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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Thursday 18 July 2019

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

A417 Brockworth to Cowley

1. **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of progress on improving the A417 missing link between Brockworth and Cowley; and if he will make a statement. [912024]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I have taken a personal interest in this project, which I regard as an important part of our infrastructure that needs to be addressed, and my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that it is moving forward. Highways England announced its preferred route for the scheme in March, and it is now preparing for the next stage of the planning process, statutory consultation, followed by a development consent order process.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Sadly, there have been 10 fatalities and 123 casualties on that road in the last four years for which figures are available, so the improvement is desperately needed. Has my right hon. Friend had the chance to evaluate the Labour party's proposals to scrap the roads programme, which would mean hundreds of road schemes such as this never being built and motorists being hugely inconvenienced?

Mr Speaker: But that is not a matter for the Secretary of State—

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr Speaker: No, no—[*Interruption.*] Order. Resume your seat. We are talking about Government policy. If the Secretary of State wants to say something about Government policy, he can, but he cannot ruminate or pontificate on Opposition policy. That is not a matter for the Secretary of State.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chris Grayling: Labour Members say “Hear, hear!” because they do not want to hear the truth, which is that we are putting in place schemes that will benefit road safety, that will improve journey times and that will be good for our economy. The A417 improvement is a much needed scheme that does all those things, and it will be an essential part of this Government's future planning. It is simply a tragedy that Labour wants to scrap it.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Sorry, Mr Speaker, I was eager to speak to Question 2.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was ahead of himself, not for the first time and probably not for the last.

Electric Vehicles: Infrastructure

2. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. [912025]

18. **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. [912042]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): We are consulting on all new build homes in England being fitted with charge points, and we want all new public rapid charge points also to offer pay-as-you-go card payments from the spring of 2020. Our grant schemes and the £400 million charging infrastructure investment fund will see the installation of thousands more public charge points, adding to the 20,000 already installed.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the Minister of State for that reply. At sea, Lowestoft is at the forefront of the transition to a low-carbon economy—the world's largest offshore wind farm is being built just off our coast—but the town also wants to be in the driving seat on land. Will the Minister outline the initiatives that have been put in place to ensure that electric vehicle charging infrastructure can be rolled out quickly and early in Lowestoft, and that the work will not just be focused in large cities?

Michael Ellis: With my hon. Friend as the Member for Lowestoft, I believe that it is doing very well indeed on land, at sea and in the air. We have to remember that the majority of electric vehicle drivers charge their cars at home overnight or at the workplace. We want people across the country, and especially in Lowestoft, to switch to electric vehicles, and we want to leverage private sector investment to provide a self-sustaining public network that is affordable, reliable and accessible. As my hon. Friend knows, the market is best placed to identify the right locations.

Andrew Lewer: That was slightly more pointed than I expected. At the moment, there is very little provision of electric car charging points in my constituency of Northampton South; I have only been able to find one in the whole constituency. What schemes does the Minister have planned for urban constituencies such as mine, and his?

Michael Ellis: I am very familiar with my hon. Friend's constituency, which neighbours my own. I am pleased to say that in February this year Northampton Borough Council was awarded £45,000 under the Government's ultra low emission taxi infrastructure competition to deliver two rapid charge points dedicated to electric taxis and private hire vehicles. He is right to focus on this issue, but we have a number of schemes that can be

accessed by electric vehicle drivers across the country, including in Northampton South and Northampton North. The electric vehicles home charge scheme is just one of them; the on-street residential scheme is another. Local authorities are receiving significant funding to install recharging points, including with these new technologies.

23. [912047] **Faisal Rashid** (Warrington South) (Lab): E-bikes will offer enormous benefits for transport, health, wellbeing, the environment and green business growth, especially if Government funding is made available to support them. What steps is the Minister taking to incentivise the use of e-bikes?

Michael Ellis: I have recently been on an e-bike, and it was very good on hills. E-bikes are of great assistance to people with health and mobility issues. We want to encourage their use, and we are doing just that. We are also investing vast sums in cycle lanes and road infrastructure improvements, and we are focusing on safety. There is more to be done, as always, but we have done an awful lot more than Labour did in this area.

Mr Speaker: It is very interesting to learn of the personal experience of the Minister, but all that I can say at this stage is that he is challenging our vivid imaginations. I was going to call Mr Stringer. Are you still interested, sir? Get in there.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was surprised to find that the charging sockets are not standardised, either on cars or on charging points. Would it not make sense to regulate to standardise them?

Michael Ellis: Of course, the market has been leading in this area, and we now have 20,000 publicly accessible charging points, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We know from the charging of other devices that we use every day that they do not all share the same fixtures, but the fact of the matter is that we have an advanced system in this country. We are growing it, and we will be providing more funding in this area and looking to do more.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Contrary to popular myth, most particulates do not come from modern diesel engines, but from wear between the vehicle's tyres and the road. Given that electric vehicles tend to be heavier than their conventional counterparts owing to the weight of the batteries, which increases tyre wear and road wear, does the Minister have any concerns that the increased use of electric vehicles may lead to increasing levels of particulates?

Mr Speaker: Interesting—the hon. Gentleman is giving the impression of knowing something.

Michael Ellis: And what a good impression it is, Mr Speaker. The reality is that we all know that electric vehicles are tremendously advantageous to the economy and, frankly, to the environment, and there is work to be done. My hon. Friend is quite right to mention particulates, and we are looking at that issue, but electric vehicles provide massive benefits to the environment.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is a sad day, because rumour has it that this is the Secretary of State's last outing at the Dispatch Box. He is the gift that keeps on giving, but that is not funny because he has cost the country billions. Earlier this month, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders announced that sales of low-emission cars in the UK have fallen for the first time in two years. The SMMT's chief executive, Mike Hawes, described the decline as a "grave concern" and blamed the Secretary of State's confusing policies and premature removal of purchase incentives. Will the right hon. Gentleman finally apologise for his political blunders that have cost the taxpayer £2.7 billion?

Michael Ellis: As usual, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. The fact is that the Secretary of State has been leading the way in this area, and the Department for Transport is also a world leader. Some 200,000 ultra low-emission battery, electric, and plug-in hybrid vehicles are registered in the UK, and we are the second-largest market for ultra low emission vehicles in the European Union, so the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How will it work for houses that do not have a driveway or reserved on-street parking, and what does the Minister mean by the term "en suite"?

Michael Ellis: Did I say "en suite"? We are investing in technologies and supporting innovations in on-street architecture—[*Laughter.*] We might invest in "en suite" architecture as well, but that would not be for my Department. Fixtures have been fitted to streetlamps, for example, and there have been innovations in contactless charging. Businesses around the country are working on various mechanisms, and this Department is supporting many of them with funding to help them to invent new technologies.

London Low Emission Zone: HGVs

3. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Transport for London on the effect of the roll-out of the London low emission zone on showpeople who drive heavy goods vehicles. [912026]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): Transport in London is devolved to the Mayor of London and is delivered by Transport for London. Ministers and officials meet TfL regularly to discuss a range of topics. I have not discussed the effect of the roll-out of the London low emission zone on showpeople who drive heavy goods vehicles.

David Linden: I am sure that the Minister is aware that under section 62 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, showpeople have a number of exemptions and concessions. There is a possibility that showpeople could get an exemption from low emission zones in recognition of their lifestyle and businesses. Will the Minister encourage Transport for London to look favourably at that and make sure that we are supporting these people?

Michael Ellis: Yes I will. The hon. Gentleman alludes to the fact that Transport for London has agreed a 100% exemption for some showpeople using adapted vehicles from both the ultra low emission and low emission zones. The detail of that is up to the Mayor of London, not the Government, but I understand that the Mayor's office is agreeing a meeting with the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter, and I wish him well in that.

Blue Badge Scheme: Hidden Disabilities

4. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the blue badge scheme for people with hidden disabilities.
[912027]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): From 30 August 2019, the blue badge scheme will include non-visible as well as visible disabilities. This change will be assessed 12 months after implementation, using feedback from the public, stakeholders and local authorities who administer the scheme. We will be tracking how many badges are awarded under the new criteria.

Mike Wood: I welcome the £1.7 million that has been allocated to councils to implement the new regulations, but will the Minister encourage local councils to spend that money on autism training for assessors, so that they can have a better understanding of how autism can affect people's ability to travel?

Michael Ellis: Yes I will. My hon. Friend is right: the £1.7 million of funding is to support local authorities in the administration of the scheme. Local authorities can use their share of the funding to train assessors on specific conditions such as autism. We will let local authorities make the actual decisions on how the money can be used most effectively to support the implementation of the new regulations, but I hope that local authorities will look sympathetically at the difficulties faced by people with autism.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House is keen to improve accessibility for people with all disabilities, which is why I am sure that the Minister will join me in condemning TransPennine Express and its decision to close the gate at Hull Paragon station, which is making it much more difficult for people with disabilities to access the station.

Michael Ellis: I am sorry to hear about that. I will raise the matter with the Rail Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones)—and perhaps he will write to the hon. Lady about it.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): While the £1.7 million is welcome, may I ask for advice and guidance for local authorities who might come under increasing pressure from the huge number of new blue badge applications? What advice can the Minister give to local authorities such as Cornwall?

Michael Ellis: This is a matter for local authorities and they can exercise their discretion, depending on the circumstances in their particular area. I appreciate that

there is a demand for the blue badge scheme; that means that the scheme works very effectively. It assists people who have mobility issues, and that is what it is designed to do. It is right that people with non-visible disabilities are also covered by the scheme. That has been the case heretofore, but this highlights the issue and we encourage local authorities to work with the system.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am a Scottish MP, but the blue badge scheme is UK-wide. As the Chamber knows, my wife is disabled and nothing is a bigger pain than to run my wife to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness and find that all the parking spaces have been taken or, worse still, that people who do not have the badge have taken spaces. Will the Government ensure that people who abuse the system are sorted out and brought to account as quickly as possible?

Michael Ellis: Yes. First, the fraudulent use of blue badges is a criminal matter and that can be dealt with accordingly, as one would expect. As for those who park in disabled parking spaces when they are not permitted to do so, such infractions ought to be dealt with by the supervisory authority, and that can be by way of fines.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister further outline what training must be undertaken by those responsible for parking enforcement to ensure that people entitled to a blue badge for hidden illnesses are not interrogated by traffic wardens when their blue badge is clearly on display?

Michael Ellis: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We expect those who are charged with enforcing our parking regulations to be sympathetic to these issues and alive to the fact that there will be people with non-visible disabilities who are perfectly entitled to use a blue badge.

Community Transport Operators

5. **Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support community transport operators.
[912028]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Community transport is incredibly important for both urban and rural communities, and in March the Department took steps to protect community transport operators so that they can carry on doing their valuable work. We have clarified, in guidance, the scope of two exemptions from the EU regulation on operator licensing, and we have enacted new legislation. We will revise the guidance on the non-commercial exemption once the High Court has reached a decision and will carry out a review of the domestic permit regime later in 2019.

Karin Smyth: I thank the Minister for her answer. She is right: the service is very valuable. In parts of Bristol South, 40% of people do not own a car or van, so public transport is crucial to getting about in daily life. Will she join me in congratulating Bristol Community Transport on running the M1 metrobus service this year? Does she

agree that local authorities need more funding to support bus services, particularly in communities where there are low incomes and older people?

Ms Ghani: I am more than happy to celebrate the work of Bristol Community Transport; Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership, which is in or close to the hon. Lady's constituency, also does incredibly good work. We have done everything we can in the Department to be as flexible as possible, so that those with community transport contracts in constituencies can carry on doing their work. We provide substantial financial support for all public transport, but of course I will always aim to secure even more funding, including in the next spending review.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): Community transport in Essex would benefit from investment in Essex's roads, and particularly from the dualling of the A120 and the widening of A12. Will the Minister work with the Department to ensure that both those schemes feature in the road investment strategy 2?

Ms Ghani: That is a fantastic question. My right hon. Friend has captured my imagination, and that of the Roads Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis). I believe that the schemes are in the pipeline, and if I cannot meet my right hon. Friend, no doubt the Roads Minister will, to make sure that the schemes are carried forward.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Over 90% of community transport operators in Scotland use section 19 or section 22 permits, but changes to legislation will lead to onerous conditions regarding driver qualifications and bus adaptations, and that threatens the existence of these important service providers. Coalfield Community Transport in my constituency believes that the measures will give them up-front costs of £50,000. Does the Minister accept how real these risks are, and will she meet me to discuss the issue and changes that could be made?

Ms Ghani: I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, because I am concerned about the cases that he has raised. I am also concerned that information is not filtering through, and that is creating panic among community transport operators that need not be felt. We have spent a lot of time working with community transport operators and local authorities; I have a list in front of me of everyone to whom we have spoken. Operators can also go on the community transport website, which has further clarification of what needs to be done. If they hold a licence at present, they are eligible to carry on doing their work.

Mr Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) want to make a second inquiry? No? I do not want to tempt him beyond his natural appetite. I had him down for two questions, but we are grateful for his self-denying ordinance. In that case, we probably just about have time to include Mr Farron.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In places such as Sedburgh and Dent, community bus services have become a lifeline for people who would otherwise be isolated from the communities around

them, and I am massively grateful to the volunteers who make those services possible. Community bus services have become essential because over the past 30 years Governments of all colours have chosen to stop seeing the provision of bus services as a service at all and have allowed rural communities such as mine to become increasingly cut off and stranded. Will the Minister agree to launch a new transport deal for rural communities, with new investment for bus services that are regular, reliable and affordable?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman has mixed up two distinct types of services: community transport, and regular bus services. Over £1 billion is spent on concessionary travel, and over £250 million directly on bus service operators grant. If he wants to sit down with me and get further ideas on how his local authority can secure a partnership, I am more than happy to do that.

Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy

6. Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the resources required to implement his Department's cycling and walking investment strategy. [912029]

16. John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): What recent estimate he has made of the resources required to implement his Department's cycling and walking investment strategy. [912040]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): Spending on cycling and walking in England has doubled from £3.50 per head to around £7 per head over the current spending review period. The Government estimate that around £2 billion will have been spent on measures to implement the strategy between 2016 to 2021 alone.

Matt Western: While I welcome that increased investment, the Department has acknowledged that "current policy and resource levels will not enable the current aim of doubling the number of trips made wholly or partially by cycling to be met", including in my own constituency of Warwick and Leamington. Will the Minister meet me and my parliamentary neighbour, the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright), to discuss a particular project, namely the Kenilworth to Leamington cycle route, which is in desperate need of investment?

Michael Ellis: I am always very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman. I would point out, however, that as well as the doubling of investment in cycling and walking and the £2 billion, we channel money from the Department for Transport and the Government to local authorities such as his so that there is even more money for them to allocate to cycling and walking.

John Woodcock: But will the Minister publish the evidence his Department has commissioned? Surely that will show that the current levels of investment will not be sufficient to meet the target. When he recognises that, will he direct his attention to the disused railway that Highways England wants to turn into a cycle lane between Ulverston canal and Greenodd roundabout?

Michael Ellis: I think the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Morecambe Bay cycle way. The Government recognise the benefits of such schemes, which may be able to provide opportunities to increase active travel and significant benefit to the local economy, as well as to health and the environment. We have recently provided more than £20 million of support to Sustrans, to improve stretches of the national cycle network. I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman if he wishes, but the reality is that we are putting considerable investment into cycling across the country.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I have seen the benefits of active travel and have been using the A44 cycle path from Woodstock to Oxford, but I want to see the same in other areas of my constituency, not least Eynsham, to alleviate, among other things, the congestion on the A40. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how that strategy might help the B4044 community path?

Michael Ellis: I know that my hon. Friend is an avid cyclist and he sets an example of active travel that is beneficial both to the environment and to health. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss the route he has in mind.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Studies now show that, even among older people, the resumption of an active lifestyle, including cycling and walking, helps counter the onset of dementia. Will the Minister do more to highlight that, to try to get older people even more active?

Michael Ellis: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. There is no doubt that life expectancy increases among older people who are active. In fact, that is the case across all ages. We support that, which is why considerable investment is going into cycling and walking. I very much accept that the more active any person of any age is, the more likely it is that they will be in good health.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), the shadow Transport Secretary, has made clear the scale of the challenge we face with climate change and the urgent need to cut emissions from transport. Increasing cycling and walking is particularly important if we are to avoid a climate crisis. If cycling levels in the UK were the same as those in the Netherlands, carbon dioxide emissions from cars would fall by one third. Given the scale of the threat from climate change, why are the Government not doing more to avert this crisis?

Michael Ellis: The Government are leading the way in promoting the use of cycling and walking. We have doubled investment and it absolutely dwarfs that of the Labour party when it was last in government. The fact is that we have put £2 billion into cycling and walking, which is a monumental increase on Labour's investment. We recognise that it is good both for the environment and for health, including mental health and wellbeing. That is why the investment is going in. We also have to factor in safety—we are very focused on that. As we have reiterated time and again, this is a priority for the Department.

Matt Rodda: The Government have once again shown their lack of commitment to tackling the real problems facing this country. The Secretary of State has failed to meet his own targets for encouraging cycling, and the Department for Transport is spending just 1.5% of its budget on walking and cycling. The Minister's attempts to dress up what is clearly a failing policy are, quite frankly, deeply disappointing and show that the Government are simply not capable of providing the leadership needed to tackle climate change, which is the greatest threat to our country and, indeed, to humanity. When will the Secretary of State and his colleagues get a grip and show some leadership?

Michael Ellis: There is £50 million for Bikeability training for schoolchildren; £101 million for cycling infrastructure for cycle ambition cities; £80 million for the local authority access fund; £85 million from Highways England for cycling and walking; £597 million from the local growth fund; £77 million for local road schemes; £194 million from the integrated transport block for micro-enhancement projects—I shall keep going until Mr Speaker stops me—£196 million from the highways maintenance refund; and some £500 million from a range of cross-Government infrastructure funds, so there are hundreds of millions of pounds of investment, and that is what the Department is doing.

Mr Speaker: I must say, having listened to the Minister I do not think I can take any more such excitement. It is almost too much.

Transport for Vulnerable Children: Driver Training

7. **Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support the provision of training on transporting vulnerable children and adults for people who drive (a) taxis and (b) private hire vehicles. [912030]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We work across government to ensure that safeguarding practice is as safe as it can be in the taxi and private hire sector. The issue has been discussed at an inter-ministerial group chaired by the Home Secretary. The Government have committed to legislate for national minimum standards, which will include making it a legal requirement that licensees undertake safeguarding awareness training. However, I encourage all licensing authorities to act now and use their existing powers to protect passengers.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, and to build on it, may I ask what plans her Department currently has to produce a standardised national training programme for people who transport vulnerable children and adults?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend touches on an important piece of work that is being carried out across a number of Departments, including the Home Office and the Department for Education, and in local government. In the Department for Transport, we are looking to obtain the powers to create a national minimum standard, which will be quite high, and a national database, and to increase enforcement powers for traffic commissioners. Put together, all those things will ensure that the quality of service and safety for people when they enter a private hire vehicle is the same up and down the country.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): We have known for a while that the Secretary of State does not run the railways, and yesterday he told the Transport Committee that

“we don’t really do buses”,

but the chair of the Government’s own task and finish group on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing told us in March that he was “truly frightened” about the risk to the public under the current regulations. Thankfully, it seems that even the Secretary of State is not trying to dodge responsibility for legislating to protect passengers, but when will a Bill on taxi and private hire licensing be laid before Parliament?

Ms Ghani: The Chair of the Select Committee knows that I am just as passionate as she is about this issue within this part of my brief. I was hoping that we could start to legislate before the summer, and I now hope that I can crack on with it in the autumn. We have to remember that licensing sits with local licensing authorities. We are trying to put together a national database and to ensure that all the information is in one place, so that those who want to fish around to get a licence cannot do so. We are also increasing the traffic commissioners’ powers. All that work is in the pipeline, and I look forward to getting it done just as much as the hon. Lady does.

Strategic Road Network: Manchester to Sheffield

8. **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the strategic road network between Manchester and Sheffield.

[912031]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I absolutely accept that we need to improve the route between Manchester and Sheffield, and, indeed, we need to provide additional crossing points across the Pennines generally. That is why, in relation to the hon. Lady’s area, we have announced a £170 million package of improvements to the existing road link, including projects such as the Mottram moor link, to reduce congestion and improve safety and journey times. Construction on that will start next year. We are also going to smart-motorway the M62, and you will be aware, Mr Speaker, that we have started work on the dualling of the A66 further north. We are looking into ways to improve the links between east Lancashire and west Yorkshire and working with Transport for the North on the proposed trans-Pennine tunnel.

Ruth George: The Secretary of State’s confirmation of those projects is welcome, but fixing the strategic gap in economic productivity between Manchester and Sheffield will require a strategic road investment between the two cities, as Transport for the North has identified. Is the Secretary of State committing to prioritise that gap to unlock the potential £20 billion of economic productivity that could be unleashed?

Chris Grayling: I am clear that we need to deliver a much upgraded strategic road between Manchester and Sheffield—there is no doubt about that at all—as we do further north between east Lancashire and west Yorkshire, and further north still between Cumbria and Teesside, so I absolutely accept the hon. Lady’s point. She might,

though, like to have a gentle word with her Front-Bench colleagues, who, of course, have committed to scrap the road improvement schemes that we have in the pipeline.

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): As someone whose constituency borders the city of Sheffield, I say to the Minister that we need to get economic productivity moving in our areas, as was outlined by the hon. Member for High Peak (Ruth George). Does he agree that, for communities such as Barrow Hill and Staveley, the Staveley bypass, which is 90 years in the asking, would be a great idea for Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire?

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend is seeking funding from the housing infrastructure fund for that scheme. I have been to the area and seen what is needed. I think that it is a very good scheme, and I hope that his application is successful. The reality is that, if we are to drive economic growth in the northern part of the country, we need road improvements. Those who argue against road improvements are letting down the north.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I declare an interest as a metro mayor. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George) is absolutely right: the connectivity, both road and rail, between south Yorkshire and Greater Manchester is not fit for the 21st century. The 30 miles between Sheffield and Manchester is just about the longest 30 miles anywhere in England. It is good to hear from the Secretary of State that investment and work are taking place to address that, but does he agree that there is still more that we can do to improve that connectivity across the Pennines?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman: that route needs to improve; the M62 needs to improve; and the proposals for the trans-Pennine tunnel need to be taken forward. On rail, the Hope Valley line needs to be upgraded and then, of course, Northern Powerhouse Rail and the network that that will create, and the links that HS2 will bring, will be essential to unlocking the potential of Sheffield and the area around it.

Road Transport: Decarbonisation

9. **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to decarbonise road transport. [912033]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): It is the Government’s mission for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040. “The Road to Zero” strategy sets out the action that the Government are taking to support this mission, as well as the steps that we are taking to drive down emissions from conventional vehicles during the transition.

Louise Haigh: But the Committee on Climate Change made it crystal clear this month that the target for 2040 is simply in no way compatible with our international obligations under the Paris accord and advised that we bring it down to 2030, which would bring us in line with countries such as Norway and the Netherlands. Will the Minister explain to the House how that 2040 target is in any way compatible with the climate emergency that is facing this country now?

Michael Ellis: The move to zero-emission vehicles is the biggest technology upheaval to hit UK roads since the invention of the combustion engine. “The Road to Zero” strategy, which we published in July last year, sets out comprehensive plans to support this change and, frankly, the work that the Government are doing today will mean that they are handing the next generation a better, cleaner and greener Britain. That is crucial not only to improve the lives and health of people across Britain—it will do that—but to be able to meet the UK’s statutory climate change targets, and, frankly, the Government expect the transition to zero-emission transport to be industry and consumer-led. Therefore, we are leading the way in this area and we have considerable ambitions. We are beating most countries around the world in terms of cleaner air, a better environment, zero-emission vehicles and a strong, clean economy.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Accidents on major roads cause terrible traffic jams, which increases pollution. As the Minister knows, I have written to him quite recently about the promised improvements to the A34 to improve safety. I would be very grateful if he updated us today, or wrote to me as soon as possible, about when these improvements will be made.

Michael Ellis: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this matter of the A34 with me, but I have already written to him and it is in the post.

Mr Speaker: Gosh, I suspect the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) is in a state of uncontrollable excitement in anticipation of the Minister’s letter.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Low emission zones are vital to decarbonising our cities. My constituency of Edinburgh West has two of the worst polluted roads in Scotland. At the moment, the city is consulting on a low emission zone, but it can work effectively only if all road transport, not just commercial, is decarbonised and moved out of the city altogether—not just moved from one area to another. Will the Minister commit to what we have already heard, which is that we need to decarbonise to clean up our cities—and we need to do it quicker than 2040?

Michael Ellis: The facts are clear: the United Kingdom is a global leader in zero-emission vehicles. In 2018, for example, the UK was the second largest market in new ULEVs in the EU. We were behind only Germany. One in five electric cars sold in Europe was made in the UK. We are leading the way on design and technology. We are in the top tier in this area, and we are doing everything that we can with a highly ambitious project towards 2040, which is only 20 years away.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): One of the best ways to decarbonise roads is to improve rail services, so will the Minister join me in congratulating Cooksbridge Area Rail Action Group, which has managed to secure an hourly rail service mid-week and, for the first time in years, on a Saturday, which will move more passengers in Lewes off the roads and on to the railways?

Michael Ellis: I very much congratulate my hon. Friend and her group for their work in this area. It will only serve to assist her constituents, residents of the local area and any visitors.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The best way of decarbonising road transport is to ensure that more people use public transport. It was therefore alarming to hear the Secretary of State tell the Select Committee on Transport yesterday that he thought that automated vehicles were the answer and that any modal shift should be incremental. Incremental? There is a climate emergency now and an incremental response will not cut it. Does not this show that the Secretary of State is not taking the climate crisis seriously?

Michael Ellis: That is quite wrong. The fact is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been in charge of a record investment in rail. That form of public transport has seen huge sums of investment. In fact, we have invested across the board. The hon. Gentleman talks about the climate. This Government are doing more on that issue than countries around the world, and certainly far more than Labour ever did when it was in power. We are taking a multifaceted approach, and automated vehicles, public transport, electric vehicles and rail are also important in this regard. Rail investment from this Government beats them all.

Andy McDonald: I was delighted to hear that Andy Burnham has secured the recommendation of Transport for Greater Manchester to franchise bus services. Contrary to the nonsense spouted from the Government Benches, this has been done at the earliest possible moment following the passing of the necessary secondary legislation, and Liverpool will be next. Modal shift from car to bus will make an enormous contribution to reducing carbon emissions. Why, then, does the Secretary of State—perhaps as a parting gift—not do what a Labour Government will do and give every local authority the power to re-regulate their buses?

Michael Ellis: Every local authority already has the power. Andy Burnham and Labour in his area had that power for three years, and they did nowt about it. It was this Secretary of State who pushed through the Bus Services Act 2017.

Rail Services: Cheshire

10. **Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con):** What recent progress he has made on improving rail services in (a) Tatton constituency and (b) Cheshire. [912034]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Since May, Cheshire’s passengers have received a new direct hourly service between Chester and Leeds, linking the two cities for the first time in many years. Services also started on the Halton curve after a gap of 40 years. Customers in my right hon. Friend’s area will benefit from Northern’s £500 million investment in new trains, which started being rolled out on 1 July.

Turning to stations, I had the pleasure of visiting Handforth station recently with my right hon. Friend. I am happy to say that it is one of the 73 stations in the Access for All programme that will receive an accessible route to and between platforms. The new £20 million Warrington West station is also due to open this autumn.

Ms McVey: I thank the Minister for the Access for All programme at Handforth station, which is much appreciated by the local community and community groups. However, Northern won the franchise for the

mid-Cheshire line in 2015, and the bid included a commitment to increase connectivity—from one to two trains an hour—between my constituency and Manchester. That was meant to happen in 2017. We are now in mid-2019 and it has not happened. I have heard the excuses from Northern and from Network Rail. What can the Minister do to ensure that there are no more excuses and that this line frequency occurs?

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend is a great champion for the commuters in her area. There is a commitment within the franchise to deliver additional services on the mid-Cheshire line, but this has proved to be very challenging operationally because of capacity issues in the area, particularly around Manchester and through Stockport. I have been clear that although I want to see the additional capacity delivered as soon as possible, this cannot be done at the expense of performance. Delivering a railway that passengers can rely on is the absolute priority. All options are being looked at to deliver these additional services. I will keep the House fully apprised of progress and this matter will be a priority for me.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his support for the upgrading of the Ebbw Vale line. That part of the Wales and Borders franchise has complicated responsibility and funding issues. Will he meet me and Ken Skates, the Welsh Government's Economy and Transport Minister, to tease out the complexities and seek investment for that important line?

Andrew Jones: I had a meeting with the hon. Gentleman only a few days ago, although I am, of course, very happy to have further meetings with him. I understand why he is making the case for that line. It is important for his constituency, which requires improved transport connections to address the economic difficulties faced there. I am very happy to continue to support the process.

Fuel Catalysts

11. **Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** What recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of the use of fuel catalysts on vehicle emissions. [912035]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): As one of the ways in which we can reduce emissions of both carbon and other substances emitted from motor vehicles, the potential benefits of fuel additives and catalysts are certainly an area of great interest. Clearly, we need to be certain that there is scientific evidence about whether an individual additive makes a difference or not, but I have tasked my officials with looking clearly at the issue again to see what additions to our fuel can make a difference in the immediate future.

Robert Halfon: May I briefly thank the Secretary of State for giving us junction 7A on the M11, for which we campaigned in Harlow for more than 30 years?

The all-party parliamentary group on fair fuel for UK motorists and UK hauliers is shortly to publish a report showing that fuel catalysts, produced here in the UK, are an immediate and highly effective way to reduce emissions in urban areas. The APPG estimates that the Exchequer would save about 10% in costs, with an overall reduction in Government vehicle NOx and particulate matter emissions of more than 50%. Will the Minister meet me and Howard Cox, of FairFuelUK, to discuss how we can work on that?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to have that meeting, and I look forward to the report with interest. Clearly, we should take any steps that we sensibly can to reduce emissions of both harmful particulates and carbon.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State realise the urgency of this issue? These technical innovations are good, but 1 million people are likely to die from poor, filthy air by 2040. When will he wake up? Why will he not admit that the V word—Volkswagen—should have changed the whole world in terms of emissions? He should have taken on the car producers and he has not.

Chris Grayling: One of the things that has happened in the past two years, of course, is the sharp fall in the sales of diesel vehicles. We are now looking at ways to continue the transition to low-carbon vehicles, moving away from diesel, which, for many years, and particularly under the last Government, was the No. 1 strategy for dealing with carbon. Of course we need to continue to clean up air, but under this Government we are introducing clean air zones around the country.

Northern Rail: Pacer Trains

12. **Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab):** What steps he has taken to ensure that Northern Rail removes from service all Pacer trains by the end of 2019. [912036]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): We have seen positive progress, with the introduction of the first brand new trains on routes across the north for a generation. There are currently nine in passenger service; the hon. Lady may be interested to know that they will be serving Rochdale from autumn this year. Alongside the roll-out of new trains and the introduction of the refurbished trains, Northern Rail is working to remove Pacers from the network. The first of them will be removed in August—only a few weeks away.

Liz McInnes: The National Railway Museum in York wanted to put a Pacer train in its history section this year. It was unable to, because Northern Rail is still using them. Is it not time that Northern Rail stopped treating its passengers like second-class citizens and consigned Pacer trains to their rightful place in the museum?

Andrew Jones: That, of course, is exactly what is happening across the network of the north: the new trains have to come in before the old ones can come out. The hon. Lady will be aware of the engineering issue with the manufacture of the new trains, announced in April. That was all resolved, which is why the new trains are in service now. The fleet changeover has been delayed by a few weeks, but the majority of the fleet of old 142 Pacer class trains will be removed by the end of this year. A small number of the newer 144 class will be retained for a few weeks to maintain a smooth and reliable service.

But let us fast-forward a few months: there will be new train fleets from TPE, new and refurbished trains from Northern Rail and the roll-out of Azumas on the east coast main line. No Transport Minister in a generation has been able to say what I can say now: we will have new trains across the north. That has been delivered by

the Conservatives, catching up on the no-growth franchise that Labour gave the north and that served from 2004 until 2016.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Thankfully, Cleethorpes does not rely on too many Pacer units, but the Saturday-only service from Sheffield to Cleethorpes is provided by Pacers, and as they approach Cleethorpes station, they cross over the now-famous Suggitts Lane level crossing. The Minister is well aware of the problems that the high-handed actions of Network Rail have caused disabled people and local businesses. It now proposes to spend hundreds of thousands to resolve that. Would that money not be better spent elsewhere on the network where there is more danger and on reopening Suggitts Lane?

Andrew Jones: My hon. Friend is ingenious in the way he brings Suggitts Lane into all Transport question sessions. He is a most diligent campaigner on this issue. Since it was last raised, I have met Network Rail and the regulator to discuss the issue, and I know that he has also recently met Network Rail. I look forward to seeing the output of those conversations, and we will take up the issue.

Rail Station Accessibility

13. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to improve accessibility at railway stations. [912037]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): You may have noticed, Mr Speaker, that most of our rail infrastructure is Victorian. That is why we have made £300 million available for the Access for All programme, which will cover 73 stations over the next five years. We are also seeking nominations for £20 million of funding for smaller-scale accessibility improvements for the mid-tier Access for All programme.

Huw Merriman: I thank my constituency neighbour for her response. Many MPs across the House met the Office of Rail and Road this week. We were delighted to hear that it fed into the Williams review that it thinks passenger assistance notice should be reduced from 24 hours to the same day. Does she agree that it should be possible for everybody, including those with mobility issues, to wake up in the morning and decide to use the train later that day?

Ms Ghani: I agree with my constituency neighbour. As a member of the Transport Committee, he will have heard a lot of evidence about how we can use new technology to make our rail network even more accessible. I have tasked the Rail Delivery Group with looking at the Passenger Assist app, so that it works in a way that he and I would accept, with live, up-to-date information about what is accessible on trains, including toilets, and the services needed in between.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): May I press the Minister on accessibility? One thing that could be done to improve station safety is the closure of dangerous level crossings, including the one at Pencoed in my constituency. This has been an issue for years. There is support from the Welsh Government and local authorities. Following the

feasibility study by Bridgend County Borough Council, we need the DFT to allocate some funding, to ensure that the crossing is closed and new disability access is included.

Ms Ghani: If funding was denied in the last round of Access for All allocation, another application can be made. If not, I suggest that an application is made with match funding for the next tier of Access for All funding.

Engine Idling

14. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce levels of engine idling. [912038]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Mr Speaker, you will be aware that vehicle idling is a major factor in poor air quality. That is why we plan to launch a consultation on increasing fines for idling drivers. We will seek a range of views on changes that would be the biggest since 2002 and how we can work with local authorities to tackle the issue.

Royston Smith: Southampton, like many other cities, has poor air quality, and engine idling makes that worse, particularly on the Northam rail bridge in my constituency. I have written to the Secretary of State to support a bid to replace that bridge. When will he make a decision? Will he look favourably on our bid, and are we likely to be successful?

Chris Grayling: I am expecting to receive proposals from Transport for the South East at the end of July on the schemes that we prioritise for the major road network and large local majors funding for that area. I am certainly aware of the proposal in my hon. Friend's constituency, which is a potential candidate. I cannot anticipate the result, but he makes a good point about the way in which schemes like that can make a real difference to air quality. Those who seek to cancel improvements on our roads will make matters worse, not better.

Topical Questions

T1. [912049] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Although we have one of the safest railways in the world, we must never be complacent, and I hope that the thoughts of the whole House are with the family, friends and colleagues of the two Network Rail staff who lost their lives in the tragic accident in south Wales two weeks ago. There is an ongoing investigation into what happened. I have asked both the Rail Accident Investigation Branch and Network Rail to ensure that lessons are properly learned from that tragedy.

Daniel Zeichner: I associate myself with the Secretary of State's comments.

The £1.5 billion A14 improvement scheme is, I am told, the biggest civil engineering project in Europe. Highways England is brilliant at moving bridges and flyovers but hopeless at enforcing the diversions that should protect local people when the road is closed at night. Incredibly, it cannot even put traffic counters on

the roads affected. Will the Secretary of State therefore join me at 3 o'clock in the morning on King's Hedges Road to count the HGVs? Failing that—if that offer is not attractive enough—will he talk with me about how we can end the misery for my constituents?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that I am not going to accept the hon. Gentleman's offer to spend part of the night with him, but I will have a word with Highways England on his behalf and ask it to ensure that the impact on the surrounding area is lessened. No major project can be delivered without some disruption, but we do not want the disruption to be excessive or inappropriate.

T2. [912050] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Towns such as Evesham and Droitwich Spa in my constituency continue to grow, which puts considerable pressure on local roads. What is the Department for Transport doing to support small towns with their traffic management and traffic lights systems to ease congestion?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): The Department has funded a significant number of local authorities to trial innovative technologies and share good practice. Some of the connected traffic management measures, including the use of sensors to provide real-time parking space availability, for example, are already being adopted more widely. We are encouraging local authorities to install more of these systems.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Gareth Delbridge; Michael Lewis: today we pay homage to two rail workers who tragically lost their lives at work near Port Talbot. It is all the more shocking in the light of the report into the fatality of a track worker at Stoats Nest junction, which described Victorian methods of protection, brought about by casual labour, a zero-hours culture and the worker probably being fatigued, having had to work because his colleague had failed to turn up to work. It was clearly unsafe. Will the Secretary of State bring an immediate end to zero-hours contracts, as advised by the regulator, the Office of Rail and Road, bring this work back in-house and end these exploitative and unsafe work practices?

Chris Grayling: I defend no unsafe work practices on the railways. I agree with the hon. Lady that the railways should always aspire to the highest safety standards. She should remember that we have the safest railways in Europe, but I am very clear, as I said in earlier remarks, that lessons need to be learnt when things go tragically wrong, as they have done on a small number of occasions in recent years, and I expect changes to be made as a result of the lessons that are learnt from those tragic incidents.

