Alongside this initiative, the MOD'S defence and security accelerator is creating a post in Northern Ireland to help companies access its programmes.

We want to increase the opportunities for innovative and competitive UK companies and ensure that they have a fair opportunity to bid for supply chain work in defence contracts; we also want to strengthen our understanding of the nature and resilience of UK supply chains. To help achieve this, we are working in partnership with industry to pilot a new approach to supply chain planning.

Growing exports and inward investment

Working closely with the Department for International Trade (DIT), we are seeking to broaden the UK's defence export base, generate greater value from our overseas procurements, and improve access. In order to help us maximise future export opportunities, we are working with the DIT Defence and Security Organisation and UKDSC to start a phased roll-out of the UKDSC's analysis of overseas export markets with our global network of defence attachés.

Post EU exit, we will maintain our strong links with partners both in Europe and globally, to create the right conditions for the UK's world-leading defence industry. We have much to offer international partnerships, including extensive operational experience and high-end capabilities. We also have a long history of European co-operation through capabilities such as Typhoon, A400M and Meteor.

We are working across Government to develop new ways of working with industry that help unlock value for the UK economy and for business. This includes reinvigorating our existing defence and security industrial engagement policy (DSIEP) and building on our successful strategic prosperity partnerships with companies like Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

The Defence Electronics and Components Agency (DECA) at Sealand in north Wales is recognised as a centre of excellence for defence electronics activity in the region. It is also at the heart of the innovative joint venture formed between the MOD, BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman called Sealand Support Services Ltd (SSSL), which last month was awarded a further £500 million of work from the US Department of Defense on the F-35 programme. We are pleased that Welsh Government continue to identify the potential of an advanced manufacturing research institute alongside DECA to create exciting new opportunities for the region, and commit to working alongside them to deliver this ambitious project.

In Scotland, the MOD is basing its fleet of P8-A maritime patrol aircraft at RAF Lossiemouth and once fully operational some 470 additional RAF personnel are expected to be based at the site. Work has commenced on a brand new £100 million strategic facility, co-funded by MOD and Boeing, which is being constructed by a local firm sustaining up to 200 local jobs at its peak. The facility will support the UK P8 fleet and is expected to create over 400 new jobs involved in the operation and support of this advanced maritime patrol capability. It will also have the capability to support the P8 fleets of other countries, which has the potential to bring further prosperity benefits to the region in the future.

Conclusion

I have set out the progress we have made in growing the defence contribution to the UK economy—and where we plan to do more. This substantial programme of work is being undertaken jointly with other Government Departments and industry; it supports delivery of the Government's industrial strategy and ensures that while growing our contribution to the economy, we do not put at risk our objective of delivering defence capability at the best value for money.

[HCWS1411]

EDUCATION

Supporting Care Leavers in Higher Education

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I am pleased to make this statement jointly with the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation.

Care leavers are some of the most vulnerable young people in society and often have to make the transition from care to independence without the support from parents and wider support networks that other young people rely on. Care leavers are significantly less likely to enter HE than other disadvantaged groups and those who do enter HE often have additional challenges to manage, compared to their peers. The Government are committed to improving care leavers' outcomes and have produced a set of principles for higher education providers to consider in their offer to care leavers to help increase the number of students in care accessing higher education and ensure that care leavers in HE are given the support they need to succeed.

This follows the launch of the care leaver covenant last October, which is a key part of the Government's drive to galvanise the support that wider civil society can provide to support care leavers. The covenant asks organisations from the public, private and voluntary

sectors—including HE providers—to commit to help care leavers successfully transition from care to independence, by setting out clearly what support they can offer.

The Government have appointed Spectra First to promote the covenant and secure signatories to it that are meaningful, and which are linked to the outcomes in the cross-government care leaver strategy. They will use these principles to encourage universities to reflect on and enhance their care leaver provision for both current and future students.

We know that there is already some exceptional work happening in the HE sector, to provide additional support for care leavers. But we want this to become the norm across the sector as a whole. We expect that HE providers' commitment to care leavers is communicated from the senior leadership down. We want to see cultures that welcome care leavers and help them reach their potential from the start to the end of their HE journeys. Providers should ensure there are sufficient opportunities for care leavers to identify and access support at any point in the student lifecycle.

The principles to guide the HE sector on improving care leavers' access and participation in higher education cover seven key areas:

Outreach and local authority relationships: Engagement with looked after children should be a key feature of outreach work and should begin at as early an age as possible. This involves working with local authorities, virtual school heads and schools in order to encourage more care leavers into higher education.

Accommodation support: Securing and sustaining suitable accommodation is a significant challenge for care leavers. HE providers should seek to provide priority access and continuous 365 days a year accommodation, preferably subsidised by the institution.

Financial support: Care leavers do not tend to have access to financial support from parents and so rely on support provided by their local authority. This has implications throughout the student lifecycle. HE providers should provide financial support to help with the costs of accommodation, associated study costs and access to social activities to support inclusion and a quality student experience.

Designated member of staff: HE providers should identify at least one designated member of staff to support care leavers. The individual should understand the barriers and challenges that care leavers face, including mental health. We would expect the designated officer to be able to direct care leavers to appropriate support, if they cannot directly provide it and to be an advocate for them throughout their time in HE.