T3. [912051] **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): The residents of Herriard in my constituency have campaigned for many years against the disruptive, antisocial behaviour of some motorcyclists on the A339. I have written to my hon. Friend the Minister about Herriard being included in the acoustic noise camera trial, and I hope that he might use his good offices to direct the consultants who have been commissioned by the Department for Transport. Will

he also separately commit to rolling them out to Herriard as early as possible if they are not part of the trial?

Michael Ellis: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this point. That experimental equipment is very interesting. The number of locations for the noise camera trials will be limited, because at the moment it is only experimental. We need to factor in such things as speed limits, road type, road gradient, accessibility and safety considerations. I cannot absolutely commit to Herriard having that experimental equipment at the moment, but my officials and I are well aware of Herriard's willingness to contribute to the trials and we will definitely bear it in mind.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State has stated that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, EU regulation 2019/501 will allow UK drivers to continue to drive HGVs in the EU. That regulation has an end date of 31 December this year, so will he confirm that the 2020 vision under a no-deal Brexit for UK drivers, importers and exporters is one of chaos and uncertainty?

Chris Grayling: No, I will not confirm that. First, the Government's policy is not to pursue a no-deal Brexit. We will continue under both our current and future leadership to pursue a deal with the European Union—that has been abundantly clear. However, both sides have equally been abundantly clear that we want trade to continue, and the European Union and we have both been very ready to say that we will allow the flow of hauliers to continue so that trade carries on.

T4. [912052] **Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): East Midlands Trains, my local rail users group and I are bidding for funds for a cycle hub at Market Harborough railway station. The Minister, who has recently visited, knows that many more people are taking that healthy way to the station in the morning. Will he look favourably on our bid?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I thoroughly enjoyed my recent visit to Market Harborough to see the work taking place there: the significant upgrade to services, the straightening of the line and a new station. The new east midlands franchise will deliver over £17 million of investment in station facilities across the route, including extra cycle spaces, 100 of which will be delivered at Market Harborough. I am very happy to champion that and to encourage smooth and early delivery.

T5. [912053] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is it true that the Secretary of State called the Road Haulage Association and advised it not to criticise his botched Brexit preparations in public? Is this the Government's new policy for stakeholders: "Don't criticise us or you'll be left in the dark."?

Chris Grayling: No; the hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood.

T6. [912054] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Luton Borough Council is the 100% shareholder of Luton airport, which yields about £26 million a year for the council. What action are the Government taking

to address the conflict of interest, where the Labour-run Luton Borough Council frequently gives the airport permission to flout planning permissions that it has itself imposed?

Chris Grayling: I understand the sensitivity, particularly for local Members of Parliament and local communities who see that joint role. I reassure my hon. Friend that there are very clear statutory rules on how a local authority can and cannot act when it owns a piece of land that is subject to a planning application. I give him that reassurance that clear rules are in place.

T8. [912056] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): The Government are investing £56 billion in HS2, £18 billion in Crossrail and £9 billion on the west coast. When will the Minister have some consideration for the people of the north-east, who do not get anything?

Chris Grayling: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the current £700 million upgrade to the east coast main line, the brand new trains arriving on the east coast main line, the new trains the Government are providing for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne metro, our plans to reopen the Blythe to Ashington rail line with financial support from Nexus, the opening of the last leg of motorway-grade road between Newcastle and London, and of course the mayor of Teesside's exciting plans for his airport. One of the most extraordinary things I have come across recently is that the shadow Secretary of State proposes nationalisation in every field of transport except for his local airport, on which he is opposed to nationalisation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us hear Mr Pursglove. Blurt it out, man.

T9. [912058] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is very welcome news that the Leyland bridge is to be rebuilt, but will the Minister put pressure on Network Rail to give a concrete finish date and to get the works on site started as quickly as possible?

Andrew Jones: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) for their campaigning on this issue. This is an important issue locally. Network Rail has made progress in finalising the design for the bridge and will start work as soon as possible. I will contact Network Rail to find the most up-to-date information, put pressure on it for the earliest possible completion of this project and keep my hon. Friend informed.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Three weeks ago, I went on a parliamentary visit to the Netherlands and had a tour of the port of Rotterdam. That one port alone is recruiting over 100 new vets to carry out the necessary regulatory checks in the light of a no-deal Brexit. Does that not demonstrate the scale of the cost of a no-deal Brexit and the likely delays from the checks that will be necessary?

Chris Grayling: It is not the Government's policy to pursue a no-deal Brexit. It is the Government's policy, under current and future leadership, to pursue an agreement with the European Union. That is what we want. We would all prefer to leave with a deal with the European Union, but that has got to be the right deal.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I am, of course, delighted to welcome the new trains on the east coast main line, but when will they get to Stirling?

Andrew Jones: The new Azuma trains entered service on the Hull and Leeds routes in May this year. We will launch Edinburgh services on 1 August and they will be reaching destinations north of Edinburgh by the end of this year.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State share my concern that in response to a survey by the Guide Dogs charity, 42% of assistance dog owners reported being refused access to taxis and minicabs because of their dogs. What is he going to do in practice to ensure that all drivers of taxis and minicabs receive disability equality training?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration, but that is actually already illegal. I am working with a number of charities, including Guide Dogs, to ensure they can complain effectively and that the local authorities handing out licences are far more diligent about who those licences go to. As I mentioned earlier, once we are able to put together a national database, it will be a lot easier to stop people who have already broken the law from getting licences.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It appears that the introduction of the hybrid Bill for HS2 phase 2b has been delayed yet again, causing further uncertainty and stress to my residents and businesses. Will the Minister give a cast-iron guarantee that my constituents will receive a bespoke financial package, given that Long Eaton is grossly affected because the line goes straight through it and put that into the Bill?

Ms Ghani: I recognise my hon. Friend's passionate and persistent campaigning on behalf of her constituents and the businesses in Erewash. I also recognise the disruption that HS2 causes for people's lives and for properties. Support is provided through the statutory and non-statutory property compensation schemes, which aim to strike a good balance between ensuring fair compensation and protecting the public purse. A consultation on design refinement is running up until 6 September, and I urge my hon. Friend to make sure she puts forward her evidence.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): The decision by Network Rail to shut the east coast main line on the bank holiday weekend is as baffling as it is nonsensical. Tens of thousands of people will be travelling to the north for our great sporting and cultural events, while rugby league fans will be heading to Wembley for the Challenge cup final. The economic impact on the north is likely to be significant. When was the Department first told about this decision, and will the Minister step in now to reverse it and prevent this misery for passengers?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the hon. Lady's concern—it is a very busy weekend. These things are always difficult to judge and to get right. I share some of her anxieties, and I have asked the Rail Minister to look, with Network Rail, at whether further ameliorations can be made that weekend to ease the pressure. Going

forward, I will ask the train companies and Network Rail to try to be careful to avoid some of the busiest peak weekends. We have to use periods such as Christmas and Easter, but I do understand the hon. Lady's issue about the August bank holiday.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): For six years, I have tried to work proactively with HS2 on the route going through my constituency, and had great success, only for HS2 now to produce a Bill that sees a viaduct tear through Rothwell Country Park. HS2 has now had the audacity to send me a letter saying, "We don't think it affects your area"—that is to the MP for Elmet and Rothwell. What can the Minister do to make Labour-led Leeds City Council, which does not care about my constituents or about us having an inappropriate station location, make this route change? Quite frankly, I can no longer support the HS2 project as it stands.

Ms Ghani: I am disappointed that my hon. Friend can no longer support the project, because I know he understands the power of investing in infrastructure and how important this line is to ensure that communities and regions beyond London thrive going forward. I am disappointed that his local Labour-led council is not

working proactively with him. I would hope that it is able to petition, when the opportunity arises, and also to put its comments into the design refinement consultation, which is open until 6 September.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Yesterday, Highways England wrote to me to confirm that it is going ahead with the road through Rimrose valley, an area with some of the worst roadside emissions in the country. Why are the Government not proceeding with the option of rail? Putting more freight on rail addresses the urgent need to address the climate emergency. Why are they so complacent about this existential threat to the world?

Chris Grayling: It is precisely because we want to see more freight on rail that we are spending £48 billion on our railways over the next five years, looking to expand capacity. Of course, one of the things HS2 will do—I absolutely understand the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), and the HS2 Minister and I will look carefully at the issues in his constituency for him—is create extra space for freight on rail. None the less, better road links to our ports, and to the port of Liverpool in particular, are also an essential part of economic development for an area such as Merseyside.

Business of the House

10.39 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): The business for the week commencing on 22 July will include the following:

MONDAY 22 JULY—Tributes to the Serjeant at Arms, followed by remaining stages of the Non-Domestic Rating (Lists) Bill, followed by, if necessary, consideration of Lords amendments.

TUESDAY 23 JULY—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Cableway Installations (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion relating to the reappointment of an electoral commissioner, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the British Nationality Act 1981 (Remedial) Order 2019, followed by a general debate on body image and mental health.

WEDNESDAY 24 JULY—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by Legislative Grand Committee (England) and remaining stages of the Kew Garden (Leases) (No.3) Bill [*Lords*], followed by a general debate on the role and sufficiency of youth services.

THURSDAY 25 JULY—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

At the conclusion of business, the House will rise for the summer recess and return on Tuesday 3 September.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House. I do not know what he said to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), but he is not in his place. I think it is because he would not allow the hon. Gentleman and the rest of MP4 to get into his car. However, we are pleased to see that the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) is present. I believe that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire is, in fact, on a Select Committee trip.

There is one week to go, and the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) has worked his charm. He has usurped the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee and arranged a pre-recess Adjournment debate next week.

It seems that, just as the Leader of the House is hitting his stride, we will have a new Prime Minister. I have asked the Leader of the House this before, but will he tell us whether there will be a statement from the new Prime Minister that has not been included in the business for next week, or at least set out the timetable for what will happen next Wednesday, when the former Prime Minister will go to the palace? I assume that the new Prime Minister will go to the palace on the same day.

The Leader of the House said that we would return from the recess on 3 September. Is he able to say whether the House will sit throughout the conference recess?

The pound has fallen to its lowest level against the dollar in 27 months, and to its lowest level this year against the euro, because of the prospect of no deal. No

deal would have a damaging effect on research: EU research funding would cease overnight. In 2016, the nine Russell Group universities engaged in 50 large European collaborations; in 2018, the number fell to 20. The Leader of the House will have heard from Venki Ramakrishnan, the president of the Royal Society, how much more we get back when we collaborate with Europe in science projects.

Some Members seem to know more than the Chancellor. The Chancellor has said that there will be a £90 billion contraction in the economy if there is no deal, but someone who is not the Chancellor reckons that leaving without a deal would boost the economy by £80 billion. Who is right?

How is the Leader of the House getting on with setting up the Joint Select Committee that I asked about last week? We have received a Lords message about it, and I know that the Leader of the House was keen to respond to it

“this side of the recess”.—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 462.]

He also said that he was having discussions with his end of the usual channels. Will they be the same usual channels next week? We need a response urgently, because we need to do this for the good of our country.

Despite what you and the Leader of the House said last week, Mr Speaker, Prorogation is now becoming a major issue. The team of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) have confirmed that they are looking into the possibility of proroguing Parliament for up to two weeks in October. A member of the team has said:

“A number of ideas are under consideration, including this one.”

Friends of the right hon. Gentleman said that he hoped to have a “simple trade pact” with the United States ready to go on the day of Brexit, 31 October, but the Secretary of State for International Trade said that a deal could not be agreed before then. He said:

“We can’t negotiate anything with the US until after we’ve left the European Union. It would be in breach of European law”.

Who is right?

The Government were defeated in the other place yesterday on an amendment relating to intentions to prorogue Parliament. Now both Houses have spoken. I know that the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill is due to come back to this House shortly, so can the Leader of the House categorically state that Prorogation will not happen and that it is against the will of the House and democracy?

Mr Speaker, you kindly granted the urgent question yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq). As Nazanin said, she went to visit her parents and has ended up in an asylum. This cannot be about a woman against a tanker; it is like a butterfly being crushed against a wheel. We say to the Iranian Government, “Show your humanity to an innocent woman and release her to her family.” And as you said yesterday, Mr Speaker, we won’t let go. I know that the Leader of the House has taken a keen interest in this matter: what update does he have for the House following the urgent question yesterday?

Ahead of the summer recess, I ask the Leader of the House to raise some matters with his colleagues in the Cabinet. Will he make representations to the Secretary

[Valerie Vaz]

of State for Education to tell all parents of schoolchildren, when they are taking their children abroad, that female genital mutilation is illegal: it is not a cultural issue and it is not a religious issue; it is an assault. And I would like the Secretary of State for International Development to say to those who are carrying out this practice that they should retrain so that they help the young women, not hurt them.

As we celebrate Nelson Mandela International Day, marking someone who suffered a terrible injustice but worked for a better society, I am sure all hon. Members will join me in welcoming the Bank of England's decision to have Alan Turing on the £50 note; he was a genius, and during world war two he was instrumental in breaking the German Enigma code. He has been credited with shortening the war by as much as two years, saving countless lives in the process, and it is terrible that he could not witness how much we value his life.

We are celebrating the moon landing, and I am sure everyone was excited when they saw Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon. I know I was; I was watching it on television in the sitting room and then ran out and looked at the moon and thought about the fact that someone was standing on it. I think I wanted to be an astronaut, but in the end I ended up here, which is not the Sea of Tranquillity. We should use our creativity and talent not to destroy each other, but for the good of all and our precious Earth.

Mel Stride: May I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and express, as she did, disappointment that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is not in his place? I had lined up numerous dreadful gags at his expense, which we will now probably never hear. I also thank the hon. Lady for welcoming the pre-recess Adjournment debate; I was pleased that we were able to accommodate that. She referred at one point to "hitting his stride", but I thought we were going to outlaw all bullying and harassment in this place—I obviously have a wolf in sheep's clothing opposite me.

I feel sure that there will be an opportunity for the House to hear from the new Prime Minister next week, although clearly I cannot comment on the precise circumstances that may pertain to that; that will be a matter for him, whoever he is.

The hon. Lady also raised the issue of the recess dates beyond 3 September, and what I would say in response is that that, once again, will be a matter for the new Prime Minister to decide upon, and whoever is the Leader of the House at that time will come forward and make the announcement in the usual way.

The hon. Lady raised a number of matters around no deal, and she asked whether I thought the Chancellor's assessment that the impact of no deal will cost the economy £90 billion or that of another person—I think I know who that other person is—who suggested that it might actually add to the economy by some £80 billion was right; I suspect the answer lies somewhere between those two figures.

The hon. Lady also rightly raised yet again the issue of the Select Committee on no deal, and when that motion will be coming before the House. I am afraid that I have nothing to add today to what I have said

before on this subject, which is that I am engaged with our end of the usual channels and am keen to see that motion coming forward. At the earliest opportunity I will return to the House with further information on that.

The hon. Lady once again raised the issue of Prorogation, and of course there are a number of circumstances in which Prorogation may occur, but the essential principle here is that it should not occur simply as a device to exempt Parliament from the important decisions that there will be around no deal or a deal as we approach the end of October.

The hon. Lady, once again quite rightly, raised the issue of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and the news that she has now been moved to a psychiatric hospital. This is a lady who, as we know, went to Iran simply to visit friends and family. She has now been detained for around three years. That is totally unacceptable. As the hon. Lady pointed out, my office has been in close engagement with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The latest update I have, as of tomorrow, is that discussions have been held at a senior level between the Foreign Office and the Iranian regime, and that we are again urging that Nazanin be released and returned to her family here in the United Kingdom. I will welcome every occasion on which the hon. Lady raises this matter because, like her, I believe it to be extremely important. She also raised the issue of female genital mutilation and made the important point that it is nothing less than an assault. She is absolutely right about that.

The hon. Lady also expressed her pleasure at the fact that Alan Turing will appear on the £50 note, and I share that, not just because of the huge contribution that he made to perhaps shortening the war with his code-breaking activities, but because this is indicative of how far we have advanced as a civilised society.

Finally, the hon. Lady mentioned the moon landing and said that she had seen it on television. I find that extraordinary, given that it happened in 1969. She cannot possibly be old enough to have been cognisant of that event at the time, but we all, right across the House, celebrate that one giant step for the whole of mankind.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Over the past month, a group of Travellers ensconced themselves in my constituency, first at Anmer Lodge, then on to Hatch End playing fields, then on to Stanmore Marsh and then into Canons Park, finally ending up at Whitchurch playing fields. Harrow Council and the police have done everything they can to move them on swiftly, but the Travellers have left behind hundreds of thousands of pounds-worth of damage to be cleared up after them. May we have a debate in Government time on what more can be done to expedite dealing with the illegal occupation of public land by groups of Travellers?

Mel Stride: I know that this is a problem for many of us, particularly those in rural constituencies such as mine. I would say two things to my hon. Friend. First, we have Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government questions next Monday and he might wish to raise the matter then. Secondly, I think that this would be an excellent opportunity for a debate—perhaps an Adjournment debate—and if he would like to speak to me, I will see what I can do to facilitate that.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—in fact, I think he should be my right hon. Friend—is racing back in breathless anticipation of the Lords amendments. We all know how much he values the Lords and their amendments. I have been left here to respond, but I do not know whether I would qualify for a last-minute spot on the Leader of the House's caravan holiday. I am not as musically talented as my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire, but I was told at my auntie's recent birthday party—she turns 70 today, Mr Speaker—that I mix a good Bloody Mary. That might be helpful for Conservative Members next week when they wake up after six weeks of self-indulgence with an almighty hangover and realise the enormity of what they have done in selecting the new Prime Minister. That is why the Leader of the House really must make time for my hon. Friend's Prime Minister (Nomination) and Cabinet (Appointment) Bill, which would give this House the opportunity to endorse any candidate put forward for nomination as Prime Minister. That is what happens in most civilised democratic institutions these days—starting, of course, with the Scottish Parliament.

Failing that, perhaps the Leader of the House's caravan could be fitted with a rocket booster so that we can all observe the new Prime Minister's blunders from the safety of the moon. Perhaps we could also have some time to debate my early-day motion 2599, which I have launched with support from across the House. It commemorates the 50th anniversary of that shared human endeavour.

[That this House recognises that 20 July 2019 marks 50 years since humanity first landed on the moon; remembers that NASA's legendary Apollo 11 mission was launched by a Saturn V rocket from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida with the ambition of landing a crew on the moon and returning them safely to earth; thanks the crew of three American astronauts, Commander Neil Armstrong, Command Module Pilot Michael Collins and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin Buzz Aldrin; recalls that the Lunar module, nicknamed the Eagle, finally touched down on the moon on 20th July 1969; celebrates the legacy of Commander Armstrong who became the first human to ever set foot on the moon as he took one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind on to the lunar surface; further recognises that the moon landing represented the single greatest accomplishment in human history as it pushed the boundaries of what was believed to be possible and united humanity in a sense of collective endeavour and hopes that the spirit of Apollo 11 will inspire future generations to better understand the complexities of the universe.]

If we cannot go to the moon, perhaps we could go to Kew Gardens. At least, Scottish National party Members could go to Kew Gardens, because we are all going to be shut out of the debate on the Kew Gardens (Leases) (No. 3) Bill next week as the English Parliament—the English votes for English laws Legislative Grand Committee—meets for the first time in its full glory to consider that Bill in Committee. We look forward to seeing how many Members from England actually turn up to take part in that process, which was supposed to transform democracy in the United Kingdom.

Perhaps while we are in Kew Gardens, we can have a look under the bushes to see whether we can find out where the 1.5 allocated Opposition days that are still

due to the SNP have got to. There are many good reasons not to prorogue Parliament in the autumn, but if it were to be prorogued without our having had those opportunities that we as the third party are entitled to under the terms of the Standing Orders, that—and the use of the EVEL procedures—would serve only to demonstrate the fact that Scotland's voice is being tuned out and that the Leader of the House's caravan is ready to drive off into the Brexit sunset without us.

Mel Stride: I welcome the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) to his place, standing in for the legendary hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, who I hope will be here next week, so that I can use my various lines on him. The hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned the Prime Minister (Nomination) and Cabinet (Appointment) Bill, which would make the Prime Minister's appointment subject to a vote in this House. However, I think it is just a thinly veiled attempt by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire to get himself into No. 10 Downing Street, coming hard on the heels, as it does, of his tilt at the speakership and his Speaker's manifesto. We know that all that is just a blatant power grab.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned EVEL. All I have to say is that this approach is working well and gives everybody across the House the ability to participate in the various debates at the different stages of a Bill, while giving the final veto on devolved competencies to the relevant area, such as England and Wales. He also mentioned Opposition day debates, and the Standing Orders are clear that there will be 20 such days per session, with 17 for the main Opposition party and three for the second largest, which is the SNP. My understanding is that that allocation has been met.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I was elected chair at the inaugural meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for sustainable clothing and textiles. This House should have a debate on whether we are moving too far towards a plastic-free environment for the things that we pick up while retaining too much plastic in our textiles. We need to support our farmers who want to give us more natural fabrics, and we need to get out of wearing plastic.

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend makes some important points, and I urge her to make them again at Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions next Thursday. We should not overlook this Government's considerable achievements in getting plastics out of our economy. Single-use plastic bag usage has reduced by some 86% since we introduced the plastic bag levy. I take on board her comments about plastics in clothing, which would make an excellent subject for debate.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the leader of the pack—sorry, the Leader of the House—for next week's business. As you know, Mr Speaker, the Backbench Business Committee puts on debates in the Chamber when the Government give us the time, so we are a little taken aback that the Leader of the House has decided that next Thursday will not be a Backbench Business day, going instead for a general debate in Government time on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

[*Ian Mearns*]

I am also a little surprised that the Leader of the House has also stolen from the Backbench Business Committee the subjects of two debates to be held on Tuesday and Wednesday. That is fine, and I am sure that the Members who applied to the Committee will be happy to have the subject matters aired, but one of them was going to involve a votable motion and is now a general debate. The other thing is that the lead Members in those applications do not now get to lead those important debates. Mr Speaker, will you give special consideration to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) in the general debate on body image and mental health and to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) in the debate on the role and sufficiency of youth services and give them slots high up in the pecking order?

Mel Stride: I take on board the hon. Gentleman's comments about the absence of a Backbench Business debate next week. He has become rather used to having such debates almost every day over the past few weeks. I am particularly pleased that we are having the usual pre-recess debate, because it would have broken the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) had we not done so. If I have the opportunity to find time at a late stage for a Backbench Business debate—the hon. Gentleman has mentioned this to me before—I will attempt to accommodate that, although I make no promises. Finally, I am sure that Mr Speaker has noted the hon. Gentleman's request regarding my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle).

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Apparently—not that I remember it—my parents got me up so that I could watch the moon landing, just as the shadow Leader of the House did. On its 50th anniversary, we should use its inspiration. May we have a statement on the importance of STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—as we remember the inspirational Apollo mission? I pay particular tribute to Ifield Community College in my constituency, which is undertaking a solar car project.

Mel Stride: In case anybody was wondering, I was just eight years old at the time of the lunar landing, and I remember watching it; it was an extraordinary moment. My hon. Friend makes an important point. He rightly congratulates his college, and stresses the importance of STEM subjects. I point out that we are making major progress in this area; for example, A-level maths is now the single most popular choice among students.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Yesterday, a group of young people were involved in a serious knife attack in my constituency. One of the group was taken to hospital, and the others were taken into custody. All were aged under 18. A primary school sports day was taking place across the road from where the attack occurred. May we have an urgent statement from the Government on the effectiveness of the serious violence strategy and what Ministers are doing to ensure that we take these weapons off our streets?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady raises an important point. The thoughts of the entire House are with the family and friends of those involved in the incident. Knife crime, as she knows, is a complex issue, and there are a number of reasons why we have higher levels of it, although crime generally has been falling since 2010. Often, knife crime is related to drugs, as she will know, and to county lines. That is why we have a cross-Government approach to tackling the issue. Some £100 million was provided in the last spring statement to make sure that we have the appropriate co-ordination to tackle the problem. I am sure that the Home Office and other Departments will have heard her question.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): The National Crime Agency was first warned about the activities of the paedophile Matthew Bell in September 2016, but he was not arrested until March 2018, which allowed him to continue to abuse Filipino children, some as young as 11, until April 2017. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, described this as “incredibly disturbing”, and went on to say:

“I’ve been concerned for many years that there just aren’t enough resources going into this given the scale of the escalating problem we face.”

May we have a debate in Government time, or a statement from the Home Secretary, on the resources available to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection command and the NCA, so that we can ensure that we are properly resourced to combat a crime that sometimes, alas, includes children around the world being peddled by their own family, and so that we can make sure that we are doing everything that we can to control and stamp out this abhorrent behaviour?

Mel Stride: My right hon. Friend raises an appalling and deeply distressing set of issues that would be well served by a debate. Perhaps the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) might consider this a subject for a future Backbench Business debate. I would be very happy to go further and offer to facilitate a meeting for my right hon. Friend with any particular Minister.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): In the very city where William Wilberforce led the fight against slavery, P&O Ferries is employing Portuguese and Polish crews on £1.83 an hour. The deck crew are required to work five months on. British ratings earn about £35,000 a year and are required to do two weeks on, two weeks off. Could we have a debate on this really important issue? I think this is slavery.

Mel Stride: I thank my hon. Friend—I will call him that—for raising this issue with me personally prior to business questions. He is absolutely right. On the face of it, what he has shared with the House is a deeply unsatisfactory situation, which appears, to me at least, to be a form of exploitation instead of the wages and conditions we would expect. It is certainly a good topic for debate, but if he would like me to arrange a meeting with the relevant Minister to take a closer look at the issue, I would be very happy to be of assistance.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): On Saturday, Brechin young farmers club will celebrate its 75th anniversary. I declare that I was previously a young farmer. Such

clubs do fantastic work in raising awareness of the farming industry, with social events and sporting events, and my locality had an annual cabaret competition. It did not serve me particularly well, which is why I am not on the stage but on these Benches instead. Will the Leader of the House join me in commending the fantastic work of young farmers clubs up and down the country, because they should be recognised in this place?

Mel Stride: I thank my hon. Friend for asking a fantastic question. The young farmers in my constituency are a vibrant and important force. Farming sits right at the heart of our rural communities, in terms of employment, looking after the environment and so on, but farmers are generally getting older and the average age is increasing as the years go by. It is really important to get young blood into farming, and the young farmers clubs, including my hon. Friend's, do a great job.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Staff in libraries across Bromley are currently on indefinite strike because of draconian terms and conditions placed on them by the contractor, Greenwich Leisure Ltd, and Bromley Council has refused to take action. Our libraries are a fantastic community asset, but they are nothing without the dedicated staff who work there. Can we please have a debate in Government time about support and funding for our libraries?

Mel Stride: I will direct the hon. Lady to Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday. I think that would be useful. Libraries are hugely important, and we have provided considerable funding for them. There is no doubt that the terrain on which libraries operate is changing dramatically, with the use of digital information as opposed to books and print media, but we as a Government are very keen to support them.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Can we have an urgent statement from the Housing Minister about Persimmon Homes, following my question yesterday to the Prime Minister, which you kindly allowed, Mr Speaker? The homes, dreams and lives of Gilden Way residents in Harlow have been ruined because of shoddy building by Persimmon Homes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Persimmon should be removed from the right to buy scheme until these problems are sorted out, not just in Harlow but in other Persimmon properties across the country?

Mel Stride: We are making considerable progress in increasing the supply of new build housing, but that is not the same as saying that all housing is of the appropriate quality. It is characteristic of my right hon. Friend to look closely at that particular issue, to make sure that housing is fit for purpose. We have announced our intention for a new homes ombudsman, to protect the rights of homebuyers and to hold developers to account. I know that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will have heard my right hon. Friend's request for a statement, and I am happy to meet him to follow that up if he wishes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. In calling the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), I congratulate him on, and offer him best wishes for, his wedding on Saturday. I

know that the House will join me in that expression of good will. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] He is a very young man to be contemplating the state of matrimony, but we wish him well in its pursuit.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. Thank you very much. I am quite thrown now.

The Leader of the House may be aware that this week the Disability Benefits Consortium has highlighted the devastating impact of welfare changes on disabled people. The report highlights how disabled people have lost benefit payments of an average of around £1,200 each year as a result of Government changes. May we have an urgent debate on how we can change our benefits system to ensure that we actually help disabled people, rather than push them further into poverty?

Mel Stride: In the spirit of the wedding fest, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, and I thank my wife for having put up with me for 14 years. It is our anniversary this weekend and she has truly put up with a great deal. I love you very much, Michelle. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Now I can do no wrong, can I?

On the hon. Gentleman's question, overall we have brought in through universal credit a welfare system that is making sure that work pays, which is the best way for people to work out of poverty and why we have the lowest level of absolute poverty in our history. We recently made some changes to universal credit, including an increase in the annual allowance, which is worth £670 per year to 2.3 million people. Various other changes were made to help those who need support, but at the same time to encourage employment.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): It is a huge source of shame that modern slavery persists in our country, in some cases on an industrial scale. It is always accompanied by other forms of organised crime, such as people trafficking, sexual exploitation and money laundering. May we have a debate on whether the modern slavery unit in the Home Office has sufficient manpower and resources to successfully and swiftly bring the perpetrators of such heinous crimes, and the complex criminal networks associated with them, to justice?

Mel Stride: Modern slavery is one of the scourges of a modern and global world. It is worth reflecting for a moment that one of the current Prime Minister's key legacies will be the extraordinary work that she did and drove forward in this policy area, particularly when she was Home Secretary. For example, she brought in the various requirements on companies and on reporting, and she made sure that we have the resources and tools available to clamp down on this iniquitous situation.

Lisa Forbes (Peterborough) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House provide Government time to implement one of the Government's own pledges? In 2015, they promised statutory guidance on school uniform costs. Since then, the cuts have got worse, and the Tory council has axed the school uniform grant in my constituency, leaving parents in Peterborough forced to fork out three-figure sums annually. Education Ministers have replied to my questions by stating that, four years on, they are still waiting for parliamentary time. Will the Leader of the House make it clear that time is available?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady appropriately raises the question with me, because it relates to the provision of parliamentary time to bring in measures that she wants to see brought before the House. On that basis, I am happy to meet her over a cup of tea to talk about what might be done.

Mr Speaker: Unless I am misinformed, I think that was the hon. Lady's first intervention in the Chamber. I congratulate her on it and express the hope that we will hear a lot more from her in the days, weeks and months to come.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): On Tuesday, we learned that drug-related deaths in Scotland have reached their highest level on record—three times higher than the rest of the UK and the highest in the developed world. After 10 years in government, that is a shameful stain on the SNP's record. This needless loss of life is a national emergency, so will the Leader of the House agree to hold an urgent debate in Government time?

Mel Stride: Scotland questions are on Wednesday, so I urge my hon. Friend to raise that issue on that occasion, as I have no doubt others will, too. As the House will probably be aware, the UK legislative framework in this policy area falls to the Government here in Westminster, but operations on the ground—if I may term it that way—are the responsibility of the Scottish Government, who I am sure will have heard my hon. Friend's comments.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Sanctuary Care runs a number of care homes in the London Borough of Greenwich, and it is cutting the pay and conditions of staff who were TUPE-ed over several years ago from the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The chief exec earns £240,000 a year. At a time when people are concerned about standards of care in social care, is the company doing the right thing? May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about this kind of practice in the care system?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman raises a very specific issue relating to a particular care home in his constituency, and, of course, it is very difficult for me to comment with any intelligence on the points that he has made, other than to say that I would be very happy to assist him in facilitating a meeting with the relevant Minister at the Department of Health and Social Care should he so desire it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Ordinarily, I call everybody in business questions, as colleagues can testify from personal experience, but that will not be possible today because of the pressure on time. I give notice that we will be moving on at 11.30 am. Colleagues, therefore, should be considerate of each other and—dare I say it?—perhaps behave in a comradely manner towards each other.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): May we have a statement on the issue of short formation trains? In Lewes, on peak services, we still get four-carriage trains, and passengers who pay an average of £4,500 a year for a season ticket cannot get on them. Will the Leader of the House ask for a statement from the Department for Transport?

Mel Stride: I am very happy to forward that request.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will go for the broadest smile. I call Lucy Powell.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I try.

With new Government figures out this week showing that, for the first time ever, there are now more young black and minority ethnic young people in young offenders institutions than there are white people, will the Government make time for a debate on this important issue, given that their own race audit, the David Lammy review, and other evidence show that the way that charges are brought, prosecutions are made and courts are run disproportionately affect those from certain backgrounds and certain communities more than their better-off peers?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady does indeed have a wonderful smile, though it is the smile of a crocodile, I think. Notwithstanding that, I will give her an answer and make it snappy, shall I?

The hon. Lady raises a very important point. We did, of course, commission the Lammy review. We accepted its recommendations and we are keen to crack on with them. The Minister responsible for the issue, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), is sitting next to me on the Treasury Bench and would be delighted to meet her.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Last week, I met my 97-year-old constituent Ron Mockford, who served in the far east in the second world war, was captured by the Japanese and spent three and a half years in captivity, during which time he worked on the Burma railway. Next year is the 75th anniversary of VJ-day, and Mr Mockford has called for a national day to mark it. Can we have a statement from the Government on their response to this very reasonable and sensible appeal?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Because of the sequencing of the end of the second world war we tend perhaps to focus more on VE-day than on VJ-day, but I can inform him that the Government, working with the Royal British Legion, will look to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day on 15 August next year in the appropriate way.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Following the recent European Parliament elections, three SNP MEPs have been working hard to represent Scotland in the family of European democracies. However, there are three Catalan MEPs who are being denied their seats in the European Parliament for protecting Catalonia's right to self-determination. Ministers in this place have frequently committed themselves to defending democracy, so can we have a debate, in Government time, on the state of democracy in Europe and what this Government are doing to protect it?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady raises an important point about representation within Parliaments and about Members of Parliament taking their seats once they have been elected. I think that, perhaps, an Adjournment debate might be the right approach to ventilate that matter.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Can we have a debate about British Telecom's hapless delivery of broadband under the Building Digital UK taxpayer-funded programme? Constituents of mine in Cirencester Road have been waiting for cabinet 129 to be fixed up. They

were promised that it would be done by the end of June. There has been delay after delay and broken promises. Can we have a debate to hold BT to account?

Mel Stride: Once again, this might be a good subject for an Adjournment debate, when the very specific issues—not least around cabinet 129—can be aired with the appropriate Minister.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Could the Leader of the House arrange a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport? Although the Secretary of State has said since 2017 that the Pacer trains are going, we have just heard in Transport questions that “the majority” of the 101 Pacer trains are going. May we have a statement on which trains are going and when?

Mel Stride: I am sure that the hon. Lady will have taken the opportunity to raise that matter in Transport questions. If not, she has raised it now and I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will shortly be aware of that. What I would say is that this Government have invested more in rail than at any time since the Victorian era.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): If someone were caught speeding, the police would have two weeks to notify them and six months to bring proceedings, but that person could bring a complaint against the police officer at any time and the investigation could take years to resolve. Could we have a debate on limiting the time for police complaint investigations to provide certainty for the complainant and for serving police officers?

Mel Stride: The whole issue of speeding has been raised with me in different ways and from across the House in the short time that I have been Leader of the House, so it appears that it is probably an area on which further debate is well overdue. I have just been passed a note to tell me that my hon. Friend’s father served 29 years with the West Midlands police; we thank him for his service.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): This summer, schools in Barnsley East will be taking part in my Little Litter Champions project to help keep Barnsley tidy. Can we have a debate to discuss how we can use this initiative and others like it to promote recycling, protect our environment and promote pride in our local communities?

Mr Speaker: Did the hon. Lady say that she was taking part in this initiative?

Stephanie Peacock: I am encouraging local schoolchildren to take part.

Mr Speaker: Ah, but I am sure the hon. Lady will be taking part herself, being such a virtuous individual.

Stephanie Peacock: I will be.

Mr Speaker: I have no reason to doubt it.

Mel Stride: I direct the hon. Lady to Environment questions, which are next Thursday.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I want to raise an issue that I know Mr Speaker has previously commented on. All too often my constituency office staff are being blocked from assisting my constituents by overly officious staff at Cornwall Council saying that we do not have the required authorisation to act on

behalf of our constituents under general data protection regulation rules. Could we have a statement from a Minister to make it absolutely clear that as elected representatives of our constituents, we are authorised to act and that no further authorisation is required?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend raises an important point that lies right at the heart of our ability as Members of this place to serve our constituents effectively. I would be happy to go further and arrange a meeting with the relevant Minister so that my hon. Friend can ensure that we have clarity on this matter.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The healthtech industry and health technology is a very valuable sector for the United Kingdom economy. This technology sector is very important, with 127,400 jobs, 3,860 companies and a turnover of £24 billion, and it has seen a 5% increase in growth in the last year. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on this sector, which promotes and creates so much for the economy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend raises the important topic of the use of technology in healthcare—something with which the current Secretary of State for Health is very personally engaged as it features in our NHS long-term plan. I think this would make an excellent topic for a Westminster Hall debate.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): We all know that helping the environment is the greatest challenge of our time, but we cannot just leave the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to crack on with its work when we need reforms of planning systems so that we can have solar panels on houses and reforms of transport infrastructure so that air quality is improved in places such as Chipping Norton. Can we have a series of debates in Government time so that we can examine how climate change and environment issues can be tackled holistically across government?

Mel Stride: Taking a holistic approach to the many measures that are being taken right across Departments would be a very good angle for a debate. Of course, we are right in the lead when it comes to climate change internationally, having made the commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Sankey canal, first opened in 1757, is an important green corridor and is used by a boat club in my constituency. It is in danger of drying out because the Fiddler’s Ferry power station, which supplies its water, is due to close next year. May we have an urgent statement or a debate involving the Environment Secretary to discuss what the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs can do to help this situation?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman raises a matter specific to his constituency. If he writes to me or has a word with me about it after these questions, I will see what I can do to facilitate an engagement with DEFRA.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I want to return to the subject raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson): the 1,187 people who have died in Scotland because of drug misuse. This is the sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. There is clearly a drugs emergency in my part of the UK, yet no urgent question was granted and no Minister appeared at the

[Stephen Kerr]

Dispatch Box to make a statement. Will the Leader of the House facilitate an early statement from either the Home Office or the Department of Health and Social Care about what they will do to support the Scottish authorities to deal with the crisis?

Mel Stride: Given that my hon. Friend has raised that important matter as a follow-up to my other hon. Friend's question, the best thing I can do to take it forward is to offer to meet them and any others interested in this subject, so that we can discuss the best way forward.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Ms Watson is a disabled single parent who is studying to become a children's social worker. She gave all her information to the universal credit authorities correctly and on time. Some 18 months later, they uploaded the information; two years later, they decided that she had had an overpayment of £10,000. They have accepted that that is their fault and even paid her £100 in compensation but they still want her to pay the money back. May we have an urgent debate on how the debt management department in the Department for Work and Pensions actually works and why it will not take responsibility for its errors?

Mel Stride: I am happy for the hon. Lady to write to me on the specific point about her constituent so that I can take it up with the DWP, to make sure that we get a full and detailed response to the various issues. However, as I said earlier, the general principle of universal credit and how it works has been a major driver of employment in this country: we have the highest level of employment in our history and the lowest level of unemployment since 1974. We have halved youth unemployment since 2010.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: As a parliamentary statesman, the hon. Member for Huddersfield will wish to exemplify the single-sentence question.

Mr Sheerman: When all the kipper waving is over, may we have the Chancellor of the Exchequer here to tell us how we can use the French method of taking on Google, Facebook and others to regenerate our towns and cities so that they are safe, secure and prosperous?

Mel Stride: Treasury questions are on 10 September, when there may or may not be a new Chancellor of the Exchequer. All I can say is that, as regards current Government policy in this area, we have committed to a digital services tax—a levy on platform-based businesses that generate significant value within the United Kingdom, while not traditionally falling within the criteria whereby we would normally have the taxation right. We are doing exactly what the hon. Gentleman has requested.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Women's sport has never been more prominent, and the women's football World cup has opened many eyes and minds to talent in the women's game. May we have a debate on how we can capitalise on that exposure and success by ensuring that women's sport is supported appropriately—rather than what happened last week, when the Scottish Professional Football League thought it sufficient to gift the women's game a few bags of footballs?

Mel Stride: That would be an excellent subject for debate; I say that as the father of three daughters who are enthused by subjects such as women's football. It is great to see women getting more and more involved in a variety of our national sports.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Teachers, social workers, volunteers and NHS workers are all subject to enhanced disclosure checks, but Members of Parliament are not. I would like us to have a debate on the Floor of the House about why, with all the reputational damage that has been going on, we too are not subject to those checks.

Mel Stride: An Adjournment debate would be an opportunity to interrogate a Minister on that specific issue.

As this is the last question, may I thank Members for all their questions this week? Who knows what will happen next week, but it has been a great pleasure to take all their questions from the Dispatch Box.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that I speak for the House in thanking the Leader of the House for attending to our inquiries and for his customary courtesy, which alike are appreciated by Members across the House.

Detainees

11.30 am

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Government's approach to the detention and rendition of detainees overseas. Our policy on this issue remains clear: the Government do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment for any purpose. To do so would not only be wrong and incompatible with the United Kingdom's commitments under international conventions—such as the United Nations convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, to which this country is a signatory—but it would also be a betrayal of everything that we stand for as a nation, in terms of our promotion of human rights and protection of human dignity.

There is already clear guidance and training for UK personnel dealing with detainees who are held by others. That guidance has been reviewed at the Prime Minister's request by Sir Adrian Fulford, the independent Investigatory Powers Commissioner, to see how it could be improved further, taking account of the views of the Intelligence and Security Committee and civil society. The Government have accepted Sir Adrian's proposals in full, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in a written ministerial statement earlier today.

We have published new guidance entitled "The principles relating to the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees", which will replace the current consolidated guidance at the end of this year. The principles will be extended so that they explicitly cover the National Crime Agency and SO15 Metropolitan Police Service.

I would like to thank Sir Adrian for his work. The principles address many of the points raised by the Intelligence and Security Committee in recommending changes to the consolidated guidance. The new document will now be explicitly engaged when there is a risk of extraordinary rendition, rendition or unlawful killing occurring in the context of detention. It will also apply not only when UK personnel are working with Governments but when non-state actors or groups are involved. The principles introduce a formal error reporting obligation and a formal whistleblowing provision, in line with the commissioner's statutory responsibilities in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016.

These new principles are part of steps taken by successive Governments to understand what happened in the aftermath of the appalling terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and to put in place improved policies and practice. As the Prime Minister said in a written statement on 28 June last year,

"With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that UK personnel were working within a new and challenging operating environment for which, in some cases, they were not prepared. It took too long to recognise that guidance and training for staff was inadequate, and too long to understand fully and take appropriate action on the risks arising from our engagement with international partners on detainee issues. The Agencies responded to what they thought were isolated allegations and incidents of mistreatment, but the ISC concludes that they should have realised the extent to which others were using unacceptable practices as part of a systematic

programme. The Agencies acknowledge that they did not fully understand this quickly enough and they regret not doing so."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 41WS.]

It is important to say, however, that the ISC found no evidence to support allegations that UK personnel directly carried out physical mistreatment of detainees.

Lessons have been learned from these challenging events and from the various independent examinations of detainee issues that have taken place over the past 15 years or so. These have included three separate investigations and reports published by the ISC in 2005, 2007 and 2018; Sir Peter Gibson's detainee inquiry report, published in 2013; related police investigations; and thorough internal reviews by the security and intelligence agencies of their involvement in detainee cases from 2001 to 2010, which the ISC examined in its most recent report.

The position now is very different from the one confronting UK personnel in the immediate aftermath of 11 September 2001. Better guidance and training is coupled with a world-leading independent oversight regime, underpinned by the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. This legislation has given the ISC enhanced powers to oversee the activities of the security and intelligence agencies, alongside the statutory role of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, who reports annually on his remit, including the application of detainee policy. The consolidated guidance and new principles make it clear that Ministers must be consulted if there is a serious or real risk of detainee mistreatment occurring at the hands of others, and of course the ministerial code reflects the overarching duty on Ministers to comply with the law.

I will turn now to the question whether there should be a further inquiry into detainee mistreatment and rendition issues. As I told the House on Monday, in response to an urgent question from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), since publishing our response to the ISC's reports on detainee mistreatment and rendition on 22 November 2018, the Government have given serious consideration to the examination of detainee issues and whether any more lessons could be learned and, if so, how. My right hon. and learned Friend, as the then Cabinet Office Minister without Portfolio, told the House on 19 December 2013 that once the ISC had completed its most recent work, the Government would

"take a final view as to whether a further judicial inquiry still remains necessary to add any further information of value to future policy making and the national interest."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2013; Vol. 572, c. 916.]

I undertook to give a definitive answer to that question, and I can confirm today that the Government have decided that it is not necessary to establish a further inquiry. There is no policy reason to do so, given the extensive work already undertaken to improve policies and practices in this area. The Government's position is also that there is no legal obligation. These matters have been subject to a number of police investigations over the years, including Operations Hinton, Iden and Lydd, and a joint panel was set up by the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police Service in January 2012 to consider allegations of UK involvement in detainee mistreatment. None of these police investigations has resulted in further action being taken, although some inquiries are continuing.

[Mr David Lidington]

Parliament and the public can have confidence in the effectiveness of measures taken since 2010 and the new principles announced by the Government today to strengthen the accountability and oversight by Ministers, Parliament and the independent commissioners of the vital work of our security and intelligence agencies. I commend this statement to the House.

11.38 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the Cabinet Office for advance sight of his statement. I always look forward to my debates with the Minister, even if on one recent occasion I was denied that pleasure, as he greatly enjoyed pointing out at the time. Although on that note I should say that if this time next week he ends up on a slow train to the gulag, along with the Chancellor, to be replaced by some “do or die” no-deal Brexiteer, I can tell him that it is 20° and sunny in Siberia today—so don’t knock it till you’ve tried it.

On a serious note, I genuinely hope that the right hon. Gentleman will continue to be a regular fixture at the Dispatch Box. Unlike the new Prime Minister, he always treats his ministerial responsibilities with the seriousness and diligence they deserve—I believe I speak for the whole House when I say that.

On this occasion, I fear there will be little consensus between me and the right hon. Gentleman. I believe the outgoing Prime Minister has made a fundamental error of judgment not to make good on the commitment of her predecessor, not to honour the promises of the former Justice Secretary and now Father of the House, and not to listen to the recommendations of the Intelligence and Security Committee. They were all absolutely clear that the only way to get to the truth on these issues and to learn lessons for the future was for the Government to commission an independent and judge-led inquiry with the power and authority to examine all the evidence, question every potential witness and come up with conclusions to which the Government would be bound.

If the argument in 2010 or 2012 was that the inquiry could not be held at that time due to ongoing criminal investigations, that argument simply does not hold water today. If the long delay and sorely mistaken judgment were the result of a genuine deliberation within Government about the merits of the public inquiry, I could possibly agree to disagree but at least respect the thought that had gone into the decision. However, I do not believe that that is the case. Even before the ISC report was published, I believe there was a deliberate attitude on the Government’s part to circle the wagons and avoid any judicial scrutiny or public consultation on the past actions of the intelligence services or the future rules by which they operate, even though it is the intelligence services themselves whose reputation and morale is damaged most by failing to deal with this scandal.

On the new guidance published today, we are told that the views of civil society have been taken into account. Right from the outset, however, we know that the Government were determined to resist those views. If we want evidence for that, just look at the letter written to me and the shadow Attorney General in June last year by the man about to become the next Prime

Minister, who, titan of competence that he is, left attached to his letter the background note written by his staff explaining the position they were suggesting he take. This is what they said on the subject of public consultation with human rights groups on the guidance given to security service personnel, designed

“to reassure personnel that they are operating in accordance with UK and international law”.

According to the Foreign Office note, they had concluded that

“Public consultation...is likely to generate recommendations that we would not be able to implement without damaging national security.”

My first question to the Minister for the Cabinet Office is whether all the recommendations from civil society have been incorporated in the new guidance. Can I ask him specifically whether one of the most important recommendations they made has been adopted? Has there been an express prohibition on Ministers giving the green light to the torture of overseas detainees? If not, why not?

I could talk at further length today about the historical allegations in relation to torture and rendition dating back two decades and about the operation of secret courts, all of which I believe justify the independent judge-led inquiry for which we, the ISC and the Father of the House have called, but in the time that I have I want to make a simple point. If the Government are so confident that all the lessons of the past have been learned, that all the abuses of the past cannot be repeated and that the new laws and procedures, which were, sadly, not strong enough before, are now in place, then what exactly do they have to fear by allowing a judge to look at this issue to examine all the evidence, interview all the witnesses and look at the new procedures and rules, so that he or she can tell the Government whether they are right?

Mr Lidington: May I first genuinely thank the right hon. Lady for her kind words at the start of her remarks? I think it is fair to say that when we have tilted lances at each other we have done so in the spirit of mutual respect, even if it has sometimes been no holds barred in terms of the professional combat in which we have been engaged.

If I can seek to respond to the questions the right hon. Lady posed to me, the Government did listen to the ISC; indeed Sir Adrian’s revisions—incorporated in the new principles, which the Government have accepted today—reflect in many detailed aspects the precise recommendations of the Committee in its two reports of 2018.

Without going into detail about internal matters and procedures within Government, I can assure the House that there was very genuine and very detailed deliberation within Government about the right way forward. While the decision on matters relating to security intelligence always rests with the Prime Minister ultimately, the House would, I am sure, have expected that other senior Ministers with an interest in these matters would be consulted and would have given their advice to the Prime Minister, and that happened.

The right hon. Lady asked me about the views of civil society. I never made any claim in my statement that the Government’s response or the proposals by Sir Adrian reflected in full the views of civil society. What I can say

is that Sir Adrian, in the course of his review, took great care to consult civil society; he convened meetings where representatives of civil society could make their representations to him and put forward their ideas. The Government have accepted Sir Adrian's recommendations in full, without qualification. If Sir Adrian, in his recommendations, chose not to reflect everything that particular civil society organisations wished to see, that was a judgment by Sir Adrian, and it was right for the Government to rely on the independent commissioner to be the prime source of advice to us on these matters.

The right hon. Lady asked, in particular, about the idea of an express prohibition on Ministers. As she will have seen, in his report Sir Adrian did say that he looked at whether extra duties should be imposed on Ministers, and he considered that that was not part of what he should be proposing. However, as I said in my statement to the House, it is already the position that Ministers are bound by the law and by the ministerial code. The ministerial code requires Ministers to comply with the law in all their actions as Ministers, and we include in the definition of compliance with the law compliance with the United Kingdom's international treaty obligations. Those duties on Ministers are very clear already, and that is reinforced by the fact that the civil service code, which operates on the basis of comparable principles, is grounded in statute, so it is straightforwardly a breach of that statute for civil servants to act in any way, professionally, that would breach the law.

I would just say to the right hon. Lady that the Government were as open as we could possibly be during the various inquiries and investigations that have taken place. For example, the Intelligence and Security Committee had access to the Government material that was presented to the Gibson inquiry and to the agency chiefs' responses to the 27 themes and issues identified by Sir Peter Gibson in his preliminary report, and the Committee was provided with the Intelligence Services Commissioner's views on the current compliance with those aspects of the consolidated guidance that he is responsible for monitoring. We therefore tried to be as open as possible, within the limits of what it is possible to discuss openly, about the issues we are debating today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. These are extremely important matters, but I intend to move on from this statement absolutely no later than 10 past 12 and to dispose of, in the parliamentary sense, the business of the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) on the Select Committee statement by absolutely no later than half-past, so economy is of the essence.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I welcome much of what my right hon. Friend has said, and the Intelligence and Security Committee greatly welcomes what he said about the consolidated guidance. It has said since 2010 that the title "guidance" is itself misleading. It is not guidance, but a framework which sets the boundaries, and we are pleased that the Government have now openly acknowledged that. We are also pleased that the principles reflect the important changes that we recommended, including specific reference to extraordinary rendition alongside torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, the application of the principles

to joint units and non-state actors, and regular review—which is of the utmost importance, because it had not been taking place regularly in the past. We are also pleased that the agencies must follow the spirit of the principles, not just the letter. All those are, in our view, major steps forward. I greatly welcome them and thank the Government for their positive response.

The second issue concerns the inquiry into what happened during the period which has given rise to the disquiet expressed in the House and elsewhere. When the ISC was asked to carry out an inquiry, we were assured that we would have access to all the evidence that we needed in order to complete it, and thus to provide the necessary public assurance to bring closure to this matter. However, as my right hon. Friend well knows, we were unfortunately denied access to certain individuals who would have given oral evidence before us, and we therefore concluded that we must bring our inquiry to an end and publish the material that we had. A judge-led inquiry would undoubtedly have presented another opportunity for that full transparency.

Leaving aside policy or legal reasons, the one point that I would make to my right hon. Friend is that even when problems have been remedied, there is sometimes a good policy reason for bringing about closure. The simple question that I pose to him is whether the decision that has been taken will enable that closure to take place.

Mr Lidington: I am grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend's welcome for Sir Adrian's report and the new principles that the Government have accepted. I was expecting him to express disappointment about our decision with regard to a judge-led inquiry.

I do not want to spend too much time going over old ground, but, as I said in response to the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the ISC was given access to all the material that the Government supplied to the Gibson inquiry and in relation to other matters. I understand that the Committee took more than 50 hours of oral evidence, reviewed 40,000 original documents, and devoted more than 30,000 staff hours to its inquiry.

The one point of difference concerned the Committee's request to take evidence from junior officials. The Government attempted to find a compromise that would enable some of them to appear, but we were unable to reach agreement on that. It is a long-established principle that junior staff are not required personally to answer to parliamentary Committees. That is recognised in the Government's memorandum of understanding with the ISC, which permits the Committee to take oral evidence from Ministers, agency heads and senior officials. A number of those whom the Committee wished to interview had been junior officials at the time of the events in which the Committee was interested.

Let me now respond to my right hon. and learned Friend's direct question. One of my concerns about the judge-led inquiry is that it would give rise to expectations about closure, but would not be able to deliver them. By definition, the sort of material that we are talking about could not be discussed openly without risk of harm to the national interest. Apart from the fact that we see neither a legal nor a policy reason for resuming a judge-led inquiry, I fear that the offer of closure would

[*Mr Lidington*]

eventually be seen as a grave disappointment by those who are arguing for a such an inquiry because of the necessity for secrecy.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement and agree with others that much of it is to be welcomed. However, like others I regret the decision not to hold an independent judge-led inquiry. The arguments that the Gibson and ISC investigations obviate the need for an independent judge-led inquiry do not hold water, because, as the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) said, the ISC's investigation took place under such severe Government restrictions that, as the Committee itself states, it was left unable to conduct an authoritative inquiry or produce a credible report. As a result, the ISC chose to classify its report and its conclusions as provisional and warned that it must not be taken as a comprehensive account. Does the Minister not see that the only way to take the work of the ISC forward and properly address what went wrong is to establish an inquiry with the necessary powers to follow the leads that the ISC could not? Obviously, some aspects of that inquiry could not be held in public, although others could, and the right model for this is an independent judge-led inquiry with the full powers of such a judge-led inquiry in relation to the production of evidence and the attendance of witnesses, along with the independent ability to assess all the evidence and make a determination as to what cannot be published for national security reasons. Does the Minister not see that such an inquiry would not be required to start from scratch? It could take the ISC findings as a base, and they could provide a clear road map for a future investigation. A judge-led inquiry could focus on answering the unanswered questions, reviewing the unexplored cases and examining the evidence the ISC was not able to see. With such considerations in mind, can the Minister not see that there is unfinished business here, and does he think that the incoming Administration might reconsider this decision, having regard to the points I have made?

Mr Lidington: I cannot speculate about what an incoming Administration might or might not do. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for her welcome for the principles, but I disagree with her on this point: I do not see that a revived judge-led inquiry would add anything to the actions that have already been taken. The Government and the agencies have accepted that things were done wrong, for various reasons, between 2001 and 2010. As a result of internal investigations, the ISC's reports and the commissioner's recommendations, significant improvements have been made to the internal training of staff in the agencies. There is much greater clarity and rigour in the guidance that officers are given, and the accountability of officers to Ministers in cases where there might be a risk of torture or inhuman treatment has been highlighted in the guidance and the training.

In the light of those changes, it is our view that no new policy decision would arise out of a further judge-led inquiry, nor do we believe that there is a legal obligation on the Government to hold such an inquiry. The police have had access to all the material they wish to access about individual cases, and, as I have said, they have

concluded a number of investigations without need for further process, while a few investigations are continuing. So I think all necessary steps have been taken.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I will resist the temptation to reply to the failure to provide a judge-led inquiry in four words; those words being, "See you in court," because it is quite plain that this decision will face a judicial review and that will take even more time and give less closure.

My right hon. Friend asked us to accept that the Government have solved the problems, and ironically he cites as evidence of that a number of ISC reports from some years ago that are now understood to have got the answer wrong because they were misinformed. The current ISC report—much better, much higher quality—was of course limited, as we heard from its Chairman, by the restriction on witnesses.

So the Government are asking us to allow them to mark their own homework. If we want a real coruscating comment on that, we need only look back at the Binyam Mohamed case and the remarks of Judge Neuberger on the Government's and agencies' handling of it throughout. The Government should simply not be allowed to mark their own homework.

On the point that the Government have solved the problems, I am afraid that that is plainly and demonstrably not true. That is illustrated most clearly in the point raised by the shadow Foreign Secretary that there is no prohibition on Ministers approving torture. My right hon. Friend the Minister says that they are required to obey the law, but they were required to do so in 2002 when the law was precisely the same in terms of international convention, so that does not apply either. We have evidence from one month ago, Mr Speaker, when you allowed an urgent question in this Chamber to the Ministry of Defence, which had produced internal policy documents that explicitly conceived of Ministers approving co-operation with states that had used torture to acquire information. So, plainly, the Government have not learned their lesson yet. There are a number of reasons for having an inquiry—legal, reputational, operational, closure and the simple one of keeping the promise we gave—and I am afraid that the Government will eventually be forced into that position.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend has been pursuing these issues for quite a long time now. He has always been absolutely consistent in the position he has taken, and I respect that position even though the Government disagree with his views.

Going back to the question about witnesses at the ISC, the offer was always there for agency chiefs, senior officials and Ministers to speak on behalf of officers who were or had been junior at the time of the events complained of. That is the way in which the Government respond to every Select Committee of Parliament, with the seniors in a Department or agency taking responsibility for the decisions made by junior staff.

In respect of what my right hon. Friend said about the Ministry of Defence, he will find when he looks at the principles that they apply expressly to members of our armed forces. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has issued a written ministerial statement today in which she says that the Ministry of Defence accepts the principles in full and has already begun work to update its internal guidance accordingly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Musings and commentary are not required. Single-sentence questions and pithy replies are.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the statement and note that a lot of the recommendations of our ISC report have been adopted, although I have to say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) on the Front Bench that a judge-led inquiry was not one of them. The important thing is the five-year review. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that when it happens, it is made fully public?

Mr Lidington: I am grateful to the right hon Gentleman for his welcome, and I will ensure that we seek to be as public as possible about the five-year review. The five years should be regarded as a maximum period. Frankly, if evidence comes to light at any stage that amendments are needed, I would expect the Government and the agencies to act accordingly and make the amendments sooner.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the Father of the House, cannot be here today, for reasons he has explained, but were he here, I am sure he would say what I am going to say, which is that this is a breach of the undertaking that was given to the country and to Parliament by the Cabinet, of which the Father of the House and I were members. Both of us were also members of the National Security Council. I am mindful of the serious damage that this has done to our international reputation, and it is a great pity that my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Government have reached the conclusions that they have today.

Mr Lidington: I respect my right hon. Friend's position, but I disagree with it, for the reasons that I have set out. We address harm to our national reputation by clearly being seen to admit when things have gone wrong in the past and taking resolute action to put them right, and I think that the measures that have been put in place over the last few years are evidence that we have done so.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): As a member of the ISC, I welcome the recommendations the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has accepted, but could he establish the principle that it is for the ISC, not the Government, to determine whom it sees?

Mr Lidington: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the principles. The memorandum of understanding between the Government and the ISC does make it clear that the ISC is entitled to take evidence from Ministers, senior officials and agency chiefs. That is in line with the relationship between the Government and every departmental Select Committee, and I am not persuaded that there is a need to change that.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend understand that he would have had an easier ride today if the Government had been more flexible on whom we, as a Committee, could see?

Mr Lidington: I understand the argument that my right hon. Friend is making, but I repeat the point that it is a long-established principle, reflected in the memorandum of understanding with the ISC, that it is senior officials, agency chiefs and Ministers who are accountable to the Committee, rather than junior officials.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): The Government accepted all the major recommendations of the ISC and that will lead to real change, but there is one that they have not accepted, which is on emergency authorisations. The Committee recommended these should not be used where there is a serious risk of torture, and if they were, that they should be escalated to the appropriate level of authorisation. Why has that not been taken on board?

Mr Lidington: If the right hon. Lady looks again at the principles that have been published today, she will see that, where there is a real risk of torture, there is a requirement that that must be escalated to Ministers, even if that carries an increased risk of, for example, a terrorist attack succeeding. I am happy to write to the right hon. Lady to set out the detail, but that is my very clear understanding.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I, for one, welcome the improved guidance and the more robust oversight of the work of our security and intelligence agencies. May I ask the Minister: is it the case that the UK is one of the very few countries in the world publicly to set out its approach on the detention, treatment and interviewing of detainees overseas?

Mr Lidington: It is, and I think we can take some pride in the fact that the arrangements that have been put in place in recent years are seen as an example elsewhere in the world.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Government are wrong to reject a judge-led inquiry, which was the only way to find out if the lessons have been learned. Given the Minister's statement, will he commit to two measures: first, legislation to provide redress for victims of extraordinary rendition; and, secondly, an immediate review of guidance should it become clear that UK personnel are still at risk of breaking the law?

Mr Lidington: It is very clearly our view that if an officer in any of the agencies or someone in the armed services is complying with the principles, they should not be at legal risk. I will take advice on the final question the right hon. Gentleman put to me and write to him. Clearly, issues to do with legislation will have to be a matter for the incoming Administration.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern at the apparent lack of appropriate ministerial oversight in the early years of this century? What has been done to ensure that the intelligence agencies are properly accountable to Ministers?

Mr Lidington: It is clear that things did go wrong—and seriously wrong—in the aftermath of 9/11. What has happened since then is that we have given enhanced powers to the Intelligence and Security Committee, and we have established the independent commissioner on a statutory basis so that he is seen to be completely independent of the Government.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Would it not be a source of reassurance for the Government to have an independent inquiry that would ensure the new principles are watertight and give the British public absolute confidence in our overseas engagements?

Mr Lidington: The problem with what the hon. Lady suggests is that, because so much of the information and documentation would have to remain secret for good security reasons, that could not provide such reassurance. It is the independence of the commissioner and the Committee that is the best and most compelling assurance we can give people.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): If matters are escalated to Ministers, will they be prohibited from authorising action that carries a real risk of torture?

Mr Lidington: I cannot see any circumstance in which a Minister of the United Kingdom would authorise action that was contrary to the law.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Is it not in everybody's interests to get to the bottom of what went wrong here? Given that the Intelligence and Security Committee said that it could not produce a credible report, we surely do still need that judge-led inquiry.

Mr Lidington: No. Any judge-led inquiry would have to conduct many, if not most, of its proceedings in secret, so it could not provide the kind of assurance that the right hon. Gentleman seeks.

Governance of Official Statistics

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Mr Speaker: In a moment, Sir Bernard Jenkin will speak on his subject for up to 10 minutes—there is absolutely no obligation on him to take the full 10—during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Sir Bernard Jenkin to respond to them in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Members of the Front-Bench teams may take part in questioning. As signalled earlier, I intend that we move on to the next business no later than 12.30 pm.

12.10 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Following a thorough inquiry, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee has published its latest report this morning entitled “Governance of official statistics: redefining the dual role of the UK Statistics Authority; and re-evaluating the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007”. Our main finding is that UKSA’s dual role of both producing and regulating official statistics has compromised its ability to ensure that statistics serve the public good. We therefore recommend that UKSA is split into two separate bodies: the Office for National Statistics and the Office for Statistics Regulation.

This may seem a rather dry and obscure topic, but the reality is that pensioners, students and rail commuters pay the price of dodgy statistics. Public confidence in the Government’s policies and the political debate also suffers as a result. In 2014, when our predecessor Committee exposed how police officers were manipulating the collection and interpretation of police recorded crime to make the situation look better than it was, UKSA withdrew its “official statistics” designation of approval for police recorded crime. In 2013, UKSA did the same to the retail prices index, because it has for some time been regarded as an unreliable indicator of movements in retail prices.

RPI and UKSA’s role in the governance of statistics is used as a case study in our report. UKSA has not made itself sufficiently independent of the Government, particularly from the Treasury, and is therefore shying away from its responsibility to be accountable to Parliament and the public. For almost a decade, there has been concern about the discrepancy between the consumer prices index and UKSA and the ONS’s calculation of RPI, but UKSA has refused to account for its RPI figure. As a result of overestimated RPI, commuters face higher rail fares and students have to pay higher student loan interest rates. In January 2019, the Economic Affairs Committee of the other place reported that by failing to fix RPI, UKSA risks breaching its statutory duties. The report recommends that UKSA demonstrates more proactive, quicker responses to concerns about the accuracy and misuse of statistics and should more clearly demonstrate its independence from key stakeholders, such as the Treasury, when it has significant disagreements with producers of statistics.

PACAC also expresses concern about UKSA's openness to parliamentary and public scrutiny. The report finds that UKSA is slow to respond or take action on correspondence and reports from parliamentary Committees. PACAC therefore urges UKSA to attend an annual hearing with the Committee to improve its accountability to Parliament and make its governance more transparent, so that it can be scrutinised in public. PACAC concludes that, through its continued mishandling of RPI, UKSA has allowed what was originally a simple mistake in the collection of price inflation data to snowball into a major unresolved issue lasting for a decade.

The good news is that, on the whole, the UK has a world-class statistical system, and we should commend the statisticians and people who work in the ONS. When UKSA was first established, it was a huge step forward, but it must improve. Its governance must improve, and its board must improve. The fundamental problem of UKSA's conflicting roles can only be resolved in the end through fresh legislation creating two separate bodies, but action can be taken immediately to improve the situation. At present, the Office for Statistics Regulation is separately identified, but is not given the autonomy and independence it needs. We question why the OSR has never called out the Government for continuing to rely on the flawed RPI. We recommend it immediately makes clear what is necessary to correct the calculation of RPI and that the non-executive directors of UKSA take charge of supervising the OSR, to underpin its operational independence. For example, it should have separate premises.

The UK Statistics Authority was created in 2008 as a statutory body to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics, and UKSA was given the dual function of being both the main provider of national statistics and the regulator. The report recommends that the Government introduce legislation to divide UKSA into two separate bodies: one for production and one for regulation. However, the Committee recognises that early legislation is unlikely, and that other steps need to be taken.

UKSA's statutory objective commits it to

"informing the public about social and economic matters" and

"assisting in the development and evaluation of public policy".

However, our report finds that it should do those things much better. UKSA does not have a complete understanding of who uses statistics, what they use them for and what statistics are in demand. Our report concludes that

"with only a modest sense of how the public uses data and no evidence of the unmet needs, UKSA is not delivering public good as required under the legislation."

The Committee recommends that UKSA should lead cross-Government research to build an evidence base for how statistics are used in practice, taking into account the full breadth of stakeholders, not just users, and to establish where data gaps persist.

The report outlines how technology and innovation should make statistics more robust and more accessible to decision makers and the public. UKSA is doing many such things, but we want its work to accelerate. However, the Committee heard that Government progress to capitalise on data innovations has been slow and that

significant work remains. The Committee also calls on UKSA to take a stronger leading role across technology, data science, data ethics and influencing improved sharing of data. I commend the report to the House.

Mr Speaker: We are extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Statistics are obviously absolutely vital if this country is to develop good policy on a whole range of different subjects, not least medicine. However, statistics are sometimes used by scurrilous politicians trying to purvey a particular version of events that is a long way away from the official version of the UK Statistics Authority, and we have seen recent instances in which it has told off Ministers and others. Did the Committee consider any means of punishing offenders who have tried to muddy the waters with false facts?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: It is difficult to envisage how that could be done without conflicting with the right of free speech. After the referendum, there was a discussion about whether there should be some regulation of what official campaigns actually say, for example, but that is difficult to do in the rough and tumble of politics, elections and referendums. Calling people out in public and being ready to do so is an important power that UKSA has through the Office for Statistics Regulation, but the Committee thinks that it could do that much more readily and proactively. Indeed, I have been personally critical of it for not doing so; it sometimes seems rather capricious in the targets it selects. This all suggests that the OSR should be a separate body with a far greater sense of its own purpose, rather than being part of the organisation that also produces all the statistics.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): As a member of the Select Committee, I was very pleased to participate in the production of this report and to heartily support its conclusions and recommendations. I also support the hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Committee, whose strong leadership on this and other reports has made a mark for our Committee. My concern all along has been rather wider than the report—the level of statistical understanding of the general public. As someone who formerly taught statistics, I suggest to Ministers, particularly in the Department for Education, that we ought to address the poor level of statistical understanding among the general populace and the poor levels of numeracy, so that the public are less prone to being bamboozled and manipulated by the dodgy statistics that the Chair so eloquently spoke about.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his work on the Committee; as our resident statistician, he contributes greatly to our scrutiny of statistics. I agree that we need a higher level of debate about statistics. UKSA has made big strides in how it presents statistics online, but we still think that the website could improve. His question underlines how important it is that there is commentary and explanation of statistics so that people understand, and indeed, that the media understand what they are reporting when they report statistics. That is a very important part of what the UK Statistics Authority should be doing.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I suspect that a number of my constituents will be very interested in the Select Committee's report, not least because each recent census has significantly under-reported those of the Jain or Zoroastrian faith in the UK, making it harder for both faith groups to win recognition for their communities both in Whitehall and across key public services, from the NHS to the BBC. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in urging the Office for National Statistics to review its decision not to allow a clearer opportunity in the 2021 census for Jains and Zoroastrians to register their faith adherence?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am sure that the powers that be who design the census will have heard the hon. Gentleman's question. We have not started scrutinising preparations for the next national census, but I will bear his point in mind.

Mr Speaker: I do not have any indication that the Front Benchers wish to participate in the questioning on this matter—I do not think they do. Sir Bernard, we are deeply grateful to you.

Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Clause 3

PROGRESS REPORTS

12.22 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I beg to move manuscript amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Lords amendment 1, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendments 2 to 18.

Hilary Benn: I support Lords amendment 1, which very sensibly provides for when the reports required under the Bill should be made to the House and provides an opportunity for the House to debate them. In other words, it provides a context in which we can discuss what is contained in those reports by requiring them to be made and requiring a motion to be presented to the House.

Given that other matters, which we debated at some length last week, have been added to the Bill since it was originally published—and have widened the scope of the Bill considerably beyond the original purpose solely relating to elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly—it seems to me even more important that we have the provisions in Lords amendment 1 in the Bill. But there is a problem that my amendment seeks to fix if the House is not sitting—for example, because it has been prorogued—on the dates by which the reports have to be made, and the crucial dates are 4 September and 9 October. My amendment simply seeks to make provision for the House to be recalled in those circumstances to allow the opportunity for us to consider the reports and debate the motions that arise from the Bill if Lords amendment 1 is accepted by the House.

I should say at this stage that probably not every Member of the House is entirely familiar with the provisions of the Meeting of Parliament Act 1797, but the most important thing to recall is that section 1 is still on the statute book. It has been used, most recently in section 68(10) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 and in section 28(1) of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004—indeed, the Civil Contingencies Act makes specific reference to the Meeting of Parliament Act 1797.

In other words, this amendment does not—I emphasise this—seek to establish a new constitutional principle. It simply seeks to use previous practice to make sure that Parliament is sitting when it needs to be sitting to debate these matters. As I hope the amendment makes clear, it would do so by requiring that Parliament be recalled on a specified day within the period in which compliance with subsection (2B) of Lords amendment 1 is required. In other words, the Minister would have to lay the report and the motion in neutral terms would have to be moved within the period of five calendar days, beginning with the end of the day on which the report was made. If my amendment is carried, we would be sitting in order to ensure that we had the

chance both to consider the report and, crucially, to debate the motion that has been presented. That is the single purpose of my amendment. It would be rather odd—would it not?—for the House to legislate to provide for these reports and motions on specified dates, only to find itself not being here to consider the reports and to debate the motions because of some other action, namely the fact that we might not be sitting.

My final point is this: everyone in the House is well aware that Brexit has significant implications for the country as a whole, but it will have particular implications for Northern Ireland, which the Exiting the European Union Committee has reported on and many Members on both sides of the House have spoken of. I suppose that this amendment has a secondary effect: to ensure that the House would be sitting at a crucial time for our country, as I believe the country would expect us to be. I do not think that we could accept circumstances, if I may coin the phrase, in which we were sent missing in action, and I hope that the House will support the amendment.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I rise simply to support the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and to explain why I added my name to amendment (a).

As the right hon. Gentleman concluded on the position of Northern Ireland—the springboard for the amendment—the implications of every decision taken by the United Kingdom in relation to Brexit are highly significant both for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. For us to be in the run-up to 31 October without those considerations being before the House seems genuinely very difficult, as it does when we go beyond that and consider that the House might not be sitting during the run-up to the date itself to consider all the other things. If we have felt under the weight of any pressure up to now, I venture to suggest to the House that that will be as nothing compared with the days leading up to 31 October if it is not clear where the country is going, either because a deal has been agreed or because the consequences of no deal have been sufficiently spelt out that everybody has been able to take a view. The idea that we might not be here to reflect those concerns and to take our own view on what the circumstances might be seems to me not only highly unlikely, but undesirable and preventable.

I have added my support for amendment (a), which strengthens the Anderson amendment agreed to in the other place and makes sure that we will be here to reflect the views of our constituents. Amendment (a) does not suggest how the House would vote when presented with a choice between a deal and no deal; it makes absolutely certain, in the absence of assurances, that we will be here then.

I commend to the House the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central.

12.30 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I rise to support the extremely sensible cross-party amendment so ably moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). It looks like a technical measure, and in many respects it is. We are dealing with circumstances that I thought I would never face as a Member of this

House; the unwritten constitutional norms that we have all accepted in our time in this place are being openly played and challenged by two people, one of whom will be an occupant of Downing Street by the end of next week, having been elected Prime Minister in an extremely mini poll of an extremely narrow number of people.

During the many hustings and debates in that election, the question has been posed of whether this Parliament should be prorogued—sent away—in an effort to get past the issue of its having three times voted against leaving the EU without a deal. The thought that Britain, a great democracy that helped to forge the post-war international rules-based system, should think of getting out of its treaty commitments by simply ripping them up and walking away, and turning its back on negotiation, would never have occurred to most of our predecessors in this place. Certainly, during the referendum, the idea that there could be no deal was not on the agenda; in fact, it was so off the agenda that it was not talked about at all. Those telling us that we should vote to leave the EU said that the deal would be the easiest in history. Nobody mentioned the phrase “no deal”.