Offer on website: Care leavers often say that they find it difficult to find information on the support available to them on provider websites. HE providers should therefore provide clear information on the provider website, that is easy to navigate, and sets out the provider's offer to care leavers.

Support networks: Loneliness and isolation are among the biggest problems reported by care leavers. Encouragement and facilitation of support networks for care leavers within the institution is therefore critical to retention.

Careers advice: High-quality careers advice and guidance, tailored to care leavers.

We particularly encourage providers to use contextual admissions in the case of applications from care leavers, so that their often-disrupted education and personal challenges can be taken in to account. This can be a way of acknowledging that despite achieving only average results many care leavers still have enormous potential; for example, simply successfully completing sixth-form

studies under very difficult circumstances could be seen to demonstrate the resilience and potential that justifies a contextual offer.

We would expect the support offer from HE providers to be proportionate to the size of the provider and their resources. In addition to the points listed above, we ask that the most selective providers and those who have the greatest income from higher fees to go the furthest in terms of their support. That could include provision of suitable, free accommodation for the full length of the course, including holidays, or a bursary of sufficient amount to cover associated study and student experience costs.

The care leavers principles can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-03-14/HCWS1410/>.

[HCWS1410]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council, March 2019

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council takes place in Brussels on 18 March.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for agriculture will be on the post-2020 common agricultural policy (CAP) reform package. Ministers will exchange views on the regulation concerning CAP strategic plans, the horizontal regulation, and the regulation on the common market organisation (CMO) of agriculture products.

Council will also hold an exchange of views on bioeconomy.

There are currently three items scheduled for discussion under “any other business”:

information from the Netherlands delegation on the outcome of the congress “CAP Strategic Plans — Exploring Eco-Climate Schemes” (Leeuwarden, 6 to 8 February 2019),

information from the Netherlands delegation on the decision by the technical board of appeals of the European patent office regarding the possibility to patent the results of classical plant breeding,

information from the Commission on the outcome of the workshops organised by the Commission’s task force on water and agriculture (Sore, 27 November 2018 and Bucharest, 5 and 6 February 2019).

Although not confirmed, we expect additional items to be added to the agenda under “any other business”:

information from the Slovenian delegation on small-scale coastal fisheries and the European maritime and fisheries fund,

information from the Polish delegation on the meat market situation.

[HCWS1409]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council, March 2019

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I will attend the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 19 March 2019 to represent the UK. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

The provisional agenda includes:

Multiannual financial framework 2021-27

Ministers and the Commission will discuss progress on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations. The intention is to reach an agreement on the negotiations in autumn 2019.

Preparation of the European Council 21 and 22 March 2019: Conclusions and European Council follow-up

The Council will discuss the draft conclusions for the March European Council. The conclusions are expected to cover: jobs, growth and competitiveness; climate change; external relations; tackling disinformation and protecting the democratic integrity of the European and national elections across the EU. The presidency will provide Ministers with an update on progress in implementing previous European Council conclusions.

European semester

Ministers will discuss a report on Council contributions to the 2019 European semester, which forms part of the EU’s economic governance framework and comprises a cycle of economic and fiscal policy co-ordination within the EU. The presidency will present an updated timetable for the 2019 European semester. Ministers will discuss the draft recommendation on the economic policy of the Euro area.

[HCWS1414]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council, 18 March 2019

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 18 March. It will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) Federica Mogherini, and will take place in Brussels.

China

Ministers will discuss their approach to the upcoming EU-China summit in April and the strategic direction of EU-China relations. The UK will highlight the importance of European co-ordination in engagement with China. The UK is committed to continuing to work closely with European partners on China after we leave the EU.

Republic of Moldova

Ministers will discuss the political situation in Moldova following the 24 February parliamentary elections, in which no political party won an overall majority. In this context, the focus of the FAC will be to take stock of the elections and discuss the EU’s expectations for the next Government, once they are established. The UK supports continued EU engagement with Moldova based on the conditions set out in the 2014 association agreement, which remains the best means to deliver tangible benefits to the Moldovan people.

Yemen

Ministers will discuss the current state of the conflict in Yemen. Following the Stockholm peace talks in December 2018, the EU adopted new FAC conclusions, which set out EU support for the political process. Ministers will focus on the next steps, urging implementation

of the Stockholm agreements and support of the wider peace process. The session will include a briefing from the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the UK will reaffirm its support to him and the UN.

Council conclusions

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the EU's human rights guidelines on nondiscrimination, two Court of Auditors' special reports on EU funding to NGOs and on internal security capacity building in Niger and Mali.

[HCWS1413]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Independent Breast Screening Review Recommendations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): Following publication of the report from the independent breast screening review on 13 December, and the initial statement that I made at the time, I am pleased to now be able to provide the Government's substantive response to each of the 15 recommendations made by the review.

As I said at the time, it is essential that we take all necessary actions to learn from any problems identified in the breast screening programme. I can now confirm that the Government have accepted all the recommendations made by the independent review team.