Today, we see what the Office for Budget Responsibility—an independent economic forecasting outfit appointed by the Government—believes the economic consequences of no deal would be. It does not take a genius, or even someone with a degree in economics, to see from a quick look at the report how disastrous that would be: Britain would enter a recession, and our GDP would be 3% smaller, even in the initial phases.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): My hon. Friend has a degree in economics and a degree in politics. From her knowledge of political history and the constitution of this country, would she say that it would be an outrage if a Prime Minister sought to thwart the will of the House by proroguing Parliament?

Ms Eagle: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend and I were establishing our economic and political credentials at university at the same time. His judgment has only improved and matured over the years.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady agree that it is an outrage that this debate, which is supposed to be on the Northern Ireland Executive's formation, is being hijacked and turned into something to do with Brexit, and to do with every issue under the sun except the formation of the Executive, which now looks more unlikely as a result of this legislation?

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is right to be somewhat miffed about what he calls a hijack, but what I call a situation in which needs must. This is the longest parliamentary Session since the civil war, because the Government, who effectively have no majority, dare not prorogue Parliament, as they would then have to have a Queen's Speech, and they do not have one handy because the work has not been done. No Government Front Bencher knows whether they will be on the Front Bench next week. Some know that they definitely will not; I hope that that will free them up when they are in the voting Lobby a bit later. The lack of a chance to use a legislative vehicle to establish Parliament's rights has led

[*Ms Angela Eagle*]

us to this pass, so I understand the hon. Gentleman's feelings, but when a legislative vehicle passes, and it is the only one in a desert, and we desperately need to clamber aboard, then needs must.

Ian Paisley: You accept that this is an abuse.

Ms Eagle: I did not say that it was an abuse; I said that needs must. I understand the hon. Gentleman's irritation with the situation, but as this is the only legislative vehicle in sight, it is quite legitimate to try to use it to assert Parliament's rights on this matter.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend's speech. This is very much the right thing to do, and as she says, needs must. We face a serious crisis in this country, and it is right to bring forward amendment (a), however difficult that might be for some colleagues.

Ms Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for agreeing with me. Perhaps this should happen more regularly; perhaps we should try to get more agreement across the House, rather than having some people in one group and others in another, in little newly forming tribes, as hate and division take root in our society. I am one of those who think that compromise is a good idea.

The amendment is trying to put into law, albeit in a clumsy way, the constitutional convention that Parliament should decide matters of great import. It should not be sent away artificially by a Prime Minister with no electoral mandate whatever, and possibly no majority whatever, in order for them to accomplish one of the most far-reaching and controversial things in modern politics—our leaving the EU without a deal. That would entail a huge loss of legitimacy, which would divide the country much further still.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Does the hon. Lady feel, as I do, that when people look back on this debate and on this measure, they will find it quite extraordinary that we needed to have this discussion about whether the Parliament of the United Kingdom should be in session when the events of which she speaks are likely to occur?

Ms Eagle: I could not agree more with the right hon. Gentleman, and I commend his attempts, and those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), to ensure that Parliament was not in that position, by seeking to prevent a no-deal crash-out.

If we had a future Prime Minister who respected the rules and lines of our unwritten constitution and who did not wish to drive a coach and horses through them in the most controversial way possible, perhaps we would not have had to resort to this. If the future Prime Minister was conservative, and was interested in conserving the traditions and rights of this place, he would, in the first item of his leadership bid, rule out a no-deal Brexit by Prorogation of Parliament. Alas, not only has he not done that, but as the Tory leadership campaign has gone on, his rival has been dragged towards using Prorogation as a tactic to send Parliament home so that it cannot have a view.

Finally, I have already said that this is the longest Session of Parliament since the English civil war, and we are contemplating a new Tory Prime Minister who seems to believe that he can behave like a Stuart king. It did not end well in the century of the civil war, and I warn the next Prime Minister that it will not end well if he tries to do the same thing in the 21st century.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There are other colleagues who wish to speak. It would be a considerable discourtesy for anybody to speak for longer than five minutes, given that others also wish to contribute.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill is all about making sure that democracy works for the people of our country whom it serves. That is why I very much support it. However, it goes wider than that in practice. This country finds itself in a time of crisis—we all know that. Many people listening to this debate will be wondering why we are even having a summer recess and going away on holiday when there are so many unresolved issues in relation to Brexit. The simple act of passing the amendment to make sure that we do indeed sit as normal during September and October is, therefore, common sense and the House should get behind it. In no way does it try to curtail decisions that a Government or a Parliament might want to make—quite the reverse: it seeks to ensure that our parliamentary democracy can simply function as normal.

We should all reflect on the fact that this debate is even necessary in our country. What has Britain come to when we have to table amendments to ensure that Parliament can still operate? To those who say that shutting down Parliament is somehow a viable approach, I simply say: you do not win a debate by closing down the main Chamber in which the views of the people of this country are aired, and you do not unite a country by muzzling the people whom those communities have democratically elected to come here to represent them.

There are other practical reasons why we should support this common-sense amendment. We all know that this is a time of global political and economic instability. Are we really saying that this House would not be there to debate issues that might arise, just in case it had its say on the hugely important issue of Brexit or spoke with one voice about the Government's proposed course of action? It is entirely untenable—indeed, it is dangerous and extremely short-sighted—to shut down this Parliament at a time of so much uncertainty.

I will finish by saying that the amendment has to pass. If it does not, I fear that we will inadvertently cross the Rubicon for our parliamentary democracy. That would mean that if a Government ran up against an issue and were worried that the elected House of MPs might decide to stand up against them, they would just close it down. That is not in Britain's DNA. The rest of the world looks on and admires our democracy because it is such a fundamental part of how this country has developed. For that reason alone, we should get behind this amendment, which is about protecting the right of ordinary people up and down this country to have their MP come here and do their job of representing them, for good or for bad.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I want to get back to the Bill's original purpose. Representatives from Northern Ireland and our constituents have forcefully made the point that it is very disconcerting that a Bill that extends two dates to allow for talks, which are already under way, has been, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), hijacked for other purposes. Some of the debates are not even on issues that directly affect Northern Ireland, such as the change to the definition of marriage and the massive change on abortion, an issue on which there are strong feelings across the board—cross-party and cross-community—in Northern Ireland. Those views differ from those of the proponents—

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Ind) *rose*—

12.45 pm

Nigel Dodds: No, I do not have time. I only have five minutes, and everyone who wishes to speak will get a chance to do so.

Sadly, when it comes to Northern Ireland debates, the Chamber fills up and people take an interest only when it serves their purposes. I would like to see as many people take an interest in Northern Ireland affairs when we are debating issues that really affect and have a practical impact on the constituents whom we represent. The time devoted to discussing the substantial issues introduced in Committee and in the other place has been woefully short, given their gravity and impact.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 has provisions for consultation. If the Government introduced measures that sidestepped that, there would be outrage on the Opposition Benches and, indeed, on the Government Back Benches and on ours. All that has been cast aside, however, because the end justifies the means. Every parliamentary norm and every norm of consultation, consideration and the principle of devolution has been set aside.

People say that this place has a right to act constitutionally and legally. Of course it does, but the reality is that they are being very selective. We are legislating on some of the most contentious and divisive issues, on which there is no consensus, and leaving aside the hundreds of other issues on which there is consensus about the need for a common-sense approach and to take action. Either we have direct rule and legislate on all those areas, or we respect devolution—we cannot have it both ways—and I think we are running very close to the time when that clear choice will have to be made.

Sadly, the issues have been given very little time for discussion—a couple of hours on Monday, a couple of hours in the House of Lords and a few minutes here today. On the fundamental change to the law on abortion in Northern Ireland, Roman Catholics and Protestants, Unionists and nationalists take a very different view from that of many people in this House, but they have been left to one side. Their views have not been, and are not going to be, listened to as a result of the procedures that have been set out.

This House inserted an abortion provision, which has become clause 9, and it is being imposed on Northern Ireland, even though every Member for Northern Ireland who takes their seat in this House voted against it. The Lords has now rewritten the clause, so the 99 Members

who voted against it on Monday are now faced with a much more radical provision. It makes abortion legal for absolutely any reason, including gender and disability, until a legal presumption of 28 weeks.

There is a provision, of course, to account for viability under the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945—I accept that—but the fact of the matter is that the amendment tabled in the other place would remove the main provision in our law on 22 October without making any provision for a regulatory framework to replace it until the end of March. We will be in limbo between 22 October and 31 March. We may have guidelines, and I hope the Minister will say something about interim regulations to plug that gap.

This is a very serious situation and it is very difficult for most of our constituents—on all sides of the community—to comprehend it. Many people are outraged and very frustrated that this House has acted in this way. Of course it has the right to do so, but given the lack of time, consideration and consultation, to take such drastic steps on a matter of such import and concern, on which there is cross-community consensus on the need to take a more careful and different approach, is completely wrong.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to oppose the totally new Lords-amended clause 9. If the amendment is agreed to, Northern Ireland will have the most permissive abortion law in the British Isles.

The way in which the issue of abortion and, indeed, the Bill has been handled has been, I believe, unconstitutional, undemocratic, legally incoherent and utterly disrespectful to the people of Northern Ireland, yet the Government are pressing on today with just a derisory one hour's debate. That is despite the fact that abortion is a devolved policy area and a hugely controversial issue, and despite the shamefully limited scrutiny time we have already had.

The decision to fast-track the Bill was considered contentious even in respect of its limited original purposes. The Lords Constitution Committee recently discouraged the use of fast-tracking in the context of Northern Ireland legislation, except for urgent matters. The amendments to change the substantive law on abortion and, indeed, marriage were outside the scope of the Bill and should never have been debated in this place. What are the constitutional implications for the respect of scope for future parliamentary Bills? It is well known that these matters are of particular sensitivity in Northern Ireland.

Nick Boles: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, I am a relatively new Member, but I thought that the determination of what was or was not in scope was for you, Sir, not for us.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct. I am exercising some latitude from the Chair. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) is a very committed parliamentarian and she is opining on these matters, and I am very content that she should do so. I am equally content to take the opportunity to assert that there is nothing disorderly whatsoever about these proceedings. I have exercised my judgment and responsibility in the way that I think fit in order to facilitate the House. There is nothing—I repeat: nothing—unconstitutional or improper about that, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Fiona Bruce: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to put my opinion on the record in respect of the way the Bill has been extended beyond what I believe what was its original intention. Indeed, I spoke to that effect when it was discussed in the House only a few days ago.

As I say, the laws in this subject area are of great importance to the people of Northern Ireland, many of whom celebrate the fact that 100,000 people are alive in Northern Ireland today as a result of the abortion laws there being different from those here. There has been no consultation with the people of Northern Ireland or their elected representatives on this issue. The democratically elected representatives in Northern Ireland voted not to change the abortion law there in any way as recently as 2016. As such, Northern Ireland's primary legislation in this policy area enjoys a more democratic recent sanction than that in any other part of the UK: 100% of the Northern Ireland MPs present voted against attempts to change the abortion law just a few days ago.

Yesterday, I had the privilege to deliver personally a letter to the Prime Minister from Northern Ireland MPs, peers, MLAs and 17,000 other residents of Northern Ireland. I have a copy of it with me, and it asks for the withdrawal of this Bill, which the Northern Ireland Attorney General has said is "unclear and inconsistent" with regard to human rights issues. There is a covering note from Baroness O'Loan—I pay tribute to her and the speech she made in the other place on this issue—in which she says:

"Please do not ignore the concerns of so many, articulated in a couple of days"—

the signatures were gathered in just a few days—

"in response to the fast tracked NI Bill."

The letter requests that the Bill be reconsidered.

I understand that what has actually happened following the original amendments to the Bill on the issue of abortion is that rather than moving to minimise the constitutional concerns expressed in this place about those changes and the way that Parliament had treated the people of Northern Ireland just a few days ago, Government representatives have met sponsors of the out-of-scope amendments—it is my opinion that they are, Mr Speaker—and worked with them to enhance the efficacy of the provisions.

So much for respecting the human rights of the people of Northern Ireland in terms of their freedom of expression, speech and belief. Let them decide on such sensitive issues. We talk here about the importance of not being colonial, but what is this? Is this what the new colonialism looks like? I will not support clause 9 and I will not support the Bill with clause 9 in it.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say what the Government should have done, which was to preserve the integrity of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, respect the Sewel convention and uphold the integrity of the Bill in its intended limited format.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I rise simply to support the amendment; however, like others, I regret the need for it. It is needed because of the position adopted by one person—the person who will be our next Prime Minister, who, if I recall correctly, did in fact campaign for parliamentary sovereignty but is now dangling the threat of abolishing Parliament over our heads. Even dictators in banana republics are reluctant to deploy that threat. It is shameful.

Mr Speaker: Has the right hon. Gentleman concluded his oration?

Tom Brake *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: He has. We are deeply grateful to him.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I have considerable sympathy with the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) and, indeed, with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who both expressed their concern that the House is legislating on Northern Ireland matters. As we have set up a devolved Assembly and Executive, many of the matters with which we are concerned today now are, or should be, the province of that Assembly and that Executive, but good governance cannot exist in the condition of paralysis. Indeed, what we have seen with the passage of this Bill is that this House—very properly, because it is our duty—is paying some attention to the vacuum that exists in the Northern Ireland context, not only in wanting to see an Executive set up but in looking in the meantime at areas where there are concerns about, for example, the law as it currently exists. It is an imperfect way of doing it, but it is not an illegitimate one now.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP) *rose—*

Mr Grieve: Before I give way, let me just add that the House should be perfectly aware that I abstained on the amendments concerning abortion and same-sex marriage precisely for that reason, but I do not think that it is illegitimate of Members of this House to feel that the time has come to express a view in the absence of an Administration.

Let me turn to the issues relating to Lords amendment 1, which I support, and the amendment to it proposed by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). We face an extraordinary situation. To do its business, the House has to sit. It is perfectly normal for the House to assert that it wants, at various times, to be able to consider issues, particularly in the Northern Ireland context, in which the situation changes rapidly. Yet we have been confronted with a most unusual situation: there is a suggestion that there would be periods when, for other reasons, we would be prevented from sitting. We are responsible for ensuring, or trying to ensure, good governance. I think that is why we have the portcullis as our symbol: we are supposed to be the protectors of the nation.

Sir Oliver Letwin: I hope my right hon. and learned Friend might be willing, particularly as he is a former Attorney General, to join me in stating specifically, for *Pepper v. Hart* purposes, that the intention of those who have been involved in the preparation of the amendment is uniformly to ensure that it absolutely and explicitly blocks the use of the prerogative power to prorogue our Parliament.

Mr Grieve: Yes, I am entirely happy to make that assertion, because when I realised that it was an issue, I also realised that it was a threat to the good governance of this country and, indeed, to the good governance of Northern Ireland in the run-up to setting up the Executive, which I very much hope will come into being very quickly. That is precisely why we have endeavoured to

do it in a manner that is wholly compatible with the Meeting of Parliament Act 1797, as was pointed out, while making it clear that, in the particular context of this legislation, this House wishes to emphasise that Prorogation is not a reason why it should not be meeting to consider these matters on the day appointed.

For those reasons, I commend this amendment to the House, and I shall be supporting it. I also agree with what has been said by others that, if we do not make such an assertion in the light of the extraordinary statements that have been made about how our business might be conducted, our role as that protector of our democracy will be seen to be shot to pieces.

1 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): This Bill is an outrage. It is an outrage to common decency in Northern Ireland; it is an outrage because, so far today, with the exception of my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), no one has actually debated its clauses with regard to Northern Ireland. Instead, the Bill has been hijacked and used as a vehicle for every other subject under the sun and every other fancy that Members have with regard to their own pet subjects, important though they are. It is wrong that Northern Ireland will now be subjected to serious and perverse changes to its laws without proper scrutiny, without proper negotiation and without proper regulation.

Some 66% of the people of Northern Ireland have rejected the fact that Parliament should have a say on the matters that are under discussion in clause 9. In fact, they have said that they should be left to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The fact of the matter is that the Bill makes it less likely that a Northern Ireland Assembly will actually be put in place to negotiate, to debate and to legislate on these matters. As has already been said, 17,000 people have signed a letter opposing what is being done today. If we read that across to the British mainland, that is the equivalent of 500,000 signing a petition in a matter of four days.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend share my view that those who say that we must have some governance for Northern Ireland have interfered not only in the devolution settlement, but in a way that makes the law on abortion in Northern Ireland even more draconian than that in the United Kingdom? That is the one part of the United Kingdom where people do not want to see changes in the law on abortion.

Ian Paisley: The changes that are being proposed and that will affect Northern Ireland are the most extreme laws that will ever affect anyone in the whole United Kingdom with regards to abortion. Those laws will allow the termination of life at the point of birth—*[Interruption.]* Yes, they do. Those laws will allow the termination of life on a point of disability; and those laws will allow the termination of life based on the sex of the child—laws that are prohibited in this part of the United Kingdom, but that Members will inflict in our part of the United Kingdom to make a cheap political point. How cheap do they hold life? They appear to hold it very low indeed.

I think of the life of a young girl called Grace in Northern Ireland whose parents were told several weeks before her birth that, because of a chromosome disorder,

her life should be terminated. That child is 15 years of age. She is a remarkable young woman, one of the highest achievers in her school—indeed, beyond that, she is a high achiever in life itself—yet today this House wants to destroy her life and would like to destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of other unborn lives.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): I am one of the signatories to amendment (a) and am therefore rising to support it and the Lords amendments. This is, in fact, the first time that I have spoken on Northern Ireland matters in 14 years in this House, but let me put on record my huge affection for Northern Ireland. I have many friends who live in Northern Ireland and I regularly visit. In fact, let me put it on the record that I bought my first ever lottery ticket on the day of the lottery launch in Ballymena. As Culture Minister, I have visited Derry/Londonderry, which I am pleased to say was the first UK capital of culture, and of course I have visited Belfast many times, not least the Titanic Quarter which has become a fantastic creative hub for Northern Ireland and is where “Game of Thrones” was filmed.

I should also put it on record that it is a matter of profound regret to me that in the past eight weeks of leadership hustings, the two leadership candidates have not visited a single museum, art centre, theatre, architecture firm, design company or film studio, or indeed barely mentioned the fantastic success of the creative industries not only in Northern Ireland, but in the whole of the UK.

One reason why this is the first time I have spoken on Northern Ireland matters is that of course Northern Ireland matters are meant to be devolved. I therefore have enormous sympathy with the points that have been made by the members of the Democratic Unionist party and, indeed, by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), but the fact remains that there is no Executive in residence in Northern Ireland, and there has not been for some considerable time, which is why we are debating Northern Ireland matters—*[Interruption.]* I wonder whether I have got something wrong, given Mr Speaker’s expression. On the issues of abortion and, indeed, of equal marriage, I have to say to my friends in the DUP that if these matters do come up for debate in this House—and they were conscience votes and free votes—they should not be surprised at all if English Members and Members from other parts of the Union express a view. We also know that those amendments have been put down in such a way that no legislation, no change to the law, will happen if a devolved Executive return to Government.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Although the right hon. Gentleman references that there is no devolved Assembly currently in Northern Ireland, what we do know is the will of that Northern Ireland Assembly. Up until this point, the Northern Ireland Assembly has never voted, across all the parties, to liberalise abortion laws in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he should not require more than another couple of minutes.

Mr Vaizey: Mr Speaker is exactly right. Having just dealt with the points about abortion and equal marriage in about 30 seconds, let me use the final 30 seconds of my remarks on amendment (a).

[Mr Vaizey]

I am sure that my friends in the DUP will welcome the fact that we are amending this legislation to ensure that, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) mentioned, in the fast-moving environment of Northern Irish politics, where we stand as friends to good governance in Northern Ireland, we want to ensure that this House is ready and able to sit to debate these matters. That is why it is vital that we support this amendment. Those who say that this Bill has been hijacked by Brexit have, in fact, missed the point of the amendment, which is to ensure that we continue to debate these important matters in the months ahead.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I rise to offer the SNP's support for both Lords amendment 1 and the amendment tabled to it by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn).

President Tusk asked the UK not to waste its time. Instead, this Government have been self-indulgent, focusing on internal machinations and the leadership election, all while this zombie Parliament is left cooling its heels instead of getting on with the job of dealing with Brexit.

The UK Government's own analysis shows the catastrophic impact that a no-deal outcome would have, yet some on the Government Benches are still quoting no deal. The default should be to revoke article 50, not to impose a no-deal Brexit. There would be a democratic constitutional crisis were the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) to prorogue Parliament. Last week, I said that, given the fact that a clear majority of MPs are opposed to the UK leaving without a deal, the Prorogation of Parliament to facilitate a no-deal would be unconstitutional, undemocratic and entirely untenable. The fact that the Prime Minister in waiting, only elevated to office by Conservative party members, refuses to rule this out tells me that he is unfit for high office.

The Government's own assessment shows that no deal could leave the UK economy up to 9% smaller after 15 years and that two of the worst hit areas economically in a no-deal scenario would be Scotland with an 8% hit to GDP and Northern Ireland itself with a hit to GDP of over 9%. Mark Carney, and pretty much everybody else if we are honest, refuted the unsubstantiated suggestion of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip that the WTO—general agreement on tariffs and trade—arrangements would enable the UK to avoid EU tariffs in the event of a no deal. David Watt, lately of the Institute of Directors, said:

"Frankly, it's difficult to imagine a policy that inflicts more economic harm on the UK and Scotland. The fact that we've inflicted this on ourselves simply beggars belief."

The chief executive of Make UK, representing British manufacturers, said that

"it would be the height of economic lunacy to take the UK out of the EU with no deal in place."

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: Sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

The Chancellor himself said that leaving with no deal would mean

"Higher unemployment, lower wages and higher prices in the shops"—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 347.]

That is not what the British people voted for in June 2016.

It is clear that neither contender for Conservative leader fully understands the implications of Brexit, or perhaps they simply do not care. Scotland has repeatedly demanded a separate course of action in every vote since the referendum, but this Government have ignored us at every turn. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government will not ignore the people of Scotland.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I will begin by making a central point about the Northern Ireland nature of the Bill. The UK Parliament, in the absence of a devolved Assembly, cannot ignore its constitutional duty to act on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. Let me also say to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) that to accuse women like Sarah Ewart and Denise Phelan of being part of a cheap political stunt is outrageous and unworthy of this House.

Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I say many things in this House, but I have not said the words that have been attributed to me from the Labour Front Bench and that should be withdrawn.

Mr Speaker: I do not recall what the position was, but if a Front Bench, like any Member, has erred, it is incumbent on that Member to make the appropriate correction.

Tony Lloyd: Mr Speaker, I will check the record, and where appropriate I will apologise to the hon. Member for North Antrim. However, he certainly cast aspersions about cheap politics in his remarks. Let me make some progress because we have very little time.

The remedy for all these things lies in the hands of the Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. When that Assembly decides to meet and the Executive are reformed, they can take the power to abrogate the bulk of what lies on the face of the Bill. This House has made that very clear commitment to the system of devolution and to the people of Northern Ireland.

I commend the words of the noble Lord Duncan, the Minister in the other House, who has talked about the need to make progress on the question of historical institutional abuse, saying:

"There is urgency... I will commit, in the absence of a sitting Assembly, to the Government introducing primary legislation on historical institutional abuse before the end of the year"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 July 2019; Vol. 798, c. 138.]

That is a very welcome commitment by the noble Lord on behalf of the Government.

I will confine my last few remarks to Lords amendment 1 and the manuscript amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). This is a massively important constitutional issue. In a parliamentary democracy, no Parliament can abrogate both the right to sit and to take action, particularly against the constitutional challenge that a no-deal Brexit would pose and especially in the light of the fact that there will be a Prime Minister who will have a mandate not from the public in general but from a very narrow base within one political party. It is simply unconscionable that this House would not sit.

I say very firmly to my friends in this House from Northern Ireland that they have to recognise that there is nowhere in this United Kingdom of ours that will be more affected by a no-deal Brexit than Northern Ireland. I hope the Minister will respond to my next point, which is that if we are moving to no deal as we get towards October, the Government will have to introduce direct rule in the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly to effect the legislation to allow for that no-deal Brexit to take place. In that sense, this House must be in a position to meet to transform the law to protect the people of Northern Ireland against the possibility of that no-deal Brexit. This is not grafted on to Northern Ireland legislation; it is absolutely fundamental to the future of the people of Northern Ireland. That is why Her Majesty's loyal Opposition will be supporting the manuscript amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and any consequential amendments.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (John Penrose): I agree with the comments made by a number of colleagues on both sides of the House that this was originally a very simple three-clause Bill to change just two dates, and it is now garlanded with baubles; it is a Christmas tree with tinsel, twinkling lights and a honking great star on top to boot. That said, the Government are willing to accept most of the Lords amendments requiring reports to be laid before Parliament on progress towards a whole host of important issues such as transparency, political donations and loans, gambling, suicide prevention and much else.

1.15 pm

I do not propose to go in huge detail through all the various amendments being accepted, other than to respond to the leader of the DUP here, the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), who specifically asked whether we will end up with some sort of gap in the legal coverage around the abortion amendments—a matter that, as we all know, is an issue of conscience. I reassure him that he is right to say a number of other statutes will persist, notably the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, which he mentioned. The Government will try to ensure that we bring forward the new regime as quickly as possible to minimise any gaps that might occur, to create a seamless transition and to issue guidelines and advice to medical professionals and others to minimise any problems. We look forward to working on and discussing that with him and other people in Northern Ireland in depth, as necessary, to ensure that we come up with a safe transition from today to the intended outcome.

On Lords amendment 1, I have two narrow but important constitutional criticisms and a broader comment. I will start with the narrow criticisms. I appreciate that constitutional niceties and procedures are not everybody's cup of tea, but it is worth pointing out that parts of this amendment have already been defeated in the Commons and the rest was ruled out of scope before it even got here. And yet, here we are—being asked to include it because the unelected Lords decided that we should. I urge colleagues on both sides of the House to send a respectful but firm message that we appreciate the Lords views and will have nothing further to do with it on this occasion.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

John Penrose: I have very little time. I will take one intervention, from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), but I will then have to make progress.

Mr Baron: May I just remind the Minister that this amendment has been tabled by those who voted to remain? Speaking as someone who voted to leave and is in a minority in this place, I can assure the Minister that we on our side of the referendum debate would in no way countenance a Prorogation of Parliament, so in many respects these people are tilting at windmills.

John Penrose: I will come to broader comments about the background politics in a second, but my hon. Friend has made his point.

I should also point out that, alone among the various amendments that we are discussing, this one has little to do with Northern Ireland and everything to do with Brexit. All the other amendments deal with important issues specific to Northern Ireland: same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland; abortion in Northern Ireland; suicide prevention in Northern Ireland. But not this one.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister give way on that point?

John Penrose: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

This amendment attempts to bind the UK Parliament for a UK-wide issue. That breaches a pretty important precedent: that we try, at least, to work on a cross-community consensual basis when it comes to Northern Ireland because the sensitivities and the risks are so great, so significant, that it would be irresponsible and dangerous to play political games in such a charged arena.

Furthermore, in this case the Bill stands a decent chance of never becoming law, if the Stormont Assembly restarts before Royal Assent; I am delighted to report that the talks were ongoing yesterday and I believe that they are continuing today. I am sure that everybody here wishes them every success. If the Stormont Assembly restarts before Royal Assent, not only is the amendment dangerously partisan—weaponising a Northern Ireland Bill for Brexit in a way that we usually, rightly, try to avoid—but it could easily put us through all that grief for no good reason at all if it fails to become law. The change would set a constitutional precedent that could last for centuries whether we intend it to or not. We should not do it like this—not in this Bill, and not in this way.

I have directly opposed the specifics of the amendment; I now come to a broader point about the politics behind it, which should inform all of us as we decide how we will vote in a minute. I am sure that we are all democrats here: first, last and always. Even though I and many others originally voted remain in the EU referendum three years ago, I have since become, like many others, a strong and doughty backer of the democratic decision to leave. Many of us would far prefer to leave with a sensible deal, but if that is not possible and it comes down to a choice between no deal and no Brexit, then,

[John Penrose]

reluctantly but firmly, I choose no deal. [Interruption.] I do not have time to give way; I am down to my last 90 seconds.

Many colleagues on both sides of the House, including a couple of signatories to the amendment, now feel the same way. We have been going at this for three years. The country sent us all a very clear message at the polls in May that they want this done. We have reached a narrowing funnel where our choices are getting fewer and fewer, and we are running out of road. The time, and voters' tolerance for our failing to address that central issue, is running out. For many of us, the problem with the amendment is not about more or less democracy; it is that it is pretending to be democratic but in reality it is trying to prevent the democratic referendum decision from ever happening at all.

I have a challenge for the backers of this amendment; it will be hugely reassuring to moderate, former remainder Brexiteers such as myself. If it finally comes down, this autumn, to the stark and simple choice between no deal and no Brexit, which will you choose? Will you promise to honour the democratic decision or will you not? If you cannot make that commitment and that pledge, I am afraid that voters will conclude that this is a stitch-up—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

John Penrose: Voters will conclude that this is a clever piece of procedure that pretends to care about democracy, but in reality is trying to prevent a decision that has already been taken from ever happening at all.

1.22 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on Lords amendments, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, 8 July).

The Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83F), That amendment (a) to Lords amendment 1 be made.

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 274.

Division No. 436]

[1.22 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Black, Mhairi
Abrahams, Debbie	Blackford, rh Ian
Ali, Rushanara	Blackman, Kirsty
Allen, Heidi	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Blomfield, Paul
Amesbury, Mike	Boles, Nick
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Brabin, Tracy
Ashworth, Jonathan	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brake, rh Tom
Bardell, Hannah	Brennan, Kevin
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Brine, Steve
Bebb, Guto	Brock, Deidre
Beckett, rh Margaret	Brown, Alan
Benn, rh Hilary	Brown, Lyn
Berger, Luciana (Proxy vote cast by Mr Gavin Shuker)	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Betts, Mr Clive	Bryant, Chris
	Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard	George, Ruth
Burton, Richard	Gethins, Stephen
Burt, rh Alistair	Gibson, Patricia
Butler, Dawn	Gill, Preet Kaur
Byrne, rh Liam	Glendon, Mary
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Cadbury, Ruth	Goodman, Helen
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Grady, Patrick
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Grant, Peter
Carden, Dan	Gray, Neil
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Green, Kate
Champion, Sarah	Greening, rh Justine
Chapman, Douglas	Greenwood, Lilian
Chapman, Jenny	Greenwood, Margaret
Charalambous, Bambos	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Cherry, Joanna	Griffith, Nia
Clwyd, rh Ann	Grogan, John
Coaker, Vernon	Gwynne, Andrew
Cooper, Julie	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Cooper, Rosie	Haigh, Louise
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hamilton, Fabian
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hanson, rh David
Cowan, Ronnie	Hardy, Emma
Coyle, Neil	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Crausby, Sir David	Harrington, Richard
Crawley, Angela	Harris, Carolyn
Creagh, Mary	Hayes, Helen
Creasy, Stella	Hayman, Sue
Cruddas, Jon	Healey, rh John
Cryer, John	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Cummins, Judith	Hendry, Drew
Cunningham, Alex	Hermon, Lady
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hill, Mike
Daby, Janet	Hillier, Meg
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Hobhouse, Wera
David, Wayne	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Davies, Geraint	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Day, Martyn	Hollern, Kate
De Cordova, Marsha	Hopkins, Kelvin
De Piero, Gloria	Hosie, Stewart
Dent Coad, Emma	Howarth, rh Sir George
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Huq, Dr Rupa
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hussain, Imran
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	James, Margot
Dodds, Anneliese	Jardine, Christine
Doughty, Stephen	Jarvis, Dan
Dowd, Peter	Johnson, Diana
Drew, Dr David	Jones, Darren
Dromey, Jack	Jones, Gerald
Duffield, Rosie	Jones, Graham P.
Eagle, Ms Angela	Jones, Helen
Eagle, Maria	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Edwards, Jonathan	Jones, Ruth
Efford, Clive	Jones, Sarah
Elliott, Julie	Jones, Susan Elan
Ellman, Dame Louise	Kane, Mike
Elmore, Chris	Keeley, Barbara
Esterson, Bill	Kendall, Liz
Evans, Chris	Khan, Afzal
Farron, Tim	Killen, Ged
Fellows, Marion	Kinnock, Stephen
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Kyle, Peter
Fletcher, Colleen	Laird, Lesley
Flint, rh Caroline	Lake, Ben
Forbes, Lisa	Lamb, rh Norman
Fovargue, Yvonne	Lammy, rh Mr David
Foxcroft, Vicky	Lavery, Ian
Frith, James	Law, Chris
Furniss, Gill	Lee, Karen
Gaffney, Hugh	Lee, Dr Phillip
Gapes, Mike	Lefroy, Jeremy
Gardiner, Barry	Leslie, Mr Chris

Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Masterton, Paul
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Newton, Sarah
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 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 (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Pat McFadden)
 Reynolds, Jonathan

Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 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
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Nic Dakin

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
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Steve Baker)
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert (*Proxy vote*
cast by Tom Pursglove)
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 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
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
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, rh Dr Andrew
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
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
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic

Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast
by Jo Churchill*)
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
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
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:
Mark Spencer and
Jeremy Quin

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 1.

The Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1, as amended.—(John Penrose.)

The House divided: Ayes 273, Noes 315.

Division No. 437]

[1.40 pm

AYES

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
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Steve Baker*)
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert (*Proxy vote
cast by Tom Pursglove*)
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
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
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter

Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
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, rh Dr Andrew
Nokes, rh Caroline

Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
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
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast
by Jo Churchill*)
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
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
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

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
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Gavin Shuker*)
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
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela

Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Spencer and
Jeremy Quin

NOES

Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
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
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Forbes, Lisa
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret

Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
James, Margot
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
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
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Mr Chris
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Masterton, Paul
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
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
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, rh Joan
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
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
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debonnaire and
Nic Dakin

Question accordingly negated.

Lords amendment 1, as amended, agreed to.

*Motion made, and Question put, That this House
agrees with Lords amendments 2 to 18.—(John Penrose.)*

The House divided: Ayes 328, Noes 65.

Division No. 438]

[1.56 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Andrew, Stuart
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Gavin Shuker*)
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bowie, Andrew
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brine, Steve
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
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Mims
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Forbes, Lisa
 Ford, Vicky
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frazer, Lucy
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Ruth
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Green, Kate
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Haigh, Louise
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Carolyn
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 James, Margot
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Keegan, Gillian
 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
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Maclean, Rachel
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mak, Alan
 Malhotra, Seema
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Matheson, Christian
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Merriman, Huw
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Philp, Chris
 Pidcock, Laura
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Powell, Lucy
 Quince, Will
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skidmore, Chris
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
Mike Freer and
Matt Warman

NOES

Amess, Sir David
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Blackman, Bob
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Steve Baker*)
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bruce, Fiona
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clarke, Mr Simon
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Elphicke, Charlie
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Girvan, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Hayes, rh Sir John
Hoey, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Hughes, Eddie
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jones, rh Mr David
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kerr, Stephen

Knight, rh Sir Greg
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Little Pengelly, Emma
Mackinlay, Craig
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Damien
Paisley, Ian
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Stewart, Bob
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Tomlinson, Michael
Vickers, Martin
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilson, rh Sammy
Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson and
Gavin Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 18 agreed to.

Points of Order

2.10 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think convention says that a Bill that has got this far in both Houses is rightfully the property of Parliament rather than the Executive. Both Houses have spoken very clearly about the constitutional nature of this Bill, and you have ruled that it is completely in order. However, there are rumours—perhaps fallacious—that the Government are thinking of pulling the Bill. Can you confirm, Mr Speaker, that that would be unconscionable and unacceptable, and that you would not be supportive of any such move?

Mr Speaker: I think that it would be quite extraordinary, but I have no expectation of it, and I am fortified, reinforced and encouraged in my view by the clear sedentary head-shaking of no less a figure than the Patronage Secretary, aided and abetted by the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose). They are both signalling that the Government have no intention of abandoning the Bill, and the Chief Whip, having shaken his head, is now in a position, if he so wishes, to nod his assent to the proposition that I have just made.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (John Penrose): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I, on his behalf, confirm that?

Mr Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) is satisfied. I thank the occupants of the Treasury Bench.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Bill that we have just debated contains clauses inviting the Government to make progress towards the implementation of a “severely injured” pension for victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. There has been considerable distress in Northern Ireland because of concerns about the criteria, and a report has suggested that terrorists who went out to murder and maim and ended up injuring themselves may be eligible for such a pension. Unfortunately, we have not had an opportunity to debate those issues today owing to the nature of the proceedings. While I welcome the comments of Lord Duncan in the other place, may I ask whether there will be any opportunities—perhaps next week—for these matters to be aired, debated and hopefully answered in this House? I should be very much obliged.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, to which the answer is yes: there could well be such opportunities. The hon. Lady would not expect me to commit myself now—on the hoof, if you will—in respect of the form that such an opportunity might take, but we have four sitting days next week before we rise for the summer recess. This is a matter of the utmost importance, and, indeed, considerable sensitivity. In the short time during which I have come to know the hon. Lady, I have come to be aware of how dexterous she is in the use of parliamentary time, and if she wishes to take her opportunities, I think that she will not be disappointed.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It concerns the decision that the House has now taken to decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland by repealing sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. This means that the abortion law in Northern Ireland will be more liberal than in England and Wales. Women will no longer be subject to criminal sanction in Northern Ireland, but, of course, the law has not been repealed for women in England and Wales, who remain subject to the criminal law. If, for example, they buy abortion tablets on the internet, they can still face prosecution. I wonder, Mr Speaker, whether the Government have given any indication that they will make a statement to the House next week to ensure that women in England and Wales are treated as fairly now as we hope they will be in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: I have not yet received any such indication, but, as I indicated in response to the previous point of order, there is time for these matters to be aired. There could be a Government statement, but in the absence thereof, there are other ways in which to secure parliamentary time. I think I would command the assent of the House if I said of the hon. Lady that the word “indefatigable” could have been invented to describe her campaigning zeal. I am very confident that if she wishes to raise the matter in the Chamber next week, she will be able to do so.

If there are no further points of order—and I thank colleagues for their interest, attention and patience—we will now come to the Back-Bench motion on the Bishop of Truro’s report on the persecution of Christians overseas. We are already having to start this debate later than any of us would have liked. The occupant of the Chair who succeeds me will do his best to protect the time for it, and it would be appreciated if colleagues who wish to conduct conversations on other matters would leave the Chamber quickly and quietly, so that those who wish to get on with this important debate can do so unimpeded and with appropriate attention.

Backbench Business

Persecution of Christians Overseas

2.16 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the persecution of Christians overseas; supports freedom of religion or belief in all countries throughout the world; welcomes the work undertaken by the Bishop of Truro in this area; and calls on the Government to do more with the diplomatic and other tools at its disposal to prevail on the governments of countries in which persecution of Christians is tolerated or encouraged to end that persecution and to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief.

I thank, especially, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for their work in securing the debate. I congratulate the Bishop of Truro on his report, which was published 10 days ago. I also thank Open Doors and Aid to the Church in Need for their tireless work on this issue.

Around the world, there are horrifying stories of Christians being attacked and often killed, of churches being destroyed and of Christians being persecuted and prevented from worshipping. This is happening on an industrial scale in multiple countries. Often, the Governments in those countries turn a blind eye, or are even responsible for the persecution themselves. Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. The International Society of Human Rights says that 80% of religious persecution in the world is against Christians. Open Doors estimates that 245 million Christians around the world—one in nine—face persecution. Here are some examples.

In April 2017, a young Nigerian woman, Dorkas Zakka, was murdered, along with 12 others, simply for attending an Easter mass. Local priest Father Alexander Yeycock said that Nigerian military units stood by and did nothing while the murders took place. In November 2017, in Mina, Egypt, a mob surrounded a Coptic church threatening worshippers inside, many of whom were also physically attacked. Local Coptic leader Anba Macarius said that the Egyptian authorities had done nothing to bring those responsible to justice.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is describing very accurately what is happening to Christians across the world. Given the involvement of the authorities in the two countries that he has mentioned, and in many other countries—countries to which we give considerable aid in the form of money, expert advice and so on—does he believe that the Government could put more pressure on them by withdrawing that aid, or at least threatening to do so?

Chris Philp: Yes, I completely agree with that point and will discuss it shortly. We give lots of money to countries where the Governments themselves are turning a blind eye to, or even themselves actively encouraging or carrying out, persecution, and we should be attaching conditions to the aid we give and in extreme cases even withdrawing it entirely; I therefore agree completely with the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes.

[Chris Philp]

In Pakistan, Christian woman Asia Bibi was sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. She is now in safety in Canada, but the very cell in which she was incarcerated now holds Shagufta Kausar, a Christian 45-year-old mother of four who was sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2014; the very cell that Asia Bibi was held in now contains another Christian woman, also under sentence of death.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I welcome what my hon. Friend is saying. He mentioned the issue of Asia Bibi and Pakistan. Many in this House have said from the very beginning of that case that Asia was being persecuted for her faith and that countries around the world, in line with their religious belief and commitment, should have offered her asylum. The United Kingdom should have done that; we did not. Does my hon. Friend agree that after this report our foreign policy must change, so that rather than hiving off our responsibility on religious freedom to Canada and other countries, we should offer asylum to those being persecuted like Asia Bibi?

Chris Philp: That is a question that requires very serious consideration, and of course there are many persecuted Christians from countries such as Iraq and Syria who might wish to seek asylum as well.

Last year, again in Pakistan, Suneel Saleem was beaten to death by a group of doctors—a group of doctors—in the Services hospital in Lahore when he protested about the anti-Christian abuse his heavily pregnant sister had suffered at the hospital. The US State Department says that the Pakistani Government themselves have

“engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom”.

Yet, just a few weeks ago Pakistan’s Foreign Minister speaking in Brussels dismissed concerns as being “whipped up” by “western interests.” His attitude is not acceptable, especially bearing in mind that the UK Government send £463 million a year in aid to Pakistan—it is the single biggest recipient of UK overseas aid, but we do not attach conditions about ending persecution of religious minorities.

The litany of persecution goes on. In May 2017, two churches in Sudan were destroyed on the orders of the Government. In June 2017, some 33 Christian women in Eritrea were imprisoned by the Eritrean Government simply for taking part in prayer. And in India, 24,000 Christians were physically assaulted last year. Prime Minister Modi dismissed that as “imaginary fears”; he is wrong and we should say so.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech on a very important issue. Does he agree that we must also be very careful that individuals in this country have freedom of religious belief, particularly given the level of abuse and intolerance following the votes last week on abortion? Does he also agree that we should decry the fact that at St Vincent de Paul parish in East Kilbride in my constituency parishioners arrived this morning to find that their Our Lady of the Grotto had been destroyed by mindless vandals? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that these issues are also troubling people across the United Kingdom?

Chris Philp: The hon. Lady is right. Of course, the first place that we should champion and protect religious freedom is here in the United Kingdom; that is of course our first duty as Members of Parliament, but let us not forget the duty we also owe to persecuted minorities around the world—to stand up and protect them as well.

In Saudi Arabia, public places of Christian worship are banned. There are regular crackdowns and raids on private Christian ceremonies, and Christians in Saudi Arabia are regularly imprisoned. Saudi Arabian schools use textbooks that teach hatred against Christians and Jews, and the country’s Grand Mufti recently said that Christianity is not a religion.

Christians are often a target for religious extremists. The terrible attack in Sri Lanka at Easter this year saw 259 people murdered by Islamist extremists, and on Palm Sunday in Egypt in 2017 ISIS bombers murdered 45 Coptic Christians. In Pakistan the year before, again at Easter, the Taliban murdered 75 Christians. These are just a few of the terrible examples of the persecution and murder that Christians around the world are suffering.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case, and the Bishop of Truro’s report is a very strong one, but I am sure that my hon. Friend would also recognise that there are terrible cases of persecution against other religions elsewhere in the world, of which that against the Muslim Rohingya in Burma is one of worst recent examples. Does he agree that there are cases about religions in general that the Foreign Office should also be considering in its policy?

Chris Philp: Yes, of course the Foreign Office should take a strong position on the persecution of any religious minorities, and of course the persecution of the Rohingya Muslims in Burma is a particularly egregious example. I am certainly not saying that we should ignore other examples of persecution, but I am drawing the House’s attention to the fact that 80% of religious persecution around the world is committed against Christians, and we should be mindful of that.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I completely agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about this situation, which is deeply horrific. I, too, spoke on an Open Doors panel, at the Labour party conference last year. He mentioned Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; does he accept that there is a fundamental problem here in that we have a series of alliances and relationships with these countries, but often turn a blind eye to the fact that they are persecuting Christians and indeed other religious minorities? Does he also agree that there is another problem in that we often do not know how many Christians are even in those countries, because people are fearful of stating what their religion is in the first place?

Chris Philp: I agree with both points—not knowing how many people are affected and the fact that we have quite close relationships with some of these countries.

For western Governments to fail to act makes us in many ways complicit in some of these outrages. As the noble Lord Alton has argued many times, failing to stand up to protect minorities simply serves to encourage the persecutors. Lord Alton has often referred to the fact that the world’s indifference made possible the slaughter

of 1.5 million Christian Armenians between 1915 and 1917. He makes the point that ignoring some of these atrocities encourages even worse atrocities to be perpetrated in the future; Lord Alton has made that point very powerfully on many occasions.

Against that backdrop, the Bishop of Truro's work has never been more important, and I fully support his report. The bishop finds that the persecution and murder of Christians around the world is

"the most shocking abuse of human rights in the modern era."

In particular, I support the bishop's call for a UN resolution stating that those countries that are responsible for tolerating or encouraging the persecution of Christians and religious minorities must instead protect them.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am afraid I have seen instances of Christians killing Christians; obviously, I am referring to Bosnia, where I witnessed that. So it is not just other religions having a go at Christians; it is actually Christians on Christians—almost blue on blue.

Chris Philp: I am aware of my hon. Friend's military service in Bosnia and the fact that he was in the country when the Srebrenica massacre of 1995 took place, and we should be mindful of those sorts of atrocities as well as the other ones we are talking about today.

I also support the Bishop of Truro's call for the Government and the UN to impose sanctions on those countries who fail to protect religious minorities, and I also support his call for British diplomatic staff to be trained on this issue and for it to be made a priority of British foreign policy to put pressure on Governments who are turning a blind eye to this.

There is even more we can do. As the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) suggested in his intervention, many of the countries where the persecution of Christians is tolerated or even state-sponsored receive direct foreign aid from the United Kingdom. Many of those countries will wish to secure trade and investment deals with us and many of them also buy arms from the UK, which requires a UK Government export licence. I would like to see the UK Government do more to link overseas aid, trade and arms exports to real progress in tackling the persecution of religious minorities. Why should we send British taxpayers' money to a Government, or indeed sell them arms, when they allow or encourage the persecution of religious minorities? Ideally, we should ensure that these steps are taken on a multinational basis, together with our European Union and United Nations partners, but if that cannot be secured, the UK should be prepared to act alone. The UK Government cannot and must not simply mouth platitudes; we must take real action. By approving the motion today, this House will make clear its view. The Government should then act.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. There is a four-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. I ask Members to be very strict about this; otherwise, some are going to drop off the list and I do not want that to happen.

2.30 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who made a very thoughtful speech.

Mention has been made of the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Glasgow East (David Linden), and I want to thank them for requesting this debate and for their tireless campaigning work in this area. Above all, I think we would all wish to thank the non-governmental organisations, including Open Doors, that have kept these issues in our consciousness for years. We must also thank our constituents who have kept Members across the House informed, and I would like to thank the members of the Penrycae Neighbourhood Church of the Nazarene who have kept me informed of meetings that have been happening.

Freedom of belief is a basic human right. It is not a western construct; it is a basic fact of being human. Article 18 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights makes it clear that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes a person's freedom to change their religion or belief and the freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

I commend the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the work that the Bishop of Truro has done in looking at the specific issue of persecution against Christians, simply because of the scale of it. Open Doors is now saying that extreme persecution has increased from being found in one country to 11 countries over five years. There has been a rise in hate speech in state media and by religious leaders. This House, the European Parliament and the US House of Representatives have declared that ISIS atrocities against Christians and other religious minorities—for example, against the Yazidis and Shi'a Muslims—met the tests of genocide. I would like to see that recognised by the UK Government.

However inconvenient it might be for politicians from western democracies, we must recognise that part of that universal declaration includes the right to convert or to change religion or belief, including the right to have no belief, which is a fundamental part of religious freedom. This is not about western values; it is about universal human values, and any extreme form of nationalism that does not allow for conversion goes against that fundamental tenet.

Mention has rightly been made of the Commonwealth, which has a real role to play in this. The blasphemy laws in Pakistan are a total obscenity. They are not somehow loosely based on the codification of laws in the 1860s. Since the 1980s, crimes under these laws have increased, prejudicing religions including certain types of Islam and Christianity, and that is a disgrace.

I would also like us to reflect on an issue of general concern—the death penalty. We have seen an increased use of the death penalty, and the Centre for Social Justice in Pakistan has stated that its use has increased for people accused of blasphemy. In the United States, 29 states still use the death penalty, including some that still use a firing squad. It is simply unacceptable to those of us in the west who wish to advocate on this issue that the US still has the death penalty, and I urge the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to challenge it. I also urge everyone in the US who cares about the persecution of Christians to question the use of the death penalty in that country. Lastly, I think we must all take responsibility. I do not want to be partisan, but

[Susan Elan Jones]

when people describe Muslim women wearing burqas as looking like letterboxes, that is irresponsible, wherever it comes from. We have to protect these freedoms.

2.35 pm

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): As the Bishop of Truro's local MP, I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate in support of his excellent report. It has become a custom in this House to give a voice to the voiceless. This enables us to ground our debate in the real-life experiences of our constituents and draw on their expertise. I want to use the short time I have available today to give voice to the bishop himself, as he cannot speak in this debate. I had planned to read out his personal introduction to his report, but time allows me to refer only to a few extracts from the six reasons for the review.

First, to understand why the review is justified, we have to appreciate that today the Christian faith is primarily a phenomenon of the global south, and that it is therefore primarily a phenomenon of the global poor. Western voices that are quick to speak up for the world's poor cannot afford to be blind to this issue. Secondly, this particular focus is justified because Christian persecution, like no other, is a global phenomenon. Thus Christian persecution is not limited to one context or challenge. Thirdly, Christian persecution is a human rights issue and should be seen as such. Freedom of religion or belief is perhaps the most fundamental human right, because so many others depend on it. If freedom of religion or belief is removed, so many other rights are put in jeopardy, too.

Fourthly, this is not about special pleading for Christians, but about making up a significant deficit. In that sense it is an equality issue. If one minority is on the receiving end of 80% of religiously motivated discrimination, it is simply unjust that that minority should receive so little attention. Fifthly, this is also about being sensitive to discrimination against, and persecution of, all minorities. Because the Christian faith is perhaps the one truly global faith, it has become a bellwether for repression more generally. Renewing the focus on Christian persecution is therefore a way of expressing our concern for all minorities who find themselves under pressure.

Finally, historically and theologically, the Christian faith has always been subversive. "Jesus is Lord" is the earliest Christian creed, and those were not empty words. Rather, they explain why the Christian faith attracted persecution from the earliest days. To say "Jesus is Lord" was to say that Caesar was not the Lord, as he claimed to be, so from its earliest days the Christian faith presented a radical challenge to any power that made absolute claims for itself. The Christian faith should make no absolutist political claims for itself, but it will always challenge those who do. Indeed, the Christian faith's inherent challenge to absolutist claims explains why it has been such a key foundation stone of western democratic government, and why we should continue to support it vigorously wherever it is under threat. The focus of the review's recommendations is clearly on guaranteeing freedom of religion or belief for all, irrespective of faith, tradition or belief system, and taking full account of the scale, scope and severity of its abuse in various contexts. We must seek freedom of

religion or belief for all, without fear or favour. That is something that the whole House can agree on, and I very much support the motion.

2.38 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be able to speak in the debate on this important issue. I would like to start, as others have done, by paying tribute to the Bishop of Truro for his important and wide-ranging report. It not only highlights many issues that we need to think about but points to how we might build a better and more tolerant world for us all. Although I do not subscribe to the Foreign Secretary's newfound views on Britain leaving the European Union with no deal, I do thank him for establishing the independent review into the extent and nature of the global persecution of Christians and committing to assess the quality of the response from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Government more generally.

Since April this year, I have had the good fortune and immense honour to represent my home and my community in Newport West. It is one of the most diverse and multicultural parts of Wales, and people from all communities and all cultures are able to practise and embrace their faiths there. I know that colleagues across the House believe in the importance of all communities and all people having the chance to do that right across the world, too. I thank the bishop for making it very clear at the outset that this review is not about pitting one faith against another or about legitimising the hatred and loathing of Islam or Judaism. This is about ensuring that all our faiths are respected and that all those who practise are free to do so safely and peacefully.

Rehman Chishti: I completely agree with the hon. Lady when she says this is about ensuring that people can practise their faith, whatever it may be. As somebody who comes from a Muslim faith and whose father, grandfather and uncles were all imams, I know that Islam itself says, "La iqra ha fiddin": people should be able to practise their faith whatever it is—there is no compulsion. As this report sets out, religious freedom is not only a civil right, but pretty much the fundamental core of people's own faith and scriptures: to respect each other's faith.

Ruth Jones: I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman's comments. The persecution of Christians across the world is attracting ever more focus and attention. This point is exemplified by the fact that the review was meant to conclude by Easter 2019, but as the scale of the task became clear, deadlines were pushed back to ensure there was enough time for the fullest of reports to be published.

As I have already said, the persecution of Christians is an increasing concern to me and to many of my constituents. I thank all those—Christian and non-Christian—who have written to me asking me to speak up for them in this debate. We must, as the bishop notes, recognise that this is not a western problem, that many of the poorest in our world are Christians and that they need our solidarity and support. It is easy to brush this off, but there are people living in fear, people living with often devastating consequences and people who need the British Government to stand up for them. This need to stand with them is why it is so important that the British Government get to grips with this.

Of course, it is not just us; we need to work with our partners in the Commonwealth of Nations, to raise these issues in the Security Council at the United Nations and, whatever happens with our relationship with the European Union, to work with Europe, too. I know that the Foreign Secretary may not be in his place next week—who knows, he could be in No. 10—but I hope that, whoever steps into the role next week, he or she will maintain an interest in and focus on these really important issues.

I welcome the 22 recommendations in the bishop's report, particularly the focus on working together with our international and regional partners and allies. We must ensure that civil society plays its role in shaping views and protecting minorities. We have seen what happened with the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and with the Christians in the middle east and other places. The British Government can and should become a leader in defending freedom of expression and of faith, too.

Like my constituents back home in Newport West, I was struck by a quote in the report of William Wilberforce saying in this very Chamber in 1791 that

"you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say you did not know".

Our task in this Chamber and in our communities is to ensure that we do not look the other way, and that we do not walk by on the other side either.

2.42 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): I do not know whether I should start by declaring an interest in that I am a Christian who has newly found faith, but it is really exciting to see so many Members of all parties in this House wanting to take part in this debate. It is a shame that we are limited to such a short time today, because there are so many MPs who want to get in and make their points.

First, I want to pay tribute to the Foreign Secretary for his work in bringing about this important report. There was that old adage in No. 10 Downing Street that "We don't do God", but that was in a previous Administration. Christians in this country have often thought that there was a sniffiness about Christianity. All too often since I have found faith, I have heard the words "Oh, they're do-gooders", and a Church of England vicar sent me an email about "Jesus freaks". We seem to do down Christianity in this country somewhat, and it is important that the Foreign Secretary has put this front and centre of the work of the Foreign Office.

We are a multicultural and multi-faith society, and we should embrace and champion that, but when we see that 80% of all religious persecutions around the world are persecutions of Christians, it is important that we as a nation stand up and say that we will not accept this and are going to come to the aid of those Christians around the world. In the same way that we deplore it and speak out when the Rohingya are persecuted in Myanmar, the Yazidis in Iraq and the Uyghur Muslims in China, so we must, with all our might and all our voice, speak out in defence of Christians around the world.

It touched me recently when, at the church that I attend in Uttoxeter—the Renew Church—we had Open Doors come and present to us one Sunday. The scale at which Christian persecution around the world is taking place is scary, as is the speed at which it is increasing.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I very much thank my hon. Friend for what he is saying. Does he agree that we should approach all this in a real spirit of humility, because we ourselves in this country have seen religious persecution over the centuries? However, we know what it is to put that behind us, and the advantages it brings to our society when we do not do it any more. I myself come from a Huguenot background: we fled to this country because of religious persecution elsewhere. British people have had to flee to the low countries—the Netherlands—because of persecution here. We need to approach this in a spirit of humility, as well as of upholding the name of Jesus Christ.

Andrew Griffiths: I absolutely agree with what my hon. Friend says. He is a true example of somebody who is living a Christian life, and he is absolutely right when he says that the UK was the first country to establish human rights such as freedom of religion. It was we who established this, and spread it around the world—to America, and to Australia and New Zealand. It was in 1547 that the freedom to read the Bible in public was first established, and it was 1559 when we first had the freedom to interpret the Bible without Government interference. There are centuries of examples of Britain leading the way in protecting religious freedoms of all kinds, and certainly in standing up for Christianity.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): At the outset, my hon. Friend mentioned that we had cross-party support for this motion. May I gently add that that support is not only cross party but multi-faith among the Members of Parliament here?

Does my hon. Friend agree that Britain has a significant role on the global stage—we are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, head of the Commonwealth and a major economic power—and that we use our influence on the global stage for a whole variety of reasons and causes, and should ensure that the protection of Christians is put high on the list and that we use our influence for that purpose as well?

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend speaks with great common sense, as always. I am very proud to represent a multicultural, multi-faith community. I have some 7,000 Muslims in my community, and they make a massive contribution to my society and it is a joy to be their Member of Parliament. He is absolutely right that we have this historical connection and historical influence with which we can do good. We can use that for the benefit of Christians, for the benefit of religious freedoms and for the benefit of democracy around the world.

In many respects, because of our history, we almost shy away from confrontation. Because of that colonial past, we are often too afraid to be seen to be interfering in the business of other independent nations. Actually, as we heard in the magnificent opening speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), whom I commend for securing this debate, we see that effect on a global scale, and it is only right for Britain to stand up and take its responsibility seriously.

I pay tribute to the Bishop of Truro for his brilliant, incisive work, but I hope that this is just the first step towards the Government standing up and taking religious persecution and the persecution of Christians very seriously. A bit like a stick of Blackpool rock, I want this to run

[Andrew Griffiths]

through the middle of all our Foreign Office policy, aid and trade. We have the levers to change behaviour and save lives. When people are being victimised, persecuted, murdered, stabbed and bullied simply for reading the Bible and worshipping Jesus Christ, we must act. The Bible states that Christ said:

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

I absolutely believe that this motion is an important step forward in ensuring the safety of Christians around the world.

2.49 pm

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I begin by adding my congratulations to the Bishop of Truro on the publication of his excellent report and by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) and the hon. Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing today’s debate. I also put on the record my appreciation for the work of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief in promoting the right of people of faith or none to have the freedom to pursue their beliefs. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in sending our best wishes to Catherine Thane, who until recently was the operations director for the APPG and who was married to George on Saturday.

I thank all those people for being such a powerful voice for persecuted Christians around the world because, sadly, that voice is necessary now more than ever. No matter where one looks in the world right now, anti-Christian discrimination and persecution is on the rise.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Brendan O’Hara: I will not give way, because of the time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): No, you will be all right. You will get an extra minute.

Brendan O’Hara: Okay. I will give way.

Emma Little Pengelly: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most important aspects of this report is that right across the United Kingdom, including within churches, there is still significant ignorance and a lack of knowledge about the sheer scale of the persecution of Christians right across the world? One of the things that we can do as Christians and as Members of Parliament is raise that awareness through the likes of this report and these debates.

Brendan O’Hara: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. As Christians in this country, we have become very comfortable in our freedom to believe as we do, and we should always have at the forefront of our minds that our brothers and sisters around the world are not in such a privileged position. His Holiness Pope Francis said recently:

“It might be hard for us to believe, but there are more martyrs today than in the first centuries. They are persecuted because they speak the truth and proclaim Jesus Christ to this society.”

Increasingly, however, society’s response to those speaking that truth is to imprison, torture, kidnap or murder them. As we have heard, the Open Doors charity publishes an annual watchlist of countries where it believes persecution to be extreme, very high or high. One country was on that list five years ago: North Korea. Today, no fewer than 11 countries are considered to be in the extreme category, and we have all watched in horror the systematic attempt to eradicate all traces of Christianity from the ancient middle east homeland that we all love.

Of course, many charities and NGOs are working hard and doing some great work, and I pay tribute to the work done by Aid to the Church in Need, which funds over 5,000 projects in 140 countries each year, helping to support persecuted Christians live out their faith and provide practical and spiritual support to millions of people. In January, I was privileged to join Aid to the Church in Need on a visit to Lebanon and the Syrian border to see that practical and spiritual support and action for myself. We met Christian families who had fled Syria, Iraq and other places in the middle east to seek refuge in Lebanon and who would be destitute were it not for the day-to-day support and pastoral care provided by ACN.

On the feast of the Epiphany in January, in the town of Zahlé on the Syrian border, we went to a food centre called Saint John the Merciful Table, where ACN, along with the Melkite Greek Catholic archdiocese, provides 1,000 people with a hot meal every single day. It was a small but wonderful example of how Christian organisations are helping those fleeing persecution.

However, given the number of people in need, the situation cannot be left to charities and NGOs, which is why I commend the Bishop of Truro’s report. I sincerely hope that the Government take heed of what it says and act upon its recommendations. In particular, I urge the Government to heed his words about the UK being a global leader when it comes to championing the freedom of religion or belief across the world. I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member for Croydon South that the UK Government must be prepared to impose meaningful sanctions against perpetrators who abuse the religious belief of others.

Finally, as the chair of the all-party group on the Yazidi people, as we approach the fifth anniversary of the genocide, I highlight the bishop’s recommendation that the Foreign Office should take a lead role in pursuing the prosecution of the perpetrators of sex crimes against Yazidi and Christian women, and not only as terrorists.

2.54 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): On 31 May 2014, *The Times* newspaper had an editorial headlined “Spectators at the Carnage”. This was a charge against western politicians—we in this Chamber and others throughout the western world—who have not taken this issue sufficiently seriously. I am very grateful to my friends who have brought this debate to Parliament.

Like many others, I follow what Open Doors says. We know from its report that some 245 million Christians are at high, very high or extreme risk of persecution. That figure is rising—only a few years ago, there were 200 million, so the situation is getting worse. In China, over 1,000 Christians have been detained without trial

or have been unfairly arrested and hundreds of thousands of Uyghur Muslims are being interred or the families are being separated. In Nigeria, 3,731 Christians were killed for their faith. The situation in China is getting worse: on the Open Doors world watch list, it has risen from 43rd to 27th place—a significant deterioration. For the first time, India has entered the top 10 countries of most concern.

The figures for deaths and for churches destroyed around the world are really serious. In 2016, there were over 4,000 deaths in Nigeria, with 198 churches destroyed. In the Central African Republic, 1,269 Christians were killed and 131 churches were destroyed. In Chad, 750 Christians were killed and 10 churches were destroyed. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 467 Christians were killed and 13 churches were destroyed. In Kenya, 225 Christians lost their lives, and in Cameroon 114 Christians were killed, with 10 churches destroyed. This is happening on a very large scale. William Wilberforce said to this House in 1791 that

“you may choose to look the other way but you can never...say that you did not know”.

That is as relevant now as it was then.

Rehman Chishti: My hon. Friend has put forward a concerning picture from around the world. On addressing that challenge, does he agree with the former Bishop of Rochester, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, who said that the greater use of our aid for persecuted Christian communities around the world is something that we should seriously consider? He gave the example of supporting the Iraqi Christian homes on the Nineveh plains and listed a number of others. As a passionate supporter of international development aid, I ask my hon. Friend: should that now be targeted to support persecuted Christian communities around the world?

Andrew Selous: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's point. I will illustrate the sort of thing that is going on by quoting Bishop William Naga of Borno, who said of some of the refugee camps in Nigeria:

“When the care of the camps was handed over to other organisations, the discrimination started. They will give food to the refugees, but if you are a Christian they will not give you food. They will even openly tell you that the relief is not for Christians. There is an open discrimination.”

It is really important that DFID, if it is involved in helping those refugees, makes sure that British aid is going to everyone who needs it, regardless of their faith, and that that sort of discrimination is not allowed to happen. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to make sure that where overseas aid, trade and arms exports are concerned, they should be subject to requiring robust action on dealing with persecution.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. Like him, I pay tribute to the work of Witney-based Open Doors for its powerful advocacy on this very serious issue. He mentions Nigeria, and one of Open Doors's other points is that progress should be pursued in areas where progress has already been made. Perhaps if the Foreign Office were to engage alongside the Government of Nigeria, as they already have, great progress will continue to be made.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and I am grateful to him for putting it on the record.

This is a harrowing debate—rightly, because we need to bring these matters into the public domain, and to keep doing so until things get better. However, I end my speech by drawing the House's attention to examples of one people group or faith coming to the aid of another that is being persecuted. In the second world war, when Jews were being rounded up into railway trucks for deportation, the Patriarch of Romania, in full ecclesiastical dress, came to the station and quoted the words of Ruth from the Old Testament:

“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

We need more of that type of intervention.

In Pakistan, about which we have heard quite a lot today, on the Sunday a week after the Peshawar bomb, Muslims formed a human chain around some churches to protect Christians who were going to worship. In Oman, a Muslim country, it is possible for Christians to worship openly in the Jesus the Good Shepherd church in Muscat; I have been able to worship there myself. That is an example that other Muslim countries should follow. In Madera in Kenya, Muslims stood up for Christians who were being attacked, saying, “You kill all of us or you kill none of us.”

As I say, this is rightly a grim debate, because these facts deserve much greater circulation, and we all want follow-through from the Government. However, it is important to look at how we can do things differently and to look at signs of hope and examples of people from one faith standing up against the persecution of people from another.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for commissioning this excellent report. He has taken a bold and important step in opening the Government up to challenge. He did that for good reason. We all look forward to the Government following through on the recommendations, as they very much need to.

3.1 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I follow on from my dear friend the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) in giving a big thank you to the Foreign Office. I also thank the Bishop of Truro for conducting this investigation, and the hon. Members who managed to get this debate. Of all the excellent organisations that have been name-checked, I particularly praise Christian Solidarity Worldwide. I have made two visits abroad with it. The first was to Nigeria, where I witnessed the words of the Bishop of Jos, whose wife was raped by extremists. He gave a graphic account of what things are like in northern Nigeria.

I also visited Pakistan, where I met the inestimable Shahbaz Bhatti, who was the Minister for Minorities. He was slaughtered for his beliefs. I hope that in due course the Catholic Church will recognise what that wonderful man has done. Pakistan is an interesting country; it has people of all persuasions in its Government, but Shahbaz always knew that he took the risk of losing his life, though he carried on nevertheless.

I spend a lot of time worrying about Sudan. It is obvious what is going on there. I got very interested in it because of the religious divide, but when I learned more about the situation, I found that it is not just Muslims against Christians; the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) talked about Christians sometimes fighting

[Dr David Drew]

Christians, and sadly that happens in southern Sudan. Also, religion is used as a franchise, and people of extreme views use those views to maintain power. I ask the Government to keep a very close eye on the Christians who remain in the north in Sudan, of whom there are many millions, and to try to bring peace to the south.

In the two minutes remaining to me, I will concentrate on a couple of points in the bishop's report that are worthy of emphasis. First, it is very important that our embassies and those who advocate on behalf of the British Government recognise the importance of freedom of religious belief are properly trained and look out for it. That is an important recommendation from the bishop, and I hope that the Minister will take it up. Often there are other connected issues, such as sexuality and gender. It is important that we tease away what may be a veneer of religion and look below the surface.

At the end of the day, we are talking about the mass exodus of Christians from many places in the world. That is unacceptable and we as Christians have to do something about it. We must talk about it in this place and represent those communities. Of course, this is not just about Christians. The Ahmadis have already been mentioned, and the Baha'is are another religious group who are heavily discriminated against in many parts of the world.

In conclusion, the one blemish—I was sad about this—is that the bishop was called in by the Israeli ambassador to be admonished about the fact that he chose to mention Israel and Palestine as a reason why Christians have left the middle east. It is important that we stand with the bishop and make it clear that, whatever the discrimination, those who may not be openly discriminatory are still, none the less, covertly allowing such things to go on. We should stand with the bishop in what he has said and done, and in how we follow up on it.

3.6 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Just a few months ago, this Chamber stood shocked in the aftermath of the appalling Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka. It is so sad to have heard in this debate that that was just one of the most recent of a whole series of terrible atrocities committed against Christians in many parts of the world.

I was struck by the quote from *The Times* that the Bishop of Truro put at the start of his report:

"Across the globe, in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, Christians are being bullied, arrested, jailed, expelled and executed. Christianity is by most calculations the most persecuted religion of modern times. Yet Western politicians until now have been reluctant to speak out in support of Christians in peril."

That is a pithy summary of the terrible injustice on which we are reflecting.

Christian persecution is a global phenomenon with multiple drivers. It is very important to remember that Christianity is not just a religion of the west—it is a genuinely global faith. The victims of persecution are, in the main, from some of the poorest and most deprived communities on earth. Open Doors has identified in a succession of "World Watch List" reports the worrying phenomenon that, where Christians are in the minority, they are increasingly portrayed as somehow western or alien, despite the fact that their communities date back hundreds of years in their home countries.

That is a particular problem in the middle east. Christians have been living in the middle east since the earliest days of the faith. They have an unbroken presence of 2,000 years in the middle east, yet they are under pressure in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen; and, of course, horrific atrocities have been committed against them in the region, including gender-based violence.

The situation is so severe that the very survival of Christianity as a living religion in the middle east is now in doubt. A century ago, 20% of the population was Christian, but now, according to the report, the figure has fallen to 5%. It is distressing to read the Bishop of Truro's finding that some of Christianity's

"oldest and most enduring communities"

are facing what he calls "decimation". There are tragic parallels with the situation of the Jewish community, whose connection with that region goes back just as far and who were largely forced out—800,000 of them were forced out—in the years between 1948 and the 1970s. My terrible fear is that history is repeating itself.

In responding to the Bishop of Truro's report, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that the efforts made to tackle the problem of attacks on Christians around the world has not matched the scale of the injustice perpetrated. I welcome that frank acknowledgement. I hope that the Bishop of Truro's report marks a turning point where that inadequacy begins to change. We cannot just stand by and let this continue to happen.

The Open Doors website quotes 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 26:

"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it".

We have a responsibility to act. As the bishop's report says, the vague language of general condemnation must be replaced by action to address the specific problem of Christian persecution. A key task is to spread that message to Governments around the world. The editorial in *The Times* that I quoted at the start of my speech said:

"We cannot be spectators at this carnage."

This has been a powerful debate on a hard-hitting report that I hope will change the direction of UK foreign policy in a profound way.

3.10 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Boko Haram has been persecuting and killing Christians for more than 10 years. In a decade, thousands have died. I am going to focus on the story of just one woman.

Saratu's home was one of those targeted. She saved her family as her village burned, making sure they got away. They hid together in the forest, but she knew she would have to go back. They had nothing to eat and she could not let her children die of hunger. She was spotted, chased, captured and beaten. Saratu was taken to a holding camp with hundreds of other women and children; they were held like animals. She feared the worst. She had heard the stories of rape, torture and murder, and of forced conversion, forced marriage and slavery. But her spirit was not broken. She was determined to get back to her children and save the other women with her. Two nights later, she escaped with more than 20 women and children.

Twenty thousand Nigerian Christians have been killed, and many more have endured kidnapping, forced conversion and torture. The kidnappings have not stopped. Christians across the middle belt of Nigeria still live in fear and the

violence has spread to neighbouring Niger. Just last month, Boko Haram kidnapped a woman from the city of Diffa, in an area that has provided refuge for the tens of thousands fleeing the attacks in Nigeria. They used that woman to send a message of terror—a letter saying to all in Diffa: “Leave within three days or be killed.” Many Christian families have fled in fear, but others simply cannot afford to leave and remain at risk. It may become yet another story of religious cleansing and murder.

The Diffa region has already seen what Boko Haram will do: 14 people were killed and 37 kidnapped in two separate 2017 attacks. Soon afterwards, the daughter of the region’s Christian pastor was taken as well. The persecution caused by Boko Haram is extreme. Some 8,000 children have been used as soldiers, targeted because of poverty and vulnerability, and exploited, lied to and manipulated. Many are orphans, and some had been abandoned to the streets by parents who could simply no longer look after them. In 2018, according to UNICEF, 48 of those children were used as suicide bombers—48 children died to murder others. In that year, they were mostly girls. In 2017, the number was 135. The campaign of religious violence has not stopped, and less than a month ago three children were used as a weapon in a communal hall; 30 were murdered and 40 injured. Religious differences have been exploited to create this violence. Christians—the minority in the north of Nigeria—have been made scapegoats. Hatred has been created and fuelled.

President Buhari has made clear commitments to improve security, including for Christian communities in Nigeria, but frankly such promises have been made before. I want to know what the Government are going to do to work proactively with Nigeria, Niger and others to make that basic promise of security a reality.

3.14 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is an honour to take part in this important debate, and particularly to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). I am sure none of us have been anything but moved by the accounts we have heard.

I pay tribute to the Bishop of Truro for his excellent report. The persecution of Christians has been raised many times in this House since I have been elected, but never have we had such a comprehensive and well put together report, which really presents a picture of what is taking place in the world. I draw attention to the fact that, in the report, the bishop included a quote from William Wilberforce, from one of his first speeches in this House against the slave trade. He said:

“You may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know.”

That is what the report does to this House—never again can we say that we do not know what is going on in our world today. It is therefore down to us to decide what we do with the information with which we have been provided.

Like many other Members, I wish to pay tribute to the many organisations that work tirelessly to raise the issue of the persecution of Christians. They even put their own lives at risk to work for the protection of those who are persecuted for their faith. I have had the pleasure of working with Open Doors and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and I thank them for the amazing work they do.

The persecution of Christians is nothing new. Right from the very beginning, the Christian Church faced persecution, but I am sure that if we spoke to those first early Christians and told them that, more than 2,000 years later, the persecution of Christians for their faith would get worse, they would have struggled to comprehend how that could possibly be the case. None the less, that is the situation in which we find ourselves. As other Members have highlighted, the vast majority of people—some 80% of them—who are persecuted for their faith around the world are Christians. The persecution of Christians can be seen as a bellwether of the broader persecution of other faiths. Often, how a country behaves towards its Christians is a test of how other religious minorities will also be treated, which is why it is important that the Foreign Office, through this report from the Bishop of Truro, has chosen to focus on the persecution of Christians around the world.

It is often difficult for those with no faith to understand exactly what it is like for someone to find that their right, or their freedom, to worship, to practise and to express their faith is taken away. It is as if their identity has been taken away. To take the right of freedom of faith away from anyone is the ultimate violation of human rights.

We must never take for granted the freedom that we have in this country. Like the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who is no longer in her place, I have been horrified by some of the abuse that Members here have experienced over the past week or so simply because they followed their conscience and voted in a particular way in this House. We should all make it absolutely clear that there is no place for that in this country and that people should be free in this House to vote in the way that their conscience dictates. That is an ultimate freedom that we should defend and never lose sight of.

3.18 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this important debate. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for joining me to present the case to the Committee. I thank, too, the Minister for Europe and the Americas and the Foreign Secretary for their commitment to this issue—the Foreign Secretary has been much committed to this issue—and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro for his efforts in carrying out the review of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s work to support persecuted Christians.