In responding to these recommendations, we have also taken account of the findings from the recent investigation into adult screening programmes conducted by the National Audit Office, which was published on 1 February 2019. In some cases, similar issues were highlighted about where improvements can be made in terms of how our national screening programmes are delivered.

A few recommendations are contingent on forthcoming advice from the UK National Screening Committee on how the upper age limit for breast screening should be defined. In the interim, I can confirm that we will maintain the upper age definition of 70 years and 364 days as set out in the current service specification.

In addition, and in line with the statement made at the time, I can confirm that the AgeX trial will continue as planned. The trial will provide significant new evidence on screening women under 50 and over 70 that is not currently available, providing the evidence needed to make decisions about the age range for breast screening in the future.

Some of the areas highlighted for improvement are being considered by Professor Sir Mike Richards as part of his review into cancer screening that was commissioned by NHS England and which was announced on 15 November 2018. Where possible, improvements to the programme are already being taken forward. Where a more considered response is required, it is appropriate to wait for Professor Richards to report and this is reflected in our response. We look forward to receiving Professor Richards' recommendations in the summer of 2019.

[HCWS1412]

Petition

Thursday 14 March 2019

OBSERVATIONS

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Business Rates Reform

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the current business rates system is out-of-date, unfair and is undermining the viability of our high streets, our hospitality industry and many small businesses across the UK.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to carry out an urgent review and reform of the Business Rates system to help protect the future of the UK High Street and create a level playing field for all businesses.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rachael Maskell, *Official Report*, 30 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 883.]

[P002282]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak):

The Government are committed to promoting vibrant and sustainable high streets and town centres to enable them to grow and create jobs. At the 2018 Budget, the Chancellor announced Our Plan for the High Street, a long-term plan to help our high streets and town centres evolve as consumer habits change. This delivers long-term support including a £675 million Future High Streets

Fund to make high streets and town centres fit for the future; planning reforms to create more homes, jobs and choice in town centres; and a High Streets Task Force to support local leadership.

As part of this plan, the Chancellor also announced one third off the business rates bills of small retailers, including shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs. This discount will be available for two years from April 2019 to retail property with a rateable value below £51,000, subject to State aid, which is worth an estimated £1 billion.

This is in addition to recent wide-ranging business rates reforms benefiting all ratepayers. In total, since Budget 2016 the Government have announced a range of reforms and measures worth over £13 billion in England over the next five years, including switching from RPI to CPI indexation, raising the threshold of the standard multiplier, and making Small Business Rate Relief more generous so that 655,000 of the smallest businesses now pay no rates at all.

The Government undertook a fundamental review of business rates in 2016, including seeking views on alternatives to a property based business tax. The majority of respondents were in favour of retaining a property based tax. There was no consensus on an alternative tax base, and even those respondents who put forward alternatives were clear these were not without issues.

Separately at Budget 2018 the Government announced a Digital Services Tax (DST). This is to address the concern that current international corporate tax rules do not reflect how social media platforms, search engines and online marketplaces derive value from user participation. This is a targeted and proportionate interim measure, pending global reform. The DST is due to raise approximately £1.5 billion over four years for the public finances, helping to ensure digital platform businesses make a fair contribution to the public finances.

The Government keep all taxes, including business rates, under review.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 14 March 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
INTERNATIONAL TRADE	501	WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	512
Future Trade Deals: NHS and Other Public Services	505	Differential Gender-based Pricing	515
Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector and Overseas Goods	503	Highly Paid Professions: Girls and Women	514
Leaving the EU: Health Services and Legal Action	504	Pension Age: Women Born in the 1950s	518
Leaving the EU: Interim Trade Tariffs	507	Period Poverty	516
Topical Questions	508	Public Spending: Disabled People	518
Trade and Investment: Switzerland	501	Shared Parental Leave Uptake	512
		Topical Questions	519

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 14 March 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY	27WS	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	33WS
Energy Council, March 2019	27WS	Agriculture and Fisheries Council, March 2019	33WS
DEFENCE	28WS	EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	33WS
Defence Prosperity Programme	28WS	General Affairs Council, March 2019	33WS
EDUCATION	31WS	FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	34WS
Supporting Care Leavers in Higher Education	31WS	Foreign Affairs Council, 18 March 2019	34WS
		HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	35WS
		Independent Breast Screening Review Recommendations	35WS

PETITION

Thursday 14 March 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	9P
Business Rates Reform	9P

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**not later than
Thursday 21 March 2019**

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CONTENTS

Thursday 14 March 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 501] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for International Trade
Minister for Women and Equalities

Business of the House [Col. 526]

Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

UK's Withdrawal from the European Union [Col. 553]

Motion—(Mr David Lidington)
Amendment (h)—(Dr Wollaston)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment to amendment (i)—(Lucy Powell)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment (i)—(Hilary Benn)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment (e)—(Jeremy Corbyn)—on a Division, negatived
Motion, on a Division, agreed to

Clyde House and A2Dominion [Col. 655]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Future of the Oil and Gas Industry [Col. 201WH]
Health and Care Professions Council: Registration Fees [Col. 225WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 27WS]

Petition [Col. 9P]

Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