In the past year, 100,000 Christians will have been murdered because of their faith and 200 million will have been persecuted because of their faith. Some 2 billion people live in what is referred to as an endangered neighbourhood. That is the magnitude of this issue and why it is so important to have it before us in the House today.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. As he praises the commitment of others across the House, may I just pay tribute to the work that he does in his role as chair of the all-party group for international freedom of religion or belief. He represents

[Gavin Robinson]

incredibly well our party, our constituents, and, I think, all those of faith who believe that we have more to do, so I thank him.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is most generous. I have been working to raise the issue of the persecution of Christians, people of other faiths and people with no faith.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): I have a sister who is a missionary in Africa. Her team encounter persecution on a daily basis and have faced particular difficulties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some of this persecution has sometimes been called tribal violence. It is not tribal violence; it is tribes rising against Christians, and it has been covered up by the world media. We also need to highlight that issue.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) said that it is the job of Members of this House to raise awareness, and she is right. But it is also our job to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Emma Little Pengelly: May I pay tribute—I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees with me—to the absolutely sterling work done by organisations such as Open Doors? Although I have attended church throughout my entire life, before I came to this place I was completely unaware of the sheer scale of the persecution of Christians. This issue is incredibly important to us all. We talk to each other, and most people in the Chamber have read the report and know the scale of the situation, but there is still a huge amount of work to be done out there. It is our duty not only to speak in this House, but to go out and speak to our constituents on our social media accounts and through the media to ensure that everybody is aware of the plight facing many millions of people right across the world—people of the Christian faith in particular, as that is the subject of today's proceedings, but also people of other faiths. We should also make people aware of the incredible work that the APPG does in trying to raise awareness across all faiths.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for her very kind intervention.

There are some 80-plus churches in my constituency. I write to them and let them know what is going on, and this debate will go out to every one of those 80 churches of all faiths across my constituency next week when the girls in the office get the work done.

As the APPG noted in our published statement, all religious or belief communities throughout the world face violations of article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights, and protecting one group requires protecting all groups. I visited Pakistan last year, and it was poignant and emotional to see the position of Christians there with respect to education and qualifications, job opportunities, the right to worship and the right to convert. In fact, we are well aware of the issues across the whole middle east.

In Syria, 1.5 million Christians have left their country. There are only a quarter of a million Christians left in Iraq and fewer than 100,000 in Iran. In Colombia, Christian peasant farmers have been persecuted, tortured and murdered by Government forces and paramilitary

groups. There are similar situations in Libya and in Nigeria, which the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) mentioned, where Boko Haram has carried out murders to a large degree. The Easter massacre in Sri Lanka is all too real in our lives. In eastern Ukraine, where Russia has influence, Baptist pastors have gone missing and churches have been destroyed. And then there is North Korea, where people cannot even mention the word “Christian” without being put in prison right away. There are also unbelievable abuses in China, as has already been mentioned today.

FORB is a hugely important issue. Indeed, the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation published its analysis on the same day as the launch of the report. I would strongly encourage any future UK Government of any colour to take this issue very seriously. The Minister knows that I am fond of him and he always responds well to our questions, so I look forward to his response. I have a couple of questions for him today. Has he initiated any action under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 against FORB violators such as the generals in Burma? Have we ever needed reminding how much the Rohingya in Burma have been butchered, violated, murdered, raped, abused and burnt alive, or that their babies have been killed almost at birth? Those generals need to be made accountable. I look to the Minister to see what we can do in that regard. What discussions has he had with the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that they can also be part of the changes that are needed? I commend the charities—Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors, Release International, the Barnabas Fund and Aid to the Church in Need—for all they have done.

I commend the Bishop of Truro for his efforts with this review. Will the Minister ask a Select Committee to assess the review to determine lessons learned and provide support and guidance for future reviewers? Recommendation 22 of the review states that in three years there should be a review to assess the Government's progress in implementing the recommendations of the report. Will the Government also consider asking the Foreign Affairs Committee to carry that out?

3.25 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has an enormous heart and often speaks from it. I admire, respect and have affection for him.

I welcome the final report of the Bishop of Truro and thank him for it. I commend the depth of research in it. I want to speak rather technically about some of the recommendations, but before that—and more briefly than I would have liked—I want to affirm what colleagues have said. It is so important to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief; when it is encroached on, that so often also involves the violation of other human rights, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, the right to freedom of assembly or association, the right to freedom of expression and many more.

That recognition must be clearly visible in the strategy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Protecting the right of freedom of religion and belief is so important

because its violation is often the root cause of so many other human rights violations across the world, as we have heard today.

Jeremy Lefroy: I praise my hon. Friend for all the work she has done, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and others in this House.

Most countries in the world have signed the universal declaration on human rights. That is there—it is a commitment that they have made. All who have signed it, including the United Kingdom, need to be held accountable. Every year, the United Nations needs to hold to account all the nations that have signed the declaration but are not living up to it. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely. I commend the report's recommendation that the UK engage better with international human rights mechanisms, but I do not think that the recommendation for a universal periodic review will help enough. A review conducted every three or four years is not enough to enable us to address some of the freedom of religious belief-related issues.

As my hon. Friend said, we need a solid review plan for a rolling oversight of the FCO's obligations under the universal declaration of human rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights—international standards—so that we can monitor the situation of the affected communities, tailor the FCO's response and oversee implementation. For that reason, I am somewhat sceptical about the suggested introduction of a diplomatic code. Actually, we have the international standards; we should be judged against those.

I commend the recommendation for the UK to champion the call for other countries each to have a special envoy position for freedom of religious belief—something that I emphasised in my communications with the independent review. I stress that we need to strengthen the mandate of our own Prime Minister's special envoy on freedom of religious belief, to ensure that he has all the resources and powers that he needs to be effective. I am not sure that that is the case at present. I see the good work that Lord Ahmad is doing, but time and again I see how stretched he is. I wonder whether the role should be distinct from that of a Foreign Office Minister, so that action on many of the review's recommendations can be held to account independently.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): My hon. Friend is right to echo the call in the report for the United Kingdom to become a champion of freedom of religion or belief, but does she share my concern about the deterioration of tolerance towards Christians in this country? I point to the example of the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who has been subject to the most intolerable feedback in relation to her vote of conscience last week.

Fiona Bruce: I agree—we must call out criticism of those in this place and elsewhere who simply want the freedom to express their biblically-based beliefs. My hon. Friend is right. Along with many others in this place, I have been the subject of some really unpleasant attacks during the past week, particularly on social media, simply for speaking out in this place and voting on biblically-based beliefs on abortion and marriage.

I turn to the issue of genocide. I welcome the recommendation in the report that the Government should introduce

“mechanisms...to facilitate an immediate response to atrocity crimes, including genocide through activities such as setting up early warning mechanisms to identify countries at risk of atrocities, diplomacy to help de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes”.

I have spoken about this issue many times in this Chamber, raised questions about it and put forward the Genocide Determination (No. 2) Bill, which would help to deal with it. I commend the Bishop of Truro for highlighting the issue.

It is important to point out that the FCO does not have appropriate mechanisms to consider mass atrocities and determine whether they amount to genocide. When asked about genocide, the Government's usual response is that such a determination is not for politicians to make, but for the international judicial systems. That needs to be reviewed. The FCO needs to review its long-standing policy of outsourcing the determination of genocide to the international judicial systems, which often do not exist. We need to introduce an FCO-based team focused on genocide and religious persecution to consider situations, identify red flags and inform the FCO response. We also need to ensure that the FCO works closely with other Departments, such as the Home Office and the Department for International Development, to ensure that we are applying the principles in this report internationally and at home.

Finally, I welcome the recommendation about improved religious literacy training. The FCO has a FORB toolkit, but as the Bishop of Truro has said, barely anyone applies it in their work or takes notice of it. We need to improve that.

3.32 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I congratulate the Members who helped secure today's debate on this very important matter. The persecution of Christians around the globe is felt by many both within and outwith the Church, in my constituency and further afield. Leaving Christians overseas vulnerable to persecution would be a gross abdication of the global responsibilities that this country has worked ceaselessly to uphold over many years.

The very birthplace of Christianity is under threat. Christians in countries across the middle east find themselves driven from their homes and imprisoned, tortured or killed on the basis of the faith that they hold or the texts that they follow. Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and the continuing spectre of Boko Haram in central Africa, present a real existential challenge for the free practice of religion in those regions. The presence of Christianity in more and more parts of the world faces nothing short of complete extinction, while Governments fail to provide a bulwark against the tide of attacks.

Christians in communities across the world under oppressive Governments, or who are the target of militant groups, take little comfort from warm words. For a child left parentless after her family was executed for attending church, condemnation provides no salve. For a pastor standing in the ruins of his church, statements of support ring hollow. We can do more, and we must do more, to help bring the persecution of Christians to an end.

[Ross Thomson]

I welcome the Bishop of Truro's recommendations, which show the clear steps that this Government can take. I am encouraged by the words of many colleagues, which demonstrate the constructive spirit in which we all are willing to work. The challenge that faces us all in ending discrimination and violence against Christians is monumental, but this report leaves me optimistic about the future of religious freedoms. This review makes concise, achievable recommendations that draw on the talents of our unparalleled diplomatic network. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has immeasurable experience in helping some of the world's most vulnerable people when they need it most. Now is the time to use that experience and influence to protect Christians, who face the most unimaginable treatment for following their faith. I congratulate the Government on their unequivocal support for defending the rights of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, because that demonstrated the impact and reach that our country can have when we lead international responses to protect those suffering from religious persecution.

The systematic denial of freedom of religious belief is becoming entrenched by extreme nationalism and militant extremism in all corners of the world. We cannot afford to hesitate. The Government have shown that they are able and willing to lead an international response to tackle these injustices. The responsibility now rests with the Government to agree a strong collective response that has freedom and tolerance at its heart.

3.35 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) on his speech. It is deeply humbling for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and my friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). When I think of those two Members, I think of the line from Paul's epistle to the Romans, chapter 1, verse 16:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ".

The speech delivered by the hon. Member for Strangford reminded me of the famous saying of St Francis of Assisi:

"Preach the gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words."

The emotion behind what he said was very powerful.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary for commissioning the report—it is a measure of that particular Member of this House that he felt the need to commission it in the first place. I also thank the Bishop of Truro for the work that he has done to highlight the scale of Christian persecution around the world. It is an excellent report, and I hope that its conclusions and recommendations will be studied carefully, and accepted and actioned. I cannot truly convey the emotions I felt when reading the report, because the scale of Christian persecution that it describes is truly shocking and horrific. Nobody should be persecuted because of how or who they worship. It is a fundamental part of the spiritual DNA of many Members of this House that everybody should have the basic human right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

I fully support the bishop's recommendation that freedom of religion or belief should become the underpinning of the operation of the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, I endorse the need for a diplomatic code. I think that some of our diplomats need to have a clear direction on the appropriate response to the persecution of Christians, because I feel ashamed that so many Christians have been persecuted around the world and we have done so little to stop it, or even to speak out about it. It is right that we have spoken out to condemn violence against other minority groups, but it is wrong that at times we have been too restrained—or indeed silent—in condemning the persecution of Christians.

I also agree with the bishop that calling out the persecution of Christians is neither imperialistic nor a case of white privilege. As my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) noted, the bishop said that it is not about special pleading for Christians, but about making up for a significant deficit, because Christian persecution accounts for 80% of all religious persecution around the world.

Our country must act. We have a special responsibility—a moral responsibility—because of our privileged status in the world, and with our Head of State being the head of a Christian Church, to speak out and protect Christians around the world. Renewing a focus on Christian persecution, as the bishop said, is actually a way of expressing our concern for all minorities who find themselves under pressure. Ignoring Christian persecution might well mean ignoring other forms of repression.

May I make a plea to the Minister that we will use our soft power to exercise as much influence as possible in speaking up for persecuted Christians? It is high time we escalated the role of the Prime Minister's special envoy on freedom of religion or belief. We need to follow the American example by having a dedicated ambassador at large for international freedom of religion or belief, with a formal structure of support, engaging with faith leaders at home and abroad and articulating recommendations for cross-Government action on this.

3.39 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As others have done, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who opened today's debate. He eloquently set the scene for what has been an excellent debate that, as some of us predicted, has been squeezed due to time. Alongside the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), I appeared before the Backbench Business Committee in support of the application for the debate. Both Members have been serious champions for the persecuted Church in this House. I know I speak on behalf of everyone when I thank them for their pursuance of this issue.

I have the privilege of winding up today's debate on behalf of the Scottish National party, which endorses the report and the recommendations made by the Bishop of Truro. We extend our grateful thanks to Philip and his team for doing so much work in such a short period of time. It was great that the Foreign Secretary committed to the review being undertaken. The relatively tight timescale for the report to be conducted and produced has raised some eyebrows, but we are where we are. It is important that the next Foreign Secretary is as committed to this issue as the current office holder.

Over the course of the afternoon, we have had no fewer than 15 contributions from the Back Benches, from the hon. Members for Croydon South, for Clwyd

South (Susan Elan Jones), for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), the hon. Members for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and for Stroud (Dr Drew), the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), and the hon. Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown), for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for Strangford, for Congleton, for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) and for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

For my own part, one of the most powerful images I have ever seen was from Egypt's Tahrir Square in 2011. That scene, of Christians forming a human shield around Muslims who were on their hands and knees praying, is one that will never leave me. For me, that kind of solidarity and fellowship is the very essence of freedom of religion and belief. However, freedom of religion and belief is not just some romantic idea. It is enshrined in the UN universal declaration of human rights:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The review is to be warmly welcomed, and it is especially welcome that it has a very specific focus on the persecution of Christians. Whether it is a subconscious post-colonial guilt or not, there is sometimes a feeling that the persecution of Christians is often ignored or given less attention. That is alarming when we consider the sheer scale of the persecution of those of us who follow Jesus Christ. We know that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the whole world. Indeed, in 2016, the Pew Research Centre found that Christians were singled out and persecuted in 144 countries across the world. That was up from 125 the previous year. We know from the excellent work done by organisations such as Open Doors that a quarter of a billion Christians in the top 50 countries for persecution still suffer intolerable levels of persecution and risk simply for following Jesus Christ.

Others have already done justice to the report by going through its recommendations, and the Foreign Office should absolutely give them serious consideration. I want to focus on where we go now and how the British Government interact with other countries in the years to come. At the moment, I am particularly concerned about persecution of Christians in Latin America and southern Asia.

Alarmingly, we saw India shoot up the world watchlist this year, entering the top 10 countries for persecuting Christians. That is particularly worrying, because the hostility towards Christians has grown enormously in just five years or so. Put simply, the persecution in India can be attributed directly to Prime Minister Modi's Hindu nationalist movement. India is the world's largest democracy, yet we are still hearing of prayer meetings being disrupted by Modi's thugs and Christians being beaten simply for gathering to study God's word and to pray.

Moving from India over to Pakistan, we are reminded of those paying the price twice: first, for being female; and, secondly, for having the temerity to have a different faith. In Pakistan, Christian women are particularly

vulnerable to abduction, rape and forced marriage. It is estimated that 700 girls are vulnerable to that every single year.

I want to turn now to Latin America, which is in the Minister's brief and which he is familiar with. There are a number of factors in play in Latin America, and we know that the main driver of persecution is a depressing cocktail of cartels, state authorities and rival human rights claims by indigenous groups. In Mexico, for example, murder is a regular occurrence, with the Roman Catholic Multimedia Centre reporting the murder of 45 priests and one cardinal between 1990 and 2017. Even today, Mexico is still considered one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a Catholic priest.

Earlier in the year, I wrote to the Minister about the situation in Chile and he, in his usual courteous but robust style, disputed that it was a place of hostility for Christians. However, in recent years, we have seen a co-ordinated campaign of arson attacks on churches, both Catholic and Protestant, so I would be grateful if, in summing up, he specifically referred to Chile and the latest situation there.

The reason I mention some of these countries and not the typical ones, such as Iraq and North Korea, is that they are ones with which we seek to have a good relationship in the context of global Britain; indeed, the Government actively want to do post-Brexit trade deals with them. I guess my main ask today is that human rights and freedom of religion and belief are not overlooked in some mad scramble to do a post-Brexit trade deal. As with any negotiation, there are trade-offs, but turning a blind eye to the persecution of Christians cannot be one of them.

That brings me rather nicely to the final thing I want to quote, which is the Bishop of Truro's last words in the report:

"Perhaps the most dystopian aspect of George Orwell's 1984 is the existence of the 'Thought Police' and the possibility of prosecution for 'thought crime'. The freedom to think for oneself and to choose to believe what one chooses to believe, without fear of coercion, is the most fundamental human right, and is indeed the one on which so many others depend: because if one is not free to think or believe how can one order one's life in any other way one chooses? And yet everywhere in our world today we see this right questioned, compromised and threatened. It is a grave threat which must be resisted—both because it is an evil in itself, and because it threatens so much else. It is on the basis of that conviction that these recommendations have been formulated. And those who find these recommendations unpalatable should simply ask themselves this question: what exactly would the consequences of inaction be? And how grave does this situation have to become before we act?"

3.46 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow East (David Linden) for securing this important debate. I also thank the hon. Member for Glasgow East for his summing-up. The hon. Member for Strangford, in particular, has done some excellent work as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief to highlight the persecution of Christians and, indeed, of those of other faiths and none. I commend him for his passion for the subject. Yes, sometimes it is emotional, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

[Liz McInnes]

We have heard 15 excellent speeches from hon. Members, and the representation here has been impressively cross-party and multi-faith. Genuine action on the persecution of Christians is long overdue; many people have been trying to draw the world's attention to the deeply worrying scale of Christian persecution for many, many years. Like other Members, I was shocked to hear that 80% of religious persecution globally is against Christians. Clearly, there is a serious problem here that needs urgent action from all Governments.

The report rightly highlights that persecution for one's religion or belief is not limited to Christians or indeed to any one religious or non-religious group. The unfortunate reality is that countries that do not respect religious freedom, or indeed the right to no belief, invariably do not respect other basic human rights. The persecution of Christians often goes hand in hand with the persecution of other religious groups and minorities. For example, we might look at India, where the rise of Hindu nationalism affects millions of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, or at Pakistan, which is about 95% Muslim and 2% Christian, and has some of the harshest blasphemy laws in the world, including a mandatory death penalty for insulting the Prophet Mohammed.

The case of Asia Bibi was particularly concerning. While we are all relieved that Asia and her family have now settled in Canada, it was a real shame that our Government could not confirm at the time that they would offer her asylum in the UK. I had numerous conversations on the subject with the then Minister for Asia and the Pacific, and each time he urged caution in making the case too public. Now that the current Minister is in a position to comment on Asia's case without jeopardising her move, can he clarify whether it is correct that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office vetoed the suggestion that she be allowed to move to the UK?

I very much welcome the Government's initiatives to put the persecution of Christians centre stage globally. However, human rights groups and others are concerned about whether they will maintain the momentum. In July 2018, the Prime Minister took the very welcome step of appointing Lord Ahmad as her special envoy on freedom of religion or belief. One way to alleviate the concerns of human rights groups would be to make the role of the special envoy permanent, providing appropriate resources and an ability to work across Departments, and I hope the Minister will be able to confirm today that the Government will do that.

The Bishop of Truro said in his review that we must be prepared to consider imposing sanctions on perpetrators of serious human rights abuses against religious minorities, including Christians. Such a measure to hold nations to account over their human rights violations could be a very significant step and would be a real statement of intent, showing that the Government were committed to protecting religious minorities. Another potential measure is to include human rights clauses in future trade agreements. EU trade policy is increasingly incorporating human rights considerations. Can the Minister give an assurance that the significant work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the persecution of Christians can be mainstreamed through new trade agreements?

The Bishop of Truro also recommended that the Government seek a Security Council resolution urging all Governments in the middle east and north Africa to protect Christians, and other persecuted minorities, and allow UN observers to monitor the necessary security measures. That too would be a welcome step, and I hope that the Minister will comment on it, but I suggest that we need to go further. Rather than monitoring situations, we need to actively pursue progress on the persecution of Christians. That could start with countries with which we have good relationships, such as Nigeria. The report notes the internecine violence between Muslim herdsmen and Christian farmers across Nigeria's middle belt. If the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were to work with the Nigerian Government to prioritise engagement on freedom of religion and belief, investing the necessary resources, a real difference could be made over time.

It is true that the conflict in Nigeria is not simply religious, but is also driven by climate change and a rapidly growing population. It is clear that more needs to be done to promote reconciliation between religious communities. I hope that the Minister will clarify how the UK will work with other Governments to support freedom of religion and belief. Numerous options are available to the Government to show that they are committed to protecting religious minorities, and many of them are contained in the Bishop of Truro's review. I am sure the whole House looks forward to hearing from the Minister which recommendations the Government will be implementing and what specific action they will be taking in the light of this review.

3.53 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and to the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow East (David Linden) for securing the debate. The Minister for the Middle East, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), would have liked very much to be here to respond to the debate, but he is currently engaged in a parallel debate, so the honour falls to me.

I am grateful for the contributions of all Members. This really has been a most dignified and passionate debate. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Strangford. I have only a day or two left as a Minister—by choice; or perhaps, anyway—and I have to say that in my three years as a Foreign Office Minister, I have responded to many, many Westminster Hall debates, and without exception, when any topic involving human rights, religion, persecution of international justice is being discussed, the hon. Gentleman has been unfailingly present. I shall miss him, if not all Westminster Hall debates.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): You can still turn up.

Sir Alan Duncan: Thank you for the offer. There are not many saints in this House, but the hon. Gentleman is about as close as anyone gets to being one.

On Monday 8 July, the Foreign Secretary welcomed the publication of the Bishop of Truro's independent review of the persecution of Christians worldwide, and I would like now to set out in more detail the response of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The world is an increasingly challenging place for people of faith, and in some parts of the world for those of no faith. In the past two years, appalling atrocities, as we have heard today, have been committed against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the horrific shootings in two Christchurch mosques shocked us all, but there are so many other stories of suffering that gain far less news coverage, and the statistics tell us, as we have heard again today, that Christians suffer more persecution than any other religious group in the world, yet we hear far less about this than one would expect. We are too reticent about discussing Christian persecution, and we must overcome this mindset; the evidence justifies a much louder voice.

As the Bishop of Truro states in the introduction to his review, the majority of Christians are found in the global south and among the global poor, and the review takes case studies from China, India, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, where persecution stems from state oppression, terrorism and ethnic or nationalist conflict. As Christianity is perhaps the most truly global of religions, the persecution of Christians often indicates wider violations of the rights of all minority groups, and the report notes the large body of evidence for this. In some places the persecution of Christians is closely linked with poverty and social exclusion, and elsewhere it is compounded by discrimination against women, so increasing the attention given to Christian persecution does not dull but sharpen our focus on human rights for all.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Foreign Office has taken the lead on this, but the Minister will know that a number of hon. Members have argued that there needs to be a cross-Government approach for the very reason he has just set out: that this touches on so many areas. May we have a strategy across the whole of government to address this alarming persecution?

Sir Alan Duncan: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend, and in fact he is making my point for me: this is not just a Foreign Office thing. Indeed, it is not just an envoy thing; it is an everything thing, which means that all Departments, all the Government, and all Government policies must bear this in mind. And in doing so we should not be timid; we should be bold and ensure that the UK's response to Christian persecution is in proportion to the problem, and that, as the report suggests, now demands serious effort.

Fiona Bruce: Does the Minister also agree that if we are to call this out internationally, we must also call out criticism of those in this country who feel inhibited perhaps and unable to speak out on issues as a result of their religious views? That is wrong.

Sir Alan Duncan: We cannot have one set of standards for abroad and a different set of standards for our own domestic life; they all have to be consistent, and in that sense my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Freedom of religion or belief is already a fundamental part of Foreign Office work, in accordance with article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights. We have a team here in London dedicated to this agenda, and our overseas network promotes and supports freedom of religion on a daily basis. Over the past year, we have

spoken out about the rights of the Baha'i in Yemen, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, the Rohingya in Myanmar and religious minorities in the middle east.

However, belief is a sensitive issue where more can sometimes be achieved through quiet persuasion and discreet negotiation. Sensitive cases often depend on strong diplomatic relations. With this in mind, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been tackling religious persecution on three levels: first, we work with the United Nations and other global organisations to create international consensus to support freedom of religion or belief; secondly, at country level Ministers and officials raise individual cases with their hosts and lobby on behalf of the United Kingdom against practices and laws that discriminate on the basis of religion or belief; and thirdly, the Government, through the FCO, fund and support projects that promote respect for all people of faith and those of no faith.

The UK argues strongly for civilian and refugee protection, for humanitarian access and for the improvement of the effectiveness and funding of the international response across the world. We support efforts to ensure that Christians can return to their homes in areas of Iraq liberated from Daesh, and we are leading global efforts to bring Daesh to justice for their crimes. Two years ago, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted the UK-drafted Daesh accountability resolution 2379, which called for the establishment of an investigative team to collect evidence of Daesh's crimes. Last year, the Prime Minister appointed my noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon as the first special envoy on freedom of religion or belief. Lord Ahmad has worked tirelessly on this issue to offer our support to those who suffer. Good work is being done, but we must of course reflect on whether there is more we can do to protect Christians who are persecuted on the basis of their religion.

The report suggests that there is more to be done, and I am pleased to announce—in answer to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes)—that the Government have decided to accept every recommendation in full. The following list of commitments is not exhaustive, but I hope that it illustrates the scale of our ambition. We will put freedom of religion or belief at the heart of FCO culture, policy and operations. We will publicly articulate our goals and give guidance to our diplomats on how to reflect these values. We already engage on freedom of religion or belief in a range of international forums, but we will strengthen our approach with an advocacy strategy. We will carefully examine whether adopting the label “Christophobia” would better inform FCO policies to address the problem.

We will strengthen our data on freedom of religion or belief, and we already have the Magna Carta project that is investigating ways to improve the data. We will also work with the Department for International Development's freedom of religion or belief programme to look at how better data can inform the development of international policy. We will respond immediately to any atrocity, including genocide, and we will continue our work to impose sanctions on the perpetrators of religious or faith-based persecution.

We will encourage arm's length bodies and partners such as the British Council to develop appropriate policies on freedom of religion or belief. To promote religious literacy, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, all Foreign Office

[Sir Alan Duncan]

staff will undergo mandatory training where this is relevant to their job. We will create a clear reporting framework to formalise how we engage with minority and religious leaders on the ground, and we will use the recommendations to tailor responses to violations. We will ensure that human rights reporting mentions faith-based persecution wherever relevant.

To improve co-ordination, we will investigate whether new Whitehall structures could strengthen cross-Government thinking. We will initiate regular themed discussions with civil society representatives, and convene Ministers across the Government to give a consistent international approach. At the United Nations, we will explore how best to deliver a new Security Council resolution urging all Governments in the middle east and north Africa to protect Christians and to allow UN observers to monitor the necessary security measures. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will follow up on the recommendation that this report should also inform the work of other public authorities through a future full Cabinet meeting. Finally, we recognise the importance of measuring the impact of our work, so a review will be commissioned after a suitable length of time.

We warmly recommend this review for helping to give the worldwide persecution of Christians the attention that it demands. The review provides us with new evidence and raises concerns to which we must respond. I hope that Members here today will agree that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is demonstrating its firm commitment to addressing the recommendations of the review and to improving freedom of religious expression around the world, and I am more than happy that my final words in this House as a Minister should be in support of such a worthy cause.

4.4 pm

Chris Philp: This afternoon's debate has been a really excellent one. I would like to pay tribute to all the Members who have contributed to it, but in particular

to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his emotional and powerful contribution earlier. I strongly suspect that the final words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) in the Chamber will not be those he has just spoken. I look forward to hearing his words for many years to come.

I strongly welcome the response we have just heard. It is fantastic news that the Government are accepting all the recommendations in the Bishop of Truro's report, and I am delighted we have heard that announced in the House this afternoon. It is very important that all of us in this House and in the Government take responsibility for protecting and promoting human rights around the world. Just because atrocities are happening across the oceans or across the seas does not make them any less serious. We should never pass by on the other side.

I hope this afternoon's debate will provide the Government with the motivation to redouble their efforts—not just in adopting the recommendations in the report, but in going further and looking at the ways we can use aid, trade and other tools in the Government's toolbox to protect the rights of religious minorities, particularly Christians, around the world, where persecution occurs. Today's debate has been an excellent one, and I hope action results. Once again, I thank everybody for participating in it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House deplores the persecution of Christians overseas; supports freedom of religion or belief in all countries throughout the world; welcomes the work undertaken by the Bishop of Truro in this area; and calls on the Government to do more with the diplomatic and other tools at its disposal to prevail on the governments of countries in which persecution of Christians is tolerated or encouraged to end that persecution and to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Non-invasive Precision Cancer Therapies

4.6 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the vital role that radiotherapy plays in cancer treatment across the UK with an estimated one in four people needing that treatment at some stage of their life; notes that there is a significant body of expert opinion that up to 24,000 people may be missing out on the radiotherapy they need, resulting in many hundreds of unnecessary or premature deaths; further notes that the UK spend on radiotherapy as a percentage of the overall cancer budget is approximately five per cent which compares badly with most other advanced economies where the percentage varies from nine per cent to 11 per cent; notes that the current commissioning system for radiotherapy is sub-optimal as exemplified by a tariff regime which discourages NHS Trusts from implementing advanced modern effective radiotherapy; calls on the Government to provide an immediate up-front £250 million investment in the service, an ongoing extra £100 million per annum investment in personnel and skills and IT, and to introduce a sustainably, centrally and fully funded rolling programme for Linac machine replacements; and further calls on the Government to appoint a single person to oversee the commissioning and implementation of radiotherapy services.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee and its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for granting this debate, and all the Members on both sides of the House who supported the application. I must declare an interest as one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on radiotherapy, and also as a cancer survivor—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Thank you. Thanks to early diagnosis, I was successfully treated with both chemotherapy and, crucially, precision radiotherapy.

I want to point out to the Minister that there is currently a crisis—there is no other word for it—in the management and funding of radiotherapy in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the charity Action Radiotherapy estimates that as many as 20,000 people across the UK may be missing out on the radiotherapy they need. Many of these patients will die prematurely or unnecessarily as a result of this shortfall. Given that one in four people receives some form of radiotherapy during their lives, and that almost half of us in the United Kingdom will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in our lifetimes, I hope the Government will realise just how important it is that we invest in modern and, importantly, accessible cancer diagnosis—and not just in diagnosis, but in cancer treatments.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I am very proud to have the Christie Hospital in my constituency of Manchester, Withington. It has a fantastic proton beam therapy unit, which is going to be the future of cancer treatment. However, when I speak to the staff at the Christie, their biggest worry is the workforce. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that the challenge is not just funding for treatment, but actually investing in our cancer workforce as well?

Grahame Morris: Absolutely, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. Indeed, that is one of the four basic requirements, as the all-party group, the charity Radiotherapy4Life and Action Radiotherapy have pointed out. That is clearly demonstrated in the “Manifesto for Radiotherapy”, which I commend to the Minister and to all hon. Members.

I appreciate that the Minister will want to refer to chapter 3 of “The NHS Long Term Plan”, particularly paragraph 3.62 on more precise treatments using advanced radiotherapy techniques. In anticipation of that, I would like to say, on investment, that the Government have promised to complete the £130 million investment in radiotherapy machines and, as my hon. Friend has just mentioned, to commission the proton beam machines at University College Hospital in London and the Christie Hospital in Manchester. However, I respectfully point out to the Minister that that is not a new announcement of additional resources, but the recycling of previous announcements. The money has already been spent or committed, so it is not part of the comprehensive 10-year plan for radiotherapy that we advocated for in the “Manifesto for Radiotherapy”.

The £250 million for proton beam facilities, while welcome, will only treat 1,500 patients a year. I accept that many of them will be children with brain cancers, but the number represents only 1% of patients needing radiotherapy. As indicated in the manifesto, we recommend that the same sum that was spent on proton beam facilities—a relatively modest sum given the size of the budget as a whole—is all that is needed to renew radiotherapy centres and to ensure that all patients, not just those who live in London or near to major conurbations, can receive treatment within the recommended 45-minute travel time. I know that other hon. Members will say a little more about that.

We are also asking for an additional £100 million a year, increasing the cancer funding for radiotherapy from the current 5% a year to 6.5% a year, to ensure sufficient funding for workforce planning, including ensuring that there is suitable training, and ensuring that there is an effective IT network, equipment upgrades and a rolling programme to ensure that all radiotherapy machines across the UK are up to date. According to analysis of freedom of information requests made by Action Radiotherapy, more than 40% of NHS trusts in England—all bar six responded to the requests—that provide radiotherapy have machines that are past their recommended lifespan, leading to less efficient and effective care.

The current system of commissioning for radiotherapy often incentivises trusts not to use their most modern precision radiotherapy machines to their full capability. That means that some patients are treated more often and less effectively, even though there are modern stereotactic ablative radiotherapy machines that could treat them more effectively. Precision radiotherapy is needed to cure 40% of cancers, and all that we want is to ensure that all patients can get to a radiotherapy machine and that the professionals are allowed to switch on the machines and provide the appropriate treatment. However, chronic underfunding and the complications of radiotherapy commissioning and delivery are preventing that from happening.

Radiotherapy receives only 5% of the cancer treatment budget. At £383 million a year, that represents 0.025% of the total NHS budget, and I want to compare that with the cost of just two cancer drugs. The NHS budget for Herceptin—an effective drug that is used to treat about 15% to 20% of breast cancer patients—is £160 million. A recent UK trial showed that only six months, not 12 months, of adjuvant Herceptin may be needed for adjacent therapy, which is when the drug is

[Grahame Morris]

used in combination with radiotherapy. In financial terms, the NHS could therefore save up to £80 million a year, offsetting much of the additional radiotherapy costs.

It is time to put radiotherapy back at the top of the NHS agenda, and we need someone to advocate for that. We are urging the Department to appoint a radiotherapy tsar who will ensure that the NHS has a world-class radiotherapy service. Many other MPs want to speak in the debate, so I will keep my remarks short. I am pleased that the Government have accepted that advanced precision radiotherapy is more effective and has fewer side-effects.

In summary, I want to see a modest increase in the budget for advanced radiotherapy, rising from 5% to 6.5% of the cancer budget. That would enable large numbers of cancer patients to live longer and more fulfilling lives and would achieve better outcomes and more positive economic benefits. I am keen to ensure that Members have an opportunity to participate in the debate. There are many issues that we need to highlight, including in relation to commissioning, workforce planning and IT networks, so I will leave it at that to allow others to participate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I will try to manage without a formal time limit. If everybody takes around five minutes, everybody will have the opportunity to speak.

4.15 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). Half of everyone in the UK will develop cancer at some stage in their lives and a quarter of us will receive radiotherapy treatment. Radiotherapy is highly effective, especially when compared with other therapies, given that survival rates improve by 16% compared with just 2% with other therapies such as chemotherapy. That is important because the UK has the second worst survival rates for lung cancer in Europe and we lag behind the European average in nine out of 10 cancers. We know that our population is ageing and that, more and more, our lifestyle choices are detrimental to our health. This means that over the next six years, cancer rates are expected to increase by a quarter, so ensuring that we get cancer treatment right is of fundamental importance.

The Government are making progress in this area. Since 2010, rates of cancer survival have increased year on year. It is thought that 7,000 people are alive today who would otherwise not have been. The NHS long-term plan has set out a way to ensure that future radiotherapy treatment will be faster, smarter and more effective. Although it is a welcome strategy, we in the all-party group on radiotherapy have been looking into the detail and have highlighted some pressing issues, which we look forward to publishing in due course.

As has been mentioned, there are serious workforce shortages; for example, radiotherapy clinical scientists have a current vacancy rate of 8%. We need to take swift action to address that, and specifically, to support the

education and training programmes that feed the pipeline of talent. There are only 10 therapeutic radiography degree programmes in England and that will soon reduce to nine, as one very close to me in Portsmouth is due to close soon.

Since 2016, entry-level training for this industry has fallen by 23% since the loss of the bursary; last year, only 240 students undertook this training. I therefore hope that the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Education will review the impact of terminating the bursary programme and consider how to attract students to this profession. The Society of Radiographers recently developed an apprenticeship standard at degree level to provide another entry point to the profession. I believe that that is exactly the right approach, whereby the next generation of industry professionals can learn and earn on the job. Sadly, however, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education offered a funding band of around £19,000 for the programme's delivery, but given the high-tech and expensive infrastructure needed to support it, the level of funding was insufficient. I urge the institute to carry out a review of the scheme and ensure that we have the right funding requirements.

During evidence sessions for the all-party group on radiotherapy, the current tariff system came up again and again, including the fact that the tariff is paid per fraction. Clearly, if we have new technology that will reduce the number of fractions, there may be a perverse incentive that would discourage the use of it. Earlier this year, the all-party group visited Elekta in West Sussex, which is pioneering the future of advanced radiotherapy technology, including the MRI LINAC—linear accelerator—machines. Ironically, West Sussex does not have a single LINAC machine—neither the MRI version nor even the standard version—so many of my constituents are travelling as far as London and Brighton for their treatment. Time and again, I have heard from them, and from charities including CancerWise, which is based in Chichester, just how gruelling these daily journeys are. Many adjacent counties have this capability, and I started this journey to make the case for having that capability for my constituents.

It is worth highlighting that £130 million was invested in 2016-17, and that upgraded and replaced machines right across England's cancer centres. It was the largest investment for 15 years, so we thank the Department of Health and Social Care for it; it was very welcome. However, we are concerned that in the long term, the equipment may not be maintained unless there is a rolling fund. The way we budget for this seems stochastic. We know that the equipment has a life span. As it is all new, perhaps we can now plan for when it is old, and ensure that there is a rolling budget in place. We have mentioned IT. It is vital that we have the latest network, to ensure that all the constituent parts are interconnected.

Radiotherapy is the most incredible resource, and is involved in 40% of cancer cures. It is a cost-effective treatment, taking up just 5% of the cancer budget while treating 50% of cancer patients, but it needs a bigger voice, and I am grateful to my colleagues on the APPG for securing this debate and allowing us to give it that voice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NHS staff across our country who deliver this phenomenal service. The changes that we are discussing could save

many more lives. Britain has always embraced innovative technology, so I have no doubt that advanced radiotherapy and integrated IT networks will be the standard in the future; the question for all those suffering from cancer is merely when.

4.21 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Grahame Morris) and for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who are vice-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on radiotherapy, of which I am honoured to be the chair.

Many of us know too well the pain, hardship and heartbreak that cancer causes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington said, it is widely accepted that half of us will get cancer in our lifetime. While I am on my feet, there will be people getting their diagnosis and families coming to terms with it, and lives turned upside down. Most of us have been affected by cancer in some way; cancer took my mum, far too young. But increasingly cancer is a condition to be overcome, not a death sentence. Advances in medical science mean that there are often a host of possible treatments when the diagnosis comes.

Perhaps the form of treatment of which we hear the least is radiotherapy. It is widely accepted that 50% of those who suffer from cancer will require radiotherapy at some point in their treatment. However, in its recent radiotherapy specification, NHS England reduced the figure for cancer patients needing radiotherapy to 40%. It reached that figure on an interpretation of the Malthus model; if only 40% of cancer patients need radiotherapy, then the current level of investment will be just about adequate, as everyone who could benefit from radiotherapy would receive it, so we might as well conclude this debate and go home—only that figure is wrong, as NHS England has had to admit.

The APPG on radiotherapy recently held a number of evidence sessions, in part to get to the bottom of this inconsistency. We heard from a wide range of experts, including one of the authors of the Malthus model, who explicitly stated that NHS England's interpretation of the model underestimates the number of patients requiring treatment, because it takes into account only those patients whose initial treatment is radiotherapy, not those who need it after the initial point. When pressed, NHS England accepted that, acknowledging that the 40% estimate was not accurate and fell shy of the true figure. This matters, because the real figure is roughly 50%, which means that NHS England is not commissioning sufficient radiotherapy treatment to meet the needs of cancer patients. The Government must plan on the basis of true demand, not of a figure discredited by the experts and now disowned by NHS England. The Royal College of Radiologists has confirmed that this combination of factors means that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington said, 20,000 people in Britain are not receiving the radiotherapy that they need.

The major issue in my patch is access. Those needing radiotherapy across our communities in south Cumbria have to travel to the Rosemere unit in Preston. That unit is excellent. The staff are wonderful and the kit is brilliant. There is only one thing wrong with Rosemere: it is far too far away. The National Radiotherapy Advisory

Group has said that it is bad practice for people normally to have to travel more than 45 minutes to receive radiotherapy treatment. I drove Kate from Kendal to her treatment in Preston the other week; it was a three-hour round trip. She had been doing that every day for six weeks. For those living in Garsdale, Langdale or Conistone, those trips could be five or six hours, or far longer on public transport, every day for weeks. Those are ludicrous distances to travel to receive vital treatment, and that is why we want a satellite of the Rosemere unit to be based at Westmorland General Hospital.

I spoke to one lady over 80 years of age who was recommended a course of radiotherapy. She decided to forgo that treatment because of the distance she would have to travel. She did not have the option of a shorter journey, so she has instead taken the option of a shorter life. And she is not alone.

A group of leading UK professionals at the British Institute of Radiology met to discuss their experience of setting up satellite centres. They calculated an average 20% uplift on top of the projected figures for those using the service, while the centres of which they were satellites saw no decline in numbers. That means that in areas such as mine, where access to radiotherapy is poor, 20% of people who should be getting radiotherapy are not getting it, but if a satellite centre was built, they would get that treatment. This is not about convenience; it is about saving lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington has already raised the problems with commissioning. I will simply say that 100% of radiotherapy centres in the UK are equipped with SABR—stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy—technology. That is the best technology, giving the most focused and concentrated treatment that is most effective at killing cancerous tissue and causing the least damage to surrounding healthy tissue. That means fewer treatments, fewer side-effects and better results. The scandal, however, is that only 25 of those 52 centres are commissioned to use it.

Is it any wonder that cancer survival rates in this country are among the worst in Europe? We have the second lowest survival rate for lung cancers and below average survival rates for nine of the 10 main cancers. Do not hear me wrong—I know that radiotherapy is not the only solution. Surgery is vital, as are drugs and chemotherapy. We are very proud of the battle we won to deliver chemotherapy to Kendal—countless people have benefited from that—but when chemo improves survival by 2% whereas radiotherapy improves survival by 16%, we need to think carefully about the disparity in investment.

The simple fact is that radiotherapy lacks the financial backing to be heard. Drugs companies lobby passionately and legitimately for the treatments they provide. Radiotherapy has no such lobby. The all-party group has been struck by the realisation that we are the entire UK radiotherapy lobby, along with those people who work in the industry. Radiotherapy has become a Cinderella service because it lacks a champion. We invite the Minister to become that champion.

Finally, enthusiastically we welcome the Government's focus on earlier cancer diagnosis, but earlier diagnosis will increase demand for radiotherapy. When tumours are spotted earlier and are smaller, they will need more precise and focused treatment—they will need radiotherapy. Twenty thousand people a year are missing out on

[Tim Farron]

radiotherapy already, but if we do not invest now, as more and more cancers are diagnosed earlier, that figure will rocket and this secret scandal will become painfully public.

Our cancer survival rates are distressingly low. Radiotherapy is, after surgery, the most effective cure for cancer—far more so than drugs. It has been left behind in terms of investment for many years under many Governments. This is the moment when that shameful state of affairs must end. People should have the best treatment for their cancer, and where at all possible they should have it close to home—because shorter journeys equals longer lives.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Hon. Members have done well on six minutes, but can we please now aim for five minutes? I am sure that people want to hear what the Minister has to say in response. There is no point in asking questions if there is no time for the Minister to answer.

4.28 pm

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). There is not one Member in this House whose life has not been touched by cancer. My late partner, John, suffered from it and, sadly, lost his battle two years ago, despite excellent treatment from the Royal Blackburn Hospital. I know and sympathise with many constituents struggling through treatment. Major breakthroughs have been made in radiotherapy in the past 10 years, with modern advanced radiotherapy being more precise, curing more patients and producing fewer side effects to the point where patients can continue to work normally; but when comparing cancer services on a global scale, we see that only one quarter of people in the north-west believe that the NHS offers the best cancer care.

Like John, 47,000 men a year in Britain are found to have prostate cancer, and more than 11,500 a year die from the disease. Last October, the University of Birmingham published an article about a breakthrough in treatment. Previously, it was unclear whether there was any benefit to treating the prostate directly with radiotherapy if the cancer had already spread. The research helps to answer the question and has implications beyond prostate cancer. Clinical trials for the disease found that advanced radiotherapy boosted survival rates by 11% for men whose cancer had spread to nearby lymph nodes or bones. The result is likely to change the care given to around 3,000 men every year in England alone, and could benefit many more around the world.

I am conscious of the time, so I am going to shorten some of my points, but I still feel that they are important. Until now, it was thought that there was no point in treating the prostate itself if the cancer had already spread because it would be—I have heard those words—like shutting the stable door after the horse had bolted. However, the study proved the benefit of prostate radiotherapy for those men. Unlike many new drugs for cancer, radiotherapy is a simple and relatively cheap treatment that is readily available in most of the world. However, there are two main issues with access—the tariffs and the availability of modern radiotherapy machines.

As other Members have said, the current tariff disincentivises trusts from saving money because their income depends on the number of treatments. NHS research has shown that treating prostate cancer patients with 20 treatments, rather than 37, was better for patients and would save the NHS in excess of £20 million a year. I hope the Minister will let me and others know when the current situation will stop. When will NHS England allow trusts to use the radiotherapy equipment that they already have to move to even shorter periods of treatment? A period of five treatments has gradually been adopted around the world for large numbers of prostate cancer patients.

Preston is our nearest radiotherapy centre. It is a very short journey from Blackpool to Preston, but Preston is really struggling with workforce, funding and a shortage of oncologists. At least four of the seven machines there are in the second part of their life. There needs to be funding to provide, sustain and maintain the machines. In October 2016, NHS England announced a £130 million investment to spend on upgrading radiotherapy machines. It was welcome, but that money was merely the underspend from the drugs budget. Of the 260 machines in use, approximately 90 needed replacing by the end of 2017. We must ensure that the machines have a sustainable future.

Finally, I want to echo the asks in the “Manifesto for Radiotherapy” for a one-off £250 million investment and an estimated sustained additional £100 million a year to catch up and provide the advanced, modern radiotherapy and IT networks currently needed in the UK. Experts, charities, clinicians and patients are calling for urgent investment in radiotherapy services. Please, Minister, listen, and support the motion before the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That was a very courageous speech by the hon. Lady, and I am only sorry that she had such a short time in which to make it.

4.33 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I completely concur with what you just said, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern) made a very warm and touching speech, which only reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) that so many people have been touched, in many cases very painfully, by cancer.

My anxiety is that a growing crisis in cancer care is coming in this country. The worst of it is that we may not spot it, because our cancer survival rates are, of course, improving, which is brilliant. Doctors and scientists—pathologists and so on—have done an amazing job in recent years in managing to keep many more people alive, and in this country in particular we have done well, but frankly we started from a very low base compared with other countries in Europe and around the world. I am painfully conscious of that in relation to Wales.

I make no partisan point here, but I will criticise what we are doing in the Welsh NHS at the moment. I do so not out of partisan anger, but simply because we need to get this right. The truth is that cancer survival rates will improve, but not as well as they could do if we managed to get several things right. We have to persuade

more people, particularly from poorer backgrounds, to go to the doctor when they have suspicions about their condition. We must also persuade more doctors, particularly those in poorer backgrounds, to refer people on when they think there might be a suspicion of cancer. It is still worrying that, in my patch in south Wales, we still do not refer on enough people, so that they end up being referred much later, when they are in the later stages of cancer. The most galling thing of all for anybody is when they hear, “Well, it’s just a little bit late. If only you had come six months, three months or even four weeks ago, you would have been at stage 2 or stage 1.”

The truth is that we are failing at the moment in the UK, and particularly in Wales. The diagnostic teams in Wales are in far worse nick than they are in Australia, Poland, Scotland, the best area in England, which is the north-east of England—ironically—and the worst area in England. Nine out of 10 consultant radiologist vacancies in Wales have been unfilled for more than a year. We need 105 more radiologists by 2023 if we are to meet the growing demand for CT and MRI scans, which has risen by a third in the past three years. Thirty six per cent. of Welsh consultant histopathologists are over 55—that is much higher than in the rest of the UK—17% of whom are locums, which means that we are paying agency staff over the odds and therefore wasting NHS money.

UK-wide, only 3% of path labs believe that they are adequately staffed at the moment. This is not to attack the Government in any way, but simply to say that we have to recruit more people. In relation to radiotherapy, the Velindre Cancer Centre in South Wales, a wonderful centre, has a target of seeing and treating 98% with radical radiotherapy within 28 days, but that has not been met in any month in the past year. In January, the figure was just 63%. Why does all this matter? It is because time is of the essence when it comes to cancer. Long waits for biopsy results are absolutely terrifying for the individual, but they may also mean that the treatment is delayed, which makes it less effective than it might be. We could save more lives if we had more people working in these services.

4.37 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and all the speakers in the debate, especially my brave hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern). I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for securing this debate on this very important subject.

Last week, I visited Cancer Research UK’s event in Parliament to raise awareness of issues around cancer. The one message that I came away with is that cancer treatment is being seriously affected by a lack of diagnostic and radiotherapy staff and equipment. In June this year, the Public Accounts Committee said that the ongoing failure of many hospitals to meet targets for cancer and elective care is unacceptable and called on officials to be more accountable for improving standards.

The Royal College of Radiologists welcomed the main thrust of that report on waiting times in England, which clearly urged increased involvement and oversight from healthcare leaders in NHS England, NHS

Improvement and the Department of Health and Social Care to improve waiting times and safeguard the future care of patients. The Society of Radiographers also supports the call for a workforce increase and for investment in equipment and infrastructure to improve connectivity across radiotherapy networks. Although acknowledging that fantastic care is delivered by all professionals across the patient pathway, it highlighted a comprehensive survey on clinical staff across the country, which identified current staff shortages as a barrier to providing effective and efficient cancer treatments and excellent patient experience. It identified many problems, including missed opportunities for service improvement; insufficient capacity to undertake clinical research; the downgrading of patient experience; competition for scarce staff numbers in the local labour market; and decreased staff wellbeing and morale. There is also a great deal of concern about the impact of the loss of the bursary on staff recruitment and retention.

A recent report by the department of allied health professions at Sheffield Hallam University said that recruitment to therapeutic radiography programmes in the UK has been problematic for several years, but that this appears to have been exacerbated since the 2017 changes in healthcare education funding from bursaries to the standard student loan system for both fees and maintenance. In 2018, several programmes confirmed that they had not recruited to target, and most had needed to go into clearing to recruit students close to the start date of the course. The general trend appears to be a decline in applications, with the added problem of places being awarded at the clearing stage, which poses a risk that students may embark on courses to which they later find they are unsuited, increasing the risk of students dropping out of their courses. If I have just one ask of the Minister, it is that she commission a full assessment of the impact on allied health professionals of the replacement of bursaries with loans. These skilled, dedicated and highly qualified staff are the unseen backbone of our NHS, and it is vital that patient care does not suffer because of these changes.

In summary, plans to transform radiotherapy provision and the NHS 10-year plan more broadly must be backed with a long-term cancer workforce plan and associated investment. Without this, the NHS and the Government will simply not be able to fulfil their commitment to patients.

4.41 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the time for it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern) said so poignantly this afternoon, cancer is a disease that touches us all. In my case, it was my lovely dad who was diagnosed with bowel cancer in his 50s. Thankfully, due to early diagnosis and amazing NHS expertise, he survived. I am truly blessed that he is still with us. However, not everyone is that lucky.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who, with his typical fortitude, eloquence and courage, spoke about how important it is that people seek all-important help upon noticing symptoms.

[Paula Sherriff]

Of those of us born in the UK after 1960, almost half of us will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in our lifetime, and around a quarter of us will receive some form of radiotherapy. These are scary statistics. Radiotherapy is not some obscure treatment that is easy to ignore because it only happens to someone else. Statistically, every fourth person in this room will have had or will at some point need radiotherapy. If nothing else, from a purely self-preservation perspective, it is in all our interests to ensure that the provision of radiotherapy is exemplary.

Although the UK has a long history of being active in radiotherapy research due to having a much higher radiotherapy machine capacity and a larger workforce than elsewhere, access to radiotherapy in many parts of northern Europe is now superior to that in the UK. Radiotherapy need in the UK is expected to rise by a further 25% by 2025, but as things stand and as has been demonstrated today, the provision of radiotherapy across the country is patchy at best. Indeed, it is widely held by the experts that up to 24,000 people may be missing out on the radiotherapy they need, resulting in thousands of unnecessary or premature deaths each year. This is simply not good enough.

The advanced radiotherapy techniques of today are the standard techniques of tomorrow, and we need to invest in ensuring that these treatments are easily accessible for all patients across the country as soon as possible. There have been major breakthroughs in radiotherapy in the last 10 years. Technological advances have made radiotherapy treatments safer and more effective, improving cure rates with fewer short and long-term side effects—often to the point where patients can even continue working during the course of their treatments.

Advanced radiotherapy is now an extremely effective treatment in curing cancer when the disease is detected early enough and for palliating symptoms when a cancer has spread. However, this advanced radiotherapy is not currently available across all the UK, with many advanced radiotherapy techniques available at only a small number of centres, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale pointed out.

Radiotherapy centres across the UK are unevenly distributed, and although it is estimated that radiotherapy is needed to treat more than half of all diagnoses of cancer, access to it in England varies between 25% and 49% of cases, depending on the region. The charity Action Radiotherapy reports that patients understandably want to be able to access the best-quality radiotherapy as close to home as possible. Only 57% of the people surveyed said that they would be willing to travel as far as was necessary to get the best radiotherapy treatment available, with many opting for shorter travel times and convenience over quality. It is vital, therefore, that we ensure that the best possible treatment is available consistently across the UK, so that every patient is able to access the best high-quality radiotherapy for their individual cancer, without needing to worry about the added stress and inconvenience of lengthy travel times and distances and the associated costs.

However, tackling barriers to access is not only about travel and distance. Having radiotherapy can be very tiring, so greater consideration needs to be given to the quality of support that people receive throughout their

treatment—for example, the provision of free parking and accommodation where needed or allowing people to book all their appointments in advance. Different types of radiotherapy techniques are not always available in the UK centres that are willing and able to deliver those treatments, and evidence suggests that some patients are missing out due to a failure of appropriate commissioning of the specific therapies they require.

One story I have heard about is Robert's. When examining the surgery versus radiotherapy option, Robert was offered the opportunity to take part in a trial that explored whether, by using stereotactic ablative radiotherapy, or SABR—a type of non-invasive therapy—the number of radiotherapy treatments he would receive could be condensed to just five sessions, as opposed to the 20 currently recommended. For obvious and understandable reasons, the chance to have a short course of radiotherapy treatment appealed to Robert, and he underwent five sessions in just one week. It is disappointing, then, that such advanced techniques are available at only a small number of centres, reducing patient access.

As the cross-party “manifesto for Radiotherapy” outlined, £100 million a year is needed to catch up and provide the advanced modern radiotherapy currently needed in the UK. A one-off £250 million would be required to secure equal access for all radiotherapy patients over the next 10 years, with cutting-edge technology. Unfortunately, the commitment that we have from the Government thus far falls far short. As we have heard this afternoon, current spending levels on radiotherapy fall well short of our comparable international partners, and UK cancer survival rates lag behind the European average for nine out of 10 cancers.

As we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and for Rhondda and the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), a further clear and pressing concern is that our current oncology workforce is simply not large enough to meet current demand. There are inadequate plans to increase the workforce to ensure that it will have the capacity for our future needs.

Without drastic and immediate action to remedy the chronic, NHS-wide staffing crisis, we are in no position to deliver the improved radiotherapy treatments that we both deserve and have been promised. Per head of population, the NHS now ranks among the lowest in the western world when it comes to the number of doctors, nurses and hospital beds, according to King's Fund analysis of OECD health data. Analysis from the Health Foundation showed that the number of personnel leaving the NHS because of a poor work-life balance has trebled in the last seven years.

The NHS workforce remains overstretched, overworked and undervalued. Much like the rest of our NHS, our radiotherapy services and staff need transformative actions, not words, to provide the world-class care that patients deserve. To address that, we would like a national plan for the funding of radiotherapy equipment, to enable every patient to have access to the appropriate treatment. Funding models should act to support innovation and research and should incentivise new and novel ways of working, but the current tariff funding of radiotherapy per fraction is clearly not fit for purpose. It can disincentivise novel ways of working, such as delivering a smaller number of fractions with a more complex technique.

As I said at the start of my speech, as many as 24,000 people are not receiving the radiotherapy they need. That cannot be allowed to continue. We must do more, today, to ensure that all those who need it are able to access not only radiotherapy but the best, high-quality radiotherapy available for their specific cancer. With sufficient investment and development, the UK can develop a world-class, patient-first radiotherapy service. I will do all I can to ensure that we achieve that goal.

4.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): I want to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for introducing the debate and all Members who have spoken today, particularly the hon. Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern), who spoke movingly about her late partner, John. His example lives on through his two beautiful daughters—my beautiful cousins—who, too, have dedicated their lives to public service. I am happy to reassure all Members that I am very happy to meet the all-party group—fingers crossed—and if I fail to address any of the points made today, I will try to address them at that meeting.

Cancer is a priority for this Government, and we have got survival rates up over the last 10 years, but there is a lot more to do. In the long-term plan, we state our aim to have 55,000 more people surviving cancer for five years by 2028. Four in 10 NHS cancer patients are treated with radiotherapy, so clearly radiotherapy is a really important part of the mix. I did not know about that until I met members of the APPG. I want to thank them for the manifesto that they presented to me, which I have read with interest and am happy to respond to.

NHS England announced a £130 million fund, which the hon. Member for Easington mentioned, to start a programme of modernising LINACs and giving patients access to leading-edge technology, regardless of geography. I will come on to the specific point raised by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), because we share Rosemere as a cancer centre.

Since 2016, we have seen more than 80 machines either upgraded or replaced, with the aim of giving cancer patients access to the latest technology, regardless of where they live. The long-term plan specifically promises

“Faster, smarter and effective radiotherapy”,

with an aim of providing curative treatment, with fewer side effects and shorter waiting times.

Members mentioned the facilities at the Christie Hospital. Some of my constituents go there as well. The good thing is that previously some people had to leave the country, but at least now people are able to be treated in this country. The first treatment was last December. Work continues on the University College London Hospitals proton beam therapy centre, which we hope will be opened next year.

Chris Bryant: I commend the Minister for everything she has said, but it is slightly easier to put new kit in and build new buildings than it is to develop new staff. The biggest difficulty is with the number of radiologists and the whole staffing element. I wonder whether she could co-operate with colleagues in Wales, because this is a UK-wide issue.

Seema Kennedy: I will come on to talk about workforce, and I will also talk to my officials about meeting my counterparts in the devolved Assemblies, because that keeps coming up. I cannot say anything from the Dispatch Box because I do not know the protocol on that.

Fifteen million pounds has been committed to evaluate treating patients with SABR. There are 25 providers, and it is to treat early non-small cell lung cancer. I know that there are problems with lung cancer treatment. There are only 25 centres at the moment while there is assessment of emerging clinical evidence. NHS England is investing a further £6 million to support the great work that Cancer Research UK is doing on SABR clinical trials. This is regularly reviewed by NHS England's national specialised commissioning team and was last reviewed during 2016-17. It is expected that access will be reviewed again over the course of 2019-20 to 2020-21.

Several Members talked about the tariff. Radiotherapy services are funded through national prices, linked in the main to the number of radiotherapy fractions delivered. Any change to the income that trusts receive for radiotherapy would therefore require a change to the national tariff. We must continue to ensure that NHS payment mechanisms support the delivery of the most effective treatments. That is why the long-term plan set out NHS England's commitment to review the national tariff, in particular to ensure that appropriate incentives are in place to encourage providers to deliver the modern techniques that we all need—the ones of today and tomorrow—and that work commenced this year.

The long-term plan also sets out NHS England's intention to use its capital settlement, which will be negotiated in the upcoming spending review, in part to continue to replace radiotherapy equipment. I will not pre-empt those negotiations, but I think that shows a clear and ongoing financial commitment to modernising NHS radiotherapy.

We have published specifications for operational delivery networks for adult external beam radiotherapy services. That is about the 11 radiotherapy networks, and I have spoken to the hon. Member for Easington specifically about satellite services. The point is that decisions on cancer services need to be taken locally. The networks have been established—the cancer alliances—so I urge all hon. Members to encourage their local services to engage in those, because that is really what we need.

With regard to the workforce, which is mentioned in every debate on cancer, the interim people plan was published recently. The noble Baroness Harding has met the all-parliamentary party group on cancer and is fully apprised of what it is saying. The final people plan will be published later this year.

I will draw my remarks to a conclusion, because I want to leave the hon. Member for Easington enough time to sum up the debate. This has been an excellent debate. I thank the hon. Gentleman for all the work he does with Members across the House. There has been progress, but I know that there is more to do. I am happy to meet the APPG to discuss this further. We need to do more to increase cancer survival rates. We have a very ambitious target. I am happy to work with him and with all hon. Members to ensure that radiotherapy is a vital part of the battle against cancer.

4.56 pm

Grahame Morris: I thank the Minister for that considered and helpful response. I can assure her that the spirit of our contributions, and of the all-party parliamentary group, is intended to help, not to hinder progress. We certainly give her credit for the aspiration to improve cancer outcomes and to see a first-class service. We want to see that in all parts of the United Kingdom.

I thank all Members who participated in the debate. The hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) highlighted the perverse incentives, which have been identified in the all-party parliamentary group's inquiries. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) mentioned the satellite centres and the number of people being denied life-saving therapy. My hon. Friend—my dear friend—the hon. Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern), in a deeply moving contribution, talked of her personal experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) talked about the importance of workforce planning and early diagnosis. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) also mentioned workforce issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) talked about the exciting developments in proton beam therapy at the Christie Hospital. My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) gave an excellent response on behalf of the Opposition.

I also want to thank all the staff involved in delivering cancer services. We value the contribution they make—each and every one of them—and we are absolutely dedicated to ensuring that the issues we have raised here are followed through.

I have one point to make on tariffs and perverse incentives. As part of our efforts, we have met extensively with NHS England. Addressing that is potentially a quick win for the Government, because it would not involve evaluating new techniques and could be done quickly. My suspicion is that NHS England does not intend to implement that for some time—in years rather than months—so I hope that the Minister will take that up immediately.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises the vital role that radiotherapy plays in cancer treatment across the UK with an estimated one in four people needing that treatment at some stage of their life; notes that there is a significant body of expert opinion that up to 24,000 people may be missing out on the radiotherapy they need, resulting in many hundreds of unnecessary or premature deaths; further notes that the UK spend on radiotherapy as a percentage of the overall cancer budget is approximately five per cent which compares badly with most other advanced economies where the percentage varies from nine per cent to 11 per cent; notes that the current commissioning system for radiotherapy is suboptimal as exemplified by a tariff regime which discourages NHS Trusts from implementing advanced modern effective radiotherapy; calls on the Government to provide an immediate up-front £250 million investment in the service, an ongoing extra £100 million per annum investment in personnel and skills and IT, and to introduce a sustainably, centrally and fully funded rolling programme for Linac machine replacements; and further calls on the Government to appoint a single person to oversee the commissioning and implementation of radiotherapy services.

Sanctuary Housing Group

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

5 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker, for granting me this Adjournment debate and thus providing me with an important opportunity to try to hold the Sanctuary Housing Group, which I regard as a highly dysfunctional organisation, to account. As you will soon hear, Madam Deputy Speaker, my remarks have been born from over a decade of frustration in trying to deal with these people as a local MP. To put it bluntly, I have well and truly had enough.

To begin with, Sanctuary has consistently provided a poor maintenance service to many of my constituents over a period of many years. I have had numerous complaints from Sanctuary tenants about shoddy workmanship, missed appointments and a generally off-hand attitude towards them when they complain. To give just one example, a constituent contacted me a few years ago to complain about a broken lift in one of Sanctuary's sheltered housing units. My constituent put it in an email:

"I'm writing to complain about the fact that our lift has not been working for the past 10 days, effectively trapping my disabled wife in our first-floor flat. Today, I spoke with the Scheme Manager, who advised me there is no confirmed date for when this problem will be resolved. He also advised me that the service company assessed the lift a month ago and advised Sanctuary of repairs that needed to be done, and the lift broke down three weeks after it was assessed... My wife has been trapped in the lift in her wheelchair six or more times. Sanctuary has known there are issues with the lift and has not responded adequately."

That is but one example of the poor level of service that Sanctuary provides, but I could spend hours reading very many others into the record. The company's record is so poor that in March this year it was the subject of an absolutely scathing Channel 4 "Dispatches" documentary entitled, "New Landlords from Hell". To try to summarise a half-hour documentary in one sentence, I would say that the group's record is truly shocking. In many instances, it shows a complete disregard for the welfare, or even the safety, of its tenants. Sanctuary's so-called board of directors should watch the documentary and then hang their heads in shame. Anybody who wants to know more about this organisation should watch the programme. I suspect they will be appalled, just as I was, by what they see.

It is not as if Sanctuary is a small or under-resourced organisation. I have carefully read its latest annual report. It currently has total assets under management in the order of £4 billion. It is one of the largest registered social landlords in the United Kingdom, with about 100,000 properties currently under management. It is, supposedly, a not-for-profit organisation, yet it made an operating profit of just under £200 million, as recorded in its 2017-18 accounts. The group's previous chief executive served for some 27 years, but has recently been replaced by a new chief executive, Craig Moule, whose total annual remuneration, including pension contributions and so on, is now in the order of half a million pounds.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): What?!

Mr Francois: Yes. By comparison, the CEO of L&Q—London and Quadrant Housing Trust—earns about £350,000 in total, the CEO of the Peabody Trust is on about £279,000, and the CEO of Genesis Housing is on approximately £250,000.

Despite previously asking Sanctuary officials for a meeting, I have not yet been offered an audience with the new chief executive, which is a shame, because the first question I would like to ask him is: “How can you justify a salary over three times greater than that paid to the Prime Minister?” I cannot countenance how someone running, essentially, a public sector organisation could be paid such a vast amount for presiding over such chaos.

To give the Minister some idea of the history of all this, I first came across the group some years ago when Rochford District Council decided to transfer its social housing stock to a new registered social landlord established for the purpose, called Rochford Housing Association. The tenants voted in a ballot to transfer to the housing association, which was then shortly taken over by a regional housing association called Hereward, and then in turn by a national organisation, Sanctuary. So I have been dealing with RHA/Hereward/Sanctuary for over a decade as the local MP.

Crucially, the original manifesto for the transfer ballot contained a commitment to build up to 50 additional units of affordable housing a year to assist the council with addressing its housing waiting list. Specifically, the manifesto—I have a copy here, because I saved one—said the following under the heading, “New affordable housing to meet local housing needs”:

“Tenants and the Council have said they want to see new homes in the area for future generations and the Council is committed to working with Housing Associations to provide affordable housing to meet local needs.

Rochford Housing Association working with Hereward Housing will aim to provide at least 50 new affordable homes each year in the Rochford District.”

That was the promise to the tenants before they voted to transfer. Sanctuary took over that commitment when it absorbed Hereward and promised to honour it when that entity became part of its group, but it has come absolutely nowhere near doing so.

I have had multiple meetings with Sanctuary down the years to try to persuade it to honour that promise, not least to alleviate the considerable pressure on Rochford’s housing list, which has sometimes, unfortunately, meant that the council has had to place families, including those with young children, in highly unsuitable bed-and-breakfast accommodation in nearby Southend.

Sir David Amess: The salaries are absolutely obscene, just like those of senior members of the BBC. My right hon. Friend might be interested to know that someone in my office suffered under these people as a student. Does he agree that, as we look to build a new town somewhere in Essex, these are the last people we want to get their hands on anything we might pursue in meeting our housing needs?

Mr Francois: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I will demonstrate, it is difficult, I am afraid, to believe anything that this group now says. As we have a Housing, Communities and Local Government Minister sitting on the Front Bench, I will take this opportunity to

absolutely endorse my hon. Friend’s long-standing campaign for Southend to be made a city. I hope the Minister will take that back to the Department.

I have had a number of meetings with Sanctuary’s head of development, Mr Chris Cole, which have taken on an almost ritualistic aspect, with him repeatedly reading out a list of major housing developments that Sanctuary is either going to be involved with or to develop itself, hardly any of which—with the exception of some very small developments and one development at Canewdon—ever come to fruition.

Sanctuary absolutely assured me several years ago that, to make up its backlog, it would bid aggressively for the social housing component of three large developments in the Rochford District Council area known as Hall Road in Rochford, Rawreth Lane/London Road in Rayleigh, and Malyons Farm in Hullbridge. In each of those instances, despite the company’s £4 billion of assets, it underbid and did not secure the RSL element of any of those developments, which would have represented well over 100 houses in each of the three cases. Basically, Minister, these people talk a good game to your face, but then completely and utterly fail to put their money where their mouth is. That is totally unacceptable on their part.

Moreover, Sanctuary has acquired, or sought to acquire, a number of high-profile brownfield sites across the district, which it has been promising to build on for years. However, in the vast majority of cases, it has not laid one brick on top of another to this day. To take just one example, when I met Mr Cole on Friday 10 May in Sanctuary’s local offices in Rochford, he sought to assure me that Sanctuary was “actively on site” on the old Bullwood Hall Prison site, which was closed some years ago and is now a classic brownfield site. Sanctuary obtained planning permission to build there over a year ago. Quite by chance, and unluckily for Mr Cole, I visited the site the weekend prior to our meeting, and I was therefore amazed when Mr Cole attempted to persuade me that the company was actively building houses there. Even when I told him to his face that I knew it was not, because I had been there and seen that it was not, he still tried to tell me that it was. The Minister is shaking his head. I mention this vignette deliberately, because it is absolutely typical of the dismissive way in which Sanctuary treats elected representatives.

Let me say as an aside that I recently spoke to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who, for the avoidance of doubt, has not seen my speech and is not party to it. She mentioned to me in passing that she, too, had had unsatisfactory experiences with Sanctuary, but that unfortunately, because of its constitutional status—I shall say more about that in a minute—it was not subject to the remit of the Public Accounts Committee, the most powerful Committee in Parliament. That raises all sorts of governance issues, to which I shall return shortly.

Because of Sanctuary’s appalling record of not keeping to its commitments, the dispute came to a head several years ago when it agreed to sign a “deed of variation, determination and collaboration” via which it undertook to raise its game and make up the considerable backlog of houses to meet the original commitment of 50 a year.

[*Mr Francois*]

I have here a letter, dated 27 July 2016, from a lady called Emma Keegan, who was at that time Sanctuary's local managing director. It states, clearly and unequivocally:

"At the forefront of Sanctuary's commitment is to build homes in Rochford. Part of that is a contractually binding requirement for Sanctuary to deliver the 50 homes a year referred to in the original agreement. Taken over the ten years of the agreement, this will require Sanctuary to build 363 more homes. If we fail to do so the local Council will receive £10,000 for each new home below the target figure of 363, up to a maximum payment of £1 million. This reflects our confidence that we will make good this commitment. We have a development team focused solely on this ambition with commercial resources at their disposal."

I submit to the Minister that that could not be any clearer, but Sanctuary never got anywhere near it. Time after time, it has failed to develop schemes and has given a whole litany of excuses, including desperately trying to blame Rochford District Council for not giving planning permission, suggesting that it was the council's fault that the houses had not been built and the target—which, incidentally, was due to be met by March 2018, a year ago—had not been delivered.

When I met Sanctuary representatives in May, I raised that issue and was told quite forcefully by Chris Cole that Rochford District Council had "let us off" the payment because the council had admitted that the planning delays were its own fault. I double-checked that with Mr Shaun Scrutton, the council's managing director, at a meeting in his office on Friday 5 July. He categorically denied that Rochford had been responsible for any major planning delay and absolutely insisted that it intended to pursue Sanctuary for the outstanding amount and was considering legal action. He said to me, "I will be having a meeting with our legal team on Monday morning." Both those men cannot be right, and, to put it mildly, one of them must at least be badly mistaken, as the two positions are poles apart.

Part of my purpose in initiating this debate was first to shame Sanctuary into coughing up the million quid that it owes my local council, and secondly, as well as arguing for the money, to argue that it should go on to build the affordable houses that it promised to build in the first place. In short, this is a housing association that, incredibly, seems reluctant to build houses, particularly if that will cost it any money. I read in the newspapers that we have a housing crisis in this country. With registered social housing landlords like Sanctuary, is it any wonder? Basically, these people are a joke, but one that is no longer funny, particularly for those who are living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation as a result of their absolute indolence.

Let me give one further example. Sanctuary assured me that it would build up to 100 properties in a site in Rayleigh known as Timber Grove, and that it was actively acquiring the site for that purpose. When I double-checked a few days ago, it had still not bought the site, which has lain undeveloped effectively for several years. That is just another example of it being extremely difficult to believe anything that the company now says based on bitter experience of a decade of repeatedly broken promises; it is that bad.

That brings me on to my wider point about the regulation of housing associations. There are good and bad registered social landlords in this country; for instance, one of the other housing associations active in my

constituency is a locally based one called Chelmer Housing Partnership or CHP. If I speak as I find, I personally do not recall ever receiving a single complaint from any of my constituents who are its tenants about the management of a CHP property, although in fairness, the very good new leader of Rochford District Council, Councillor Mike Steptoe, tells me anecdotally that he has had a few complaints about CHP, which has the RSL component at the new development at Hall Road that I mentioned a few minutes ago. In any event, it is a matter of fact that housing associations, some of whose chief executives are extremely well paid—far more than the Prime Minister—are not even subject to freedom of information requests. In short, they are neither fish nor fowl—neither wholly public nor wholly private—and that leads to serious questions about who is really in charge. Partly based on my experience with Sanctuary, I wish to raise with the Minister the serious question of the governance of the sector in general.

There is a lack of an effective regulator to hold housing association boards to account and to make sure their tenants receive the kind of service for which they pay their rent. I would, therefore, like to press the Minister specifically and ask him whether the Department has any proposals to change the governance of housing associations and, in particular, whether it has any plans to bring in any form of new regulator, perhaps focusing on governance and customer service, to try to keep housing associations up to the mark. For the avoidance of doubt, there are some very good registered social landlords in this country, but there are also some very bad ones, and Sanctuary is probably the worst of the entire lot.

This is a sorry tale of an extremely badly run organisation, which does not keep its word, which obfuscates and delays, treats publicly elected officials with open contempt, and threatens to bring its entire sector into disrepute. Just as Persimmon Homes has given the private house building sector something of a bad name in recent years—I do not believe the sector really deserves that and I note in passing that the new chief executive of Persimmon, David Jenkinson, is attempting to do something to address it—I believe that Sanctuary threatens to give the whole housing association sector in this country a bad name. That would be a shame, because many RSLs do very good work to provide decent, affordable homes for our constituents to live in, and it is important to put that on the record.

I very much hope therefore that when the board members of Sanctuary read this debate, as I suspect they may, they will take radical action to address their woeful underperformance. I hope they will sack the hopeless Mr Chris Cole and specifically agree to pay Rochford District Council the £1 million that they owe. I also hope they will redouble their efforts to build the affordable housing they promised to build all along and which my constituents so desperately need.

This rolling farce, perpetrated by a failed and broken organisation, has gone on long enough and we now need action, not words. I have known the Minister for years and, as he knows, I have high regard for him. I am sure he will take my constituents' concerns very seriously—that would be in his nature—and I therefore look forward with considerable interest to his reply on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

5.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): I do not know about you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I rather enjoyed that contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois). It is wonderful to see a passionate constituency Member of Parliament in full flow fighting for his constituents on the Floor of the House. We do not see that often enough in Parliament, and I congratulate him on bringing this debate to the Floor of the House with such force. He has a wonderful constituency, and I know he is proud of being in Essex. I just wonder whether he knows quite as much as many others know about his own constituency, so I thought I would increase his knowledge of it before I come on to deal with the debate.

My right hon. Friend may be aware, and all Members will want to know, that next week we will have County Flags Day, on which the Essex county flag will be flying proudly in Parliament Square at the moment of national unity when we see our new Prime Minister installed in No. 10. Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, other county flags will also be available, if they are registered with the Flag Institute. There will be 51 in total, including the Union flag showing the awesome foursome that makes up our United Kingdom of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am glad that the Minister has clarified that point, but there was no need. As long as he mentioned the Essex county flag, he was doing very well.

Jake Berry: There are others available. The flag of Lancashire will, of course, be proudly flying, and the flag of Staffordshire as well. I also wonder whether my right hon. Friend knows the millennium clock in Rayleigh in his constituency, which was created in a competition for schoolchildren. One of the shields that appears on the clock was designed by no less a person than Sarah Morgan from my private office in the Department, who is currently sitting in the Box. She proudly tells us about it at every opportunity, and she has also said that one of her ambitions is to appear in *Hansard*. She has achieved that ambition today.

I will now move on to the content of my right hon. Friend's debate. Importantly, he spoke about Sanctuary Housing and some of the things he said are a real cause for concern. He will understand that many of those contracts are private commercial matters between his local authority and the housing association, and that disputes should, in the first event, be resolved by the parties to those agreements. However, I was extremely concerned, as a Member of this House and a Minister in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, to hear of that organisation's dismissive attitude towards Members of Parliament who are doing their job by raising the concerns of their constituents. That is completely unacceptable, not just from Sanctuary but from every social housing provider. We are sent to the House to fight for our constituents, and my right hon. Friend is doing a wonderful job this evening. I call on all social landlords, in a positive way, to engage actively with their Members of Parliament, because it is often we who people come to talk to when things are going wrong, and if that route is closed down, Members

of Parliament will not be able to do their job and the housing associations and social landlords will also not be able to do theirs.

Many of the points my right hon. Friend raised are matters of real concern, and I hope that Sanctuary will read the *Hansard* of this debate very carefully. Serious matters have been raised, and they should be dealt with at local level, but it is also a national issue and a matter of concern to us all that people should engage with Members of Parliament with courtesy and respect and that the issues we raise should be taken extremely seriously. If they are not, we are going to see real problems in social housing sector, and I hope that Sanctuary will listen to the comments I make on behalf of the Department today.

On the issues my right hon. Friend raised about the changes we are going to see, particularly with the regulators, his concern is I think shared by all. We have to find a way to put the tenant voice and the tenant experience absolutely at the heart of our social housing providers. He, I know, is aware that the Government have recently concluded a consultation on the Green Paper; in fact, it concluded in November. We were delighted as a Department, but slightly overwhelmed, by the number of responses we had. Many of those responses, particularly in a world post that appalling tragedy at Grenfell Tower, were about how we as a Government can ensure that tenants' voices are never lost when it comes to social housing. If we think about some of the consequences we saw on that night just over two years ago and about some of the missed opportunities to support the people of Grenfell Tower, I think we would agree that we should all take this extremely seriously. I look forward to the Government responding in detail both to the Green Paper and all the consultation responses, but I want to reassure my right hon. Friend that the tenant voice and the tenant experience will absolutely be at the heart of what we seek to achieve. That may well include changes to the role of the regulator, although I am not in a position this evening to give any further detail on that.

On a more positive note, I think we should take the opportunity of tonight's debate to celebrate the work of social landlords and the housing sector more generally in building the homes that our constituents need. In his speech, my right hon. Friend talked about CHP, a local landlord with which he has had a good experience. That may not be universally shared, but it is an accolade that he says he has had no complaints about it. I think that shows how, where there is a great relationship between a council, a Member of Parliament, the tenants and a housing association, they can get things right.

The reason why we must celebrate the contribution of this sector is that we need to ensure and to focus on the fact that, by the mid-2020s, we will be delivering 300,000 homes a year. That is what our country needs, and what this Government are focused on. A good portion of those homes will be delivered by the social housing sector. I was delighted that the Prime Minister announced in September 2018 that we are going to make another £2 billion long-term funding pilot available for social landlords, starting in 2022, so they can get on with the job—to pick up on my right hon. Friend's comments—of building homes, building communities and ensuring that our constituents, each and every one of them, have the opportunity to own their own home or have a home to call their own for which they pay an

[Jake Berry]

affordable rent. That is why I hope my right hon. Friend will join me, the specifics of Sanctuary aside, in celebrating the extraordinary contribution of social landlords more generally.

Question put and agreed to.

5.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 July 2019

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Human Rights in Saudi Arabia

1.30 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

2.12 pm

On resuming—

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered human rights in Saudi Arabia and the detention of opponents of the regime.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for giving us time in Parliament to debate our relations with one of the most important operators in one of the most important regions in the world. Saudi Arabia is a dominant force in the Gulf—an area of significant importance to this country—a significant trading partner, and a significant partner in security and intelligence matters.

I am not naive about how we should approach these matters; I am aware of how politics in the Gulf works. I chair the all-party British-Qatar group, and last year I was a guest of the Kuwaiti Government in that country. Those matters are fully disclosed in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is right that we recognise, applaud and encourage progress on standards of governance and human rights. I approach human rights in that region in a spirit of humility. I am aware that many of the things for which we criticise Gulf regimes were part of our society and law just a few decades ago, or are even part of it today. On workers' rights and standards, for example, let us not forget that for all the legislative and regulatory standards that we have in this country, not long ago several dozen cockle pickers perished in Morecambe bay as a result of the fact that they had been engaged illicitly.

Even with all those caveats, when I look at Saudi Arabia today I see a bad human rights situation, and I regret to say that it is getting worse. This is an area where the United Kingdom Government, as a partner of the Saudi Arabian Government in commercial and security and intelligence matters, can do more. They should be looking at some of their current actions.

I will focus on people being held as political detainees following the mass arrests on 4 November 2017, others who remain in detention subject to capital punishment, and our assistance to and engagement with Saudi Arabia. It is well known that on 4 November 2017, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman arrested several hundred of his political opponents, as he probably saw them. It was a mass arrest, and those arrested and detained were rounded up and taken to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. I have to say that of all the accommodation that could be

afforded to those who get on the wrong side of the regimes under which they live, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Riyadh is probably not the worst. None the less, it remains a serious matter, not least because it highlights one of my main concerns: the lack of proper regard for the basic norms of international and domestic law. As a consequence of that arrest programme, there was a process of forced transfer of assets totalling approximately \$100 billion, we believe. Many of those held have been tortured, and there have been fatalities. We understand that approximately 200 detainees remain in custody as a consequence of the Crown Prince's move.

Those who remain in detention without clear legal status include Prince Turki bin Abdullah, the former governor of Riyadh and son of the late King Abdullah. He is obviously seen as a key political rival of the current Crown Prince. He remains in detention without charge. His associate, Faisal al-Jarba, is also in detention without charge. The *Washington Post* reported in June that Jordanian authorities detained him in Oman, where he had fled to seek safety; they eventually drove him to the Saudi border and handed him over to the Saudi authorities. Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz bin Salman and his father, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Mohammad—both businessmen—have remained in detention since January 2018 without charge or trial. Their arrest was believed to be in retaliation for their representations and advocacy on behalf of detained family members. Beyond that there is no clear basis for their continuing detention. The Government have not frozen any of their assets or asked for financial settlements.

My requests of the Government and the Foreign Office are fourfold. We should ask, first, for proof of life of those who were detained. On 12 March 2018, the *New York Times* report said that Ritz-Carlton detainees required hospitalisation for physical abuse. Major General Ali al-Qahtani, an aide to Prince Turki, later died in custody. Reports suggest that his

“neck was twisted unnaturally as though it had been broken”

and his body had burn marks that appeared to be the result of electric shocks. To this day, Saudi Arabia has not offered any official explanation of how al-Qahtani died, although it is interesting to note that on 7 November the President of the United States tweeted:

“I have great confidence in King Salman and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, they know exactly what they are doing....”.

Sometimes, when he takes to Twitter, the President manages to say so much more than I suspect he intended.

Secondly, we should ask for clarification from the Saudi authorities about the specific charges on which those who remain in detention are being held. That is a basic norm of international law: a person should know the basis on which they are being held and the charges should be for recognisable crimes. As an absolute minimum, they should be given the specific grounds for their arrest and be able to contest their detention fairly and promptly before an independent and impartial judge, with appropriate legal representation, and there should be periodic reviews of their case. Those who are detained in the Ritz-Carlton and elsewhere in Saudi Arabia receive none of that most basic legal entitlement.

Thirdly, we should ask that people who are not charged with a crime be released. Again, that is a basic principle of international human rights law. In its general

[*Mr Alistair Carmichael*]

comment on article 7 of the international covenant on civil and political rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee stated that

“provisions should be made for detainees to be held in places officially recognized as places of detention”—

presumably not normally including five-star hotels—

“and for their names and places of detention, as well as for the names of persons responsible for their detention, to be kept in registers readily available and accessible to those concerned, including relatives and friends.”

Fourthly and finally, we should ask the Saudi Arabian Government for the release of frozen assets that are currently held illegally. If the assets have been frozen without any proper legal basis, surely we should be saying that they should be returned, unless formal charges can be brought. These are not extravagant requests, and they are the very least that we should be taking to the Saudi Government if the relationship we have is meaningful and not one-sided.

As the House is aware, on 23 April this year there was a programme of 37 executions, including, we understand, one by crucifixion, following two mass trials: the Qatif 24 case and the Iran spy case. This matter was ventilated fully as a result of Mr Speaker granting an urgent question, so I will not rehearse the detail at this time, but there is one aspect I want to remind the House about: three of the detainees who were executed were children at the time of their detention and charge. Capital punishment for children is absolutely forbidden under international law.

That remains relevant today, because, according to Reprieve, there are currently at least three detainees in Saudi Arabia who are subject to conviction awaiting execution. Ali al-Nimr, Abdullah al-Zaher and Dawoud al-Marhoon were all arrested in 2012 following anti-regime demonstrations held in the Qatif region of Saudi Arabia's eastern province. All were under 18 at the time of the alleged offences. In international law that makes them children and makes their execution illegal. All were tortured extensively while they were detained and forced to sign false confessions to serious crimes, punishable by death, on which the trial courts later relied to convict them.

The three men were not informed of their charges or presented with an arrest warrant. All were held in solitary confinement for long periods, during which time they were given no access to legal representation. Their families did not know where they were and they could not contact them. All were tried at the specialised criminal court, which has been widely criticised for failing to meet the basic standards of a fair trial and for its use as a tool of political repression. Despite widespread international condemnation, the Saudi authorities have never investigated the serious allegations of torture. Having exhausted all domestic legal remedies, the three now await execution, unless they can receive pardons from King Salman.

The United Kingdom has a long-standing and distinguished policy of opposing the use of the death penalty in all circumstances. Surely, if that policy remains meaningful, it demands that representations of the strongest and most public sort be made to the Saudi Arabian Government on behalf of these three young men. That is a common theme in all the representations I have

received from organisations that provided briefings for today's debate. Yes, the Government will say the right things in this country, but they say them privately and they do not say them loudly and publicly enough when it comes to their dealings with the Saudi Government. In relation to the Khashoggi killing, we have seen that the Saudi Arabian Government will take heed and will respond to international pressure and criticism. Surely we should not be leaving it until the executions have happened to criticise them. We should be doing that while there is still a prospect of bringing these three young men relief and mercy.

That raises the question why all this should matter to us in the United Kingdom. We know there are many regimes across the world that are similarly despotic and, in some cases—although probably not many—even worse in their human rights abuse and their use of capital punishment than Saudi Arabia. I do not want this debate to be an exercise in hand-wringing on the international stage and saying, “Isn't this dreadful.” It has to be an open and honest examination of how we see these issues and what we, as a commercial and security intelligence partner of Saudi Arabia, are prepared to do to help to effect meaningful change.

The Government are often criticised for not being active enough. I have heard other concerns and received from Reprieve a compelling briefing, which argues that the problem is not just that we are not saying enough, but that sometimes what we do aids and abets the conduct I have described. Reprieve has brought it to my attention that the UK College of Policing has provided forensics training to the Saudi Ministry of the Interior since 2009; I have commented publicly in the House about this before. In 2016, Reprieve obtained documents from a proposal by the College of Policing to extend its training of Saudi police to areas including cyber-security, mobile phone analysis and IT digital forensics, including data decryption and the retrieval of deleted files. These documents show that the college accepted that there was a risk that

“the skills being trained are used to identify individuals who later go on to be tortured or subjected to other human rights abuses.”

They decided that these risks could be “mitigated” by the college, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, preparing a press statement emphasising that the forensics training is part of a wider programme to assist the Saudi authorities move to democratic policing methods. That was a thin defence in 2016. Having seen the events in 2017 and the mass execution of 37 people earlier this year, I am afraid that that defence simply does not stand anymore. Will the Minister tell us what attitude the Government now take to the relationship between the UK College of Policing and Saudi Arabia?

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are going to assist the Saudis on technology in this way, at the very least our Government should in response press for the immediate release of all political prisoners and, pending that happening, seek proof of life of those who have been detained?

Mr Carmichael: I did not realise that my right hon. Friend was behind me, so I do not know whether he was in the Chamber when I made exactly that point about those who are detained in the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh.

Getting proof of life is crucial. That is something that we should not have to demand; it is something that should be provided routinely. If Saudi Arabia wishes to move among the developed nations of the world as an equal partner, that is something it should wish to take on board for itself.

An investigation by *The Daily Telegraph* this year revealed that hundreds of Saudi police officers were trained in Britain in 2018, despite the risk that the skills acquired here could be used by the regime to commit human rights abuses. With no transparency about the training taking place, it remains entirely unclear what safeguards have been placed on this assistance to ensure that it does not contribute to severe human rights abuses.

Furthermore, real questions hang over continued UK funding in Saudi Arabia through cross-departmental funds such as the integrated activity fund. The IAF is a cross-departmental fund earmarked exclusively for co-operation with Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, on security and justice assistance. Under the auspices of the Foreign Office, the IAF is overseen by the Gulf national security secretariat implementation group, which consists of representatives from Departments responsible for delivering the Gulf strategy, including the FCO, the Home Office, the Department for International Development, the Department for International Trade, the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

We know, because the Foreign Office has confirmed it, that the IAF's allocation is £80 million over the current spending review period. What we have not heard from the Government is any detail on how the programme uses its funds. I would like at least an explanation for that basic lack of transparency. For a fund that covers only six countries, unlike the 90 countries covered by the conflict, stability and security fund, for example, the Government refuse to provide any details of the breakdown of spending across the country or within the region, claiming that no breakdown is possible, since:

"Many of the projects and programme activity are delivered regionally".

In any circumstance, that would be a pretty thin defence, but in the context of everything that we know and see to be going on in Saudi Arabia, if that is where the British taxpayers' money is being spent, at the very least we should be given a proper explanation of the spending and not some obfuscation according to accounting practices.

The Government continue to refuse to provide any information to parliamentarians about the use of IAF funds in Saudi Arabia. That, of course, raises real questions about why the Government refuse to provide that information in this age. If there is to be a bid for the IAF to continue beyond 2020, which we understand is already under consideration, surely it is critical that Members of this House get answers on just what the funds are being used for and what safeguards exist to ensure that they will not lead to further and more egregious abuses of human rights.

I have three final questions for the Minister. First, will the Government confirm that the Foreign Office will make urgent representations to its Saudi counterparts to ensure that the three individuals currently on death row in Saudi Arabia will have their sentences commuted and receive a full pardon? Given the inadequacies of the

process that has brought them to this point, if the Government are serious about a policy of opposing the death penalty in all circumstances, that is the very least we should do.

Secondly, will the Government commit to publishing information on all programmes currently engaging with Saudi Arabia, including the programme documentation and assessment frameworks, and assessments under the overseas security and justice assistance guidance? Thirdly, will the Government commit to providing full breakdowns of all projects funded under the integrated activity fund, including the countries and institutions receiving funds under that programme, and details of each project's human rights assessment under the overseas security and justice assistance guidance?

It is all very well to stand here, in the comfort of the House of Commons, and criticise Saudi Arabia for its human rights, but I am pretty sure that, if we were to go out and ask anybody we stopped on the street here what they thought of the treatment of detainees and citizens in Saudi Arabia, they would be pretty appalled. I think they would actually be angry if they knew that money paid by taxpayers in this country was being used in such a way that it could contribute to and abet those human rights abuses, and that no explanation for that would be forthcoming. That is why I think it is important that the House debates this subject today. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the time, and I hope that we will have time to hear the fullest possible answers from the Minister.

2.37 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). I congratulate him on securing this debate.

I will concentrate on the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's motion, human rights in Saudi Arabia. I will do so by tackling one issue in particular, that of modern slavery. We have set a significant agenda for dealing with modern slavery in this country, but I have also had experience of dealing with it overseas. In my role as a trade envoy to Nigeria, I have been there specifically to try to sort out the problems of modern slavery, and I have had successful meetings there that have gone a long way toward sorting them out. I have also mentioned before my experience there with Unilever, which has eradicated modern slavery from its entire supply chain. There is a lot that we can do, if I may use that example to talk about what we want to do on modern slavery in Saudi.

Our definition of modern slavery is a situation in which people are exploited for criminal gain. That sounds very simple, but it hides the enormous impact that it has on the human rights of the individuals who are exploited. I have a background in human rights from my membership of the Council of Europe, which I share with you, Mr Evans, and it is interesting to see the matter in that context.

Hon. Members may be aware of pictures sent around on Saudi social media of two Moroccan women who were sold as housemaids for lump sums of cash. They were described as being able to cook local meals and as loving children and so on, but they were sold for cash.

[John Howell]

Saudi human rights organisations point out that this is modern slavery, explaining that the women were severely restricted in what they were able to do and were also sexually abused. We should all bear that firmly in mind.

In Saudi Arabia, women working as housemaids, as in this situation, or simply as domestic helpers are not only from Morocco, as those two women were, but from other developing countries such as Ethiopia, India and the Philippines. Numerous cases have come to light in recent years of domestic helpers, particularly female, being treated in this way and finding themselves with great problems. A system of law in Saudi Arabia called the kafala system provides some legal structure to this, but it is a tissue of a legal structure that does not provide any substance of protection for the women there. The owners—they are classed as owners—remain responsible for the visas and residence status of the women for the duration of their stay. That system has come under huge amounts of criticism from human rights organisations, which object to the restrictive and abusive relationships that the women are put through.

Such advertisements for women have brought further attention to other cases of mistreatment of women, including other Moroccan women, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In one example, a Moroccan woman who married a Saudi man was raped by her husband and then imprisoned in their house after trying to report the crime. Her being released from that captivity required her to appeal directly to Morocco's King. Those are good examples of how prevalent modern slavery is in Saudi Arabia. It is not only Moroccan women but American women as well. I am aware of American women who married Saudi nationals, live in Saudi Arabia and are subject to a situation in which other people completely rule over what they do.

Those people have all the rights that we associate with ownership. The women were forcibly abducted or kidnapped, in clear violation of the laws of other countries, and of court orders of other countries in some cases. They have been removed from those countries, far beyond the enforcement powers of the courts within those countries. They have been hidden away in family compounds for years, deprived of even a basic standard of living, including being deprived of a choice of religion, spouse or, for younger women, a choice of their age of marriage. They are denied freedom of movement and they are subjected to torture.

The stories are pitiful, and we should have tremendous sympathy for those women, but sympathy is not enough. I have explained what I have been doing in other countries. The Government can take a firm stance in raising those issues with the Governments of other countries and bringing to attention the plight of those women. It should not only be the King of Morocco who is required to do this; we should be doing it as well.

Many foreign workers in Saudi Arabia report abuse, but they are not allowed to change employer or, indeed, to leave the country without the written consent of their employer. During the year, numerous migrant workers report being laid off, sometimes after months of non-payment of salaries, and some remain stranded in Saudi Arabia without the money to move. An American study of this phenomenon revealed a lot of details, but the Saudi reaction was illustrative of the modern-day approach

to dealing with a problem. They did not try to tackle the problem head-on. All they did was try to rubbish the report, which we typically see today; whether in response to antisemitism or whatever, the people who respond to reports simply choose to rubbish them and do not tend to engage. That illustrates all too well the problems that we have here.

Sadly, a number of women in this situation have been forced to work as prostitutes, even though prostitution is not officially allowed in Saudi Arabia. We should stand forcefully against any system that forces women into prostitution. We should not sit by and allow our relationship with Saudi Arabia to continue without taking up those issues and making a great point of those problems in the course of that relationship.

2.47 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I sincerely congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on his comprehensive account of some of the crimes and misdemeanours currently being carried out by the Saudi regime. I will emphasise one or two of his points, but I will endeavour not to repeat them.

It is probably now a truism to say that the Saudi regime operates, to a large extent, outside civilised norms, the rule of law and due process, and does not, in many cases, recognise the right to a fair trial. It is not unique in those respects—indeed, it is not unique in the Gulf region; its closest allies in the Gulf Co-operation Council, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, are equally guilty in many respects—but that does not excuse what it is doing. A lot of the current cases date from immediately after the Arab spring and the crackdowns that occurred in those countries, including some of the cases of juveniles who were arrested and who are still incarcerated and face the death penalty.

However, it is also undoubtedly true that the situation has become worse since the accession of King Salman and the increase in power of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. We now look with great irony at the way they were fêted as reformers and as those who would undo a lot of the anachronisms and anomalies of Saudi society. There is little sign of that in the area of women's rights. The response to women's rights defenders who protested not only the driving ban, important though that is, but against the whole guardianship system has been the arrest, detention and torture of prominent individuals.

Of course, the issue that gained the regime in Saudi Arabia notoriety around the world was the horrific murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Again, there is no contrition there and no real willingness to co-operate with the UN special rapporteur or the international community in investigating that. Indeed it has simply been swept under the carpet.

The treatment of the Shi'a minority population has been atrocious over many years, with many people put on trial on trumped-up and vague charges. Most significant was Sheikh al-Nimr, himself the uncle of one of the young men currently on death row but also the most prominent Shi'a cleric in Saudi, who was executed after years of persecution in the mass execution in January 2016.

I think it was one of the largest of the recent mass executions—47 people were beheaded or killed by firing squad.

Again, it is outside the scope of this debate, but of course beyond all this are the atrocities being committed, and the breaches of international humanitarian law, in Yemen. It is a shame, but I think it is emblematic of the way the British Government are responding to many of these atrocities that it took victory by the Campaign Against Arms Trade in the Court of Appeal for the Government to look at suspending in any way the sales of arms that are fuelling that war. Even so, it is without any embarrassment that the Government are taking their case to the Supreme Court, no doubt with the intention of resuming sales thereafter.

That is the background to this debate, and I want to focus on a couple of those points. The first, which is particularly shocking, it is not just that many people who in other countries would just be seen as exercising their democratic rights end up in prison in Saudi Arabia, but the fact that it also happens to juveniles. Sadly, a number of young people have been executed, including in the mass execution earlier this year of 37 people, in which three young men who were juveniles at the time of their arrest were executed.

The three who have become a cause célèbre and are still at risk on death row are Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, Abdullah al-Zaher and Dawood al-Marhoon. Their cases have been raised many times in this House over a period of years. Indeed, in preparing for this debate, I looked back at an urgent question that I was granted back in October 2015. I shall say more about it in a moment, because it relates to a good decision that the previous Government made, but I referred in that exchange to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who has taken a close interest in these matters over a number of years, writing then to the Prime Minister and raising the case of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, yet four years on there is no less a threat. Indeed, because judicial processes have been exhausted, there is, other than the mercy of the King, nothing standing between him and other detainees and their executions.

These are difficult subjects to deal with, but they have to be dealt with, and the British Government appear to have particular difficulty in dealing with such matters in relation to Saudi Arabia even though they are outspoken in relation to other places. A type of double standard appears to operate. It would be useful to have from the Minister today an acknowledgement that these matters are serious, that they are growing, that the regime in Saudi, far from becoming more tolerant, is becoming more illiberal in these ways, and to hear what response the British Government are going to make. Sadly, as I have said and we have heard also from the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, there is continued close co-operation—collusion—with the Saudi Government.

The matter that I was referring to from 2015 related to a prison contract that the UK had as part of a bizarre arrangement set up within the Ministry of Justice called Just Solutions International, which actively went out and sold services, often to repressive regimes, without making sufficient checks. I am pleased to say that, in response to my urgent question at that time, the then Lord Chancellor, who is now the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said that he was

closing that operation down and withdrawing from the contract. He is to be congratulated on that, but it was one beacon of hope and has not really been followed up in succeeding years. Indeed, there continue to be concerns about the College of Policing and other arrangements whereby respectable UK institutions offer training—it was reported only last year that hundreds of Saudi police officers were being trained—or supervise or in some way give credibility to institutions in which practices such as torture are carried out.

[SIR HENRY BELLINGHAM *in the Chair*]

No doubt the Government will say, “We respect human rights and we hope that by engaging with these countries we can promote human rights,” but that is not what is happening at all. There is no sign that the engagement is in any way mitigating or addressing the way in which the Saudi authorities operate, so in effect we are colluding.

There is no clearer sign of that than the funds that have been referred to, which are largely opaque; this is within Government. Numerous attempts have been made to identify exactly where the money goes, particularly in relation to the Gulf countries. The integrated activity fund and other larger funds, which are operated through the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development, run to more than £1 billion in total, but there is no clarity whatever about how that money is spent. Frankly, that is a disgrace.

I welcome you to the Chair for this debate, Sir Henry. This morning’s statement on detainee issues had really to be dragged out of the Government over the period of a year. It is a matter of great regret that the Government announced that they would not pursue that, despite previous promises on rendition and the Gibson inquiry and the Intelligence and Security Committee inquiries and their inconclusive nature.

There is an unhelpful trend in this Government not to deal with issues that they find embarrassing to themselves or to their close international partners. When I heard the announcement today, I thought, “Well, this is exactly what we heard about Leveson 2: ‘Nothing to see here. We’ve all moved on. No need for an inquiry.’” That is becoming an unhealthy habit of the Government. They should bear it in mind that, even if they are not prepared to confront these matters in this House or in public, they will still come to light and, as with the war in Yemen, there will be legal challenges. I have no doubt that there will be in relation to rendition. We are fortunate in this country to have a tradition of good independent journalism, of good independent non-governmental organisations, some of which briefed us for this debate, and of lawyers who will do that job if the Government are not prepared to do it themselves.

The Minister has set himself up as somebody who does take these issues seriously and wishes to see this country take its human rights responsibilities abroad as seriously as its defence and security and trade responsibilities, so it would be useful if we could see some change of tone and of policy specifically in relation to Saudi. Do we need anything further than what happened to Jamal Khashoggi just last year to raise the alarm about the way that that country is conducting itself in the region and in the world?

[*Andy Slaughter*]

I shall end my comments shortly as other hon. Members wish to speak. I end simply by asking again in relation to the detainees on death row in Saudi, and specifically in relation to those who were juveniles when their alleged offences took place, that the Government redouble their efforts and use what influence they have—they say that they have a lot of influence—with Saudi, and that they do so in the strongest possible terms and the most urgent terms, because it could well be the case that at no notice we find that there has been another series of mass executions in that country.

2.59 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I draw the House's attention to my declaration in the register, not least because I chair a detention review panel examining the cases of Saudi activists for women's rights. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate. Saudi Arabia is an important ally, so it is important that, where she falls short of the standards we expect from countries we strategically stand alongside, we hold her to account.

It is also important to put the question of how we advance and support human rights in Saudi Arabia into the wider strategic context. By most measurable economic and social indicators, the world is improving for the majority of its citizens. Global poverty and child mortality are down. Vaccinations, basic education and democracy are going up. Those are trends over the past couple of centuries. We live in a liberal-democratic-inspired, rules-based international world order, underpinned by NATO, the United States security umbrella and the United Nations, based on those structures established at the end of the second world war.

Overall, we expect those structures to advance human rights, but we now have to recognise that those structures are under immense strain. First, there was the missed opportunity of the fall of the Soviet Union, which has been replaced over the past 30 years by an increasingly like-for-like security structure in Putin's Russia. Additionally, in the middle east we witnessed the failure of the Arab spring to advance the political and human rights of those on the wrong end of governance in the pre-2011 middle east, except perhaps in Tunisia and Morocco.

Strategically, the main challenge we face is the rise of China. If we fail to secure China's place in the rules-based international order, it will be to our peril, and it will not only have implications for the nation states who immediately abut Chinese regional power in east Asia, but have a direct effect on basic questions of advancing human rights in countries such as Saudi Arabia. If our policy serves to drive our allies into the open arms of China and Russia to provide for their hard security, we will do nothing to advance and support human rights, collective political rights and government accountability in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, which have also been mentioned. It could seriously damage accountable progress.

This is a perilous time for human rights. This debate rightly highlights that Saudi Arabia is a human rights priority country for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and has been for several years. Disengaging from

its political development and security will only help more authoritarian countries, which place less value on the rule of law, to become the dominant paradigm in the world.

I profoundly disagree with the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). I believe the cancellation of the Just Solutions International contracts, which engaged in the Saudi justice system, particularly in the management of offenders, is profoundly to be regretted. I believe in the merits of interdependence. I believe that the police and justice training that we support should be delivered as far as possible. If we can do that, and sell to countries our experience—particularly the experience of the Ministry of Justice's retired senior prison governors and probation officers—at economic advantage to the United Kingdom, so that they can improve their systems and import some of the human rights accountability, which we take for granted, it is likely to be of significant benefit overall, both financially for the United Kingdom and, more importantly, for the values we want to promote in those societies.

Mr Carmichael: I said in my speech that I am pragmatic about these things and where progress is seen, it should be applauded and rewarded. The difficulty is that where there is no accountability, it is difficult for us to know how effectively our money is being spent. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the refusal to account for the money that is being spent, as I referred to in my speech, is not good enough for the taxpayers of this country?

Crispin Blunt: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It does not only apply in this area. When I chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee, I served on the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, which made a report about the inadequacy of accountability in the conflict, stability and security fund, for example, and the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the integrated activity fund. We ought to have accountability for public money; it is a basic requirement of our responsibility as we levy taxes on our constituents.

Having made the case for co-operation with Saudi Arabia, I recognise the flipside. As vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Saudi Arabia, I feel particularly pained by the current situation. In my 22 years as a Member of this House, I have defended the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's important relationship with the United Kingdom. A few years ago, I had hoped that the Kingdom was taking a bold new step forward when Mohammed bin Salman—first as Deputy Crown Prince and then as Crown Prince—effectively assumed the majority of the Executive power in Saudi Arabia.

The moves of the Crown Prince towards economic reform, with Vision 2030, were accompanied by wider apparent social reform: the removal of arrest powers from the religious police, the formal preparation of legislation to ease male guardianship laws and granting women the right to drive. There is genuine potential for modernisation under that programme. However, if the price turns out to be the closure of any emerging political space, any overall societal gain will be heavily reduced, if not negated altogether.

We must be beyond disappointed by the series of events over the past two years that have led to where we are today. There is a wretched contradiction between

the recent societal liberalisation in Saudi Arabia and the detention of the people who campaigned for those changes. Saudi Arabia has been commended for allowing women the right to drive, for the opening of cinemas and other entertainment places and, as I said, for ending the religious police's power of arrest. They were all immensely important to the freedom one has to conduct one's life in Saudi Arabia, but if in parallel the activists who for years had advocated those changes are arrested, such incredible detention and this disastrous series of events must be challenged, not least by the friends of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who recognise the importance of that nation as a regional ally. Pushing for successful reform should not lead to prison. The Crown Prince would be well advised to recognise the truth of the aphorism used by President Ronald Reagan that there is no limit to what we can achieve if we do not mind who gets the credit.

This year, I have worked with the hon. Members for Stockton South (Dr Williams) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) on a detention review panel for the female human rights activists in Saudi Arabia. I accepted the task because I believed that I would command the confidence both of Saudi Arabia and of its critics for fairness. I am trying to demonstrate in this speech that I hope to see both sides of the question. However, I was disappointed that the Saudi Government did not welcome independent oversight of the detainees' conditions in detention when, by all measures, the Crown Prince ought to be proud of his fellow countrywomen for sharing his desire to advance reform in Saudi Arabia. I am sure the Saudi Government wish to resolve the issue. I can at least record my pleasure that, to date, the Saudi Arabian authorities appear, temporarily at least, to have released four out of the 11 women detained last year. Hopefully more will follow, as the Saudi Government must realise that the decisions leading to the activists' detentions and the appalling circumstances and death of Jamal Khashoggi must be rectified to save the country from itself. If the lessons are to be learnt and we are to honour Jamal Khashoggi's life's work by ensuring a more open society in Saudi Arabia where criticism is seen as an asset to good policy making, and where there is a more open press to report criticism, it can come only if there is a change of approach from the very top. Such disasters must be used to learn lessons on the necessary limitations on Executive power.

The enrichment of Saudi Arabia has led to the education of its citizens, particularly women, which inevitably has led to and will lead to a desire for progressive change. Western nations, particularly the United Kingdom, have to stand by the current constitutional framework, which must find within it the capacity for progressive change in respect of the growing role and responsibility of Saudi citizens in their influence on policy. Of course, that means the United Kingdom faces a difficult situation.

We could choose to ostracise the kingdom, as implied by the policy proposals supported by the hon. Member for Hammersmith, with the cancellation of the Just Solutions contract. I ought to declare an interest as I was the junior Minister most enthusiastically in support of setting up Just Solutions in order to get its methodology away, so I treated the cancellation of that contract as disastrous and an immense personal disappointment. If we followed the prescription of the hon. Gentleman, we could turn the kingdom into a pariah and push it into

the arms of Russia and/or China which, incidentally, are two other human rights priority countries for the United Kingdom. Populist diplomacy and noisy condemnation will always be heard, humiliating the key decision makers at the top. Cynically, if its target audience is just the domestic media and NGOs in the United Kingdom, in those terms it would be successful. But in terms of effecting support for human rights and advancing them in Saudi Arabia, and advancing and securing the position of Saudi Arabia within those nations committed to the current rules-based international order, I suspect the policy advocated by the hon. Gentleman might not be quite so successful.

Andy Slaughter: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument and I would hate to take credit for the Just Solutions contract being cancelled. I was simply an advocate of it. The hon. Gentleman's parliamentary colleague, the then Lord Chancellor, must take the credit for it, and no doubt he has had those discussions. In advancing his argument, what evidence can the hon. Gentleman point to in recent years of the regime's move towards a human rights success—not ones that have been forced or dragged out of it, but ones that he would say our close relationship has helped to achieve? What evidence is there?

Crispin Blunt: The most obvious one that springs to mind is the influence of American and British officers in the targeting cells for the operation in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen was unanimously approved by the United Nations in order to deal with the illegal usurpation of authority, and we all supported the necessary military involvement to restore order in Yemen. It is an awful place to try to advance by military means the political objectives that the world supported the Saudi coalition to put together. That campaign has been of immense difficulty. Rightly, the coalition was properly criticised for the way it appeared to be conducting the operation yet we should note that there has been a significant improvement. That operation has continued because of the quality of advice coming from the United Kingdom and also the United States in making sure that the military operations were conducted within the remit of international law with regard to human rights. I point to that as an area where there has been effective influence.

Domestically over the past two years within Saudi Arabia, I concede to the hon. Gentleman that what we see and what is reported about the execution of the 37 and the rest, and the detention of the women detainees that I and two of our colleagues inquired into, has been profoundly disappointing. I assume that the Saudi Arabian Government would reflect on the issues I have already mentioned—women being given the right to drive and the ending of the powers of arrest of the religious police—as an overall improvement but if, as I will come on to, Saudi Arabia simply closes down the political space and everyone is far too terrified to offer a critique, it will not help a consultative monarchy to advance good governance in Saudi Arabia. The picture is mixed, but let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that we have no influence whatever.

We have enormous leverage over Saudi Arabia as far as defence is concerned, until and unless we cancel our defence contracts with it. Such leverage would disappear

[Crispin Blunt]

and Saudi Arabia would be faced with the enormous expense of re-equipping itself from another supplier. It would be catastrophic if that supplier was in either Russia or China and provided it with the defence capability that it needed. We would certainly then say goodbye to any influence that we had over Saudi Arabia at enormous economic cost to ourselves. In that sense, we are engaged in a contest for influence, and its human rights is a very important part of trying to advance that agenda. I say to the hon. Gentleman that this is difficult, as I am sure the Minister will recognise. If we give up on interdependence, we will pay a very heavy price, as will the people of Saudi Arabia. We need to stand as much as we possibly can alongside them, and this debate and oversight of what is happening in Saudi Arabia should be part of that.

There is a degree to which it should be true that public shaming and the isolation of offending regimes can occasionally be a spur to progress, but it is better to offer a solution, to engage, and to assist by using our centuries-long hard-won experience of accountability for the rule of law. Rather than tell the Saudis sanctimoniously what their values ought to be, we should have these debates to challenge our friends and encourage them to see the merits of an open civil society, for the benefit of their nation's policy making if nothing else. Given such a process and our influence, we should be able to agree that they could do nothing better than to release the female detainees straight away.

Previously, change came slowly to Saudi Arabia. It was a conservative country with a cautious monarchy. That caution appeared to be swept away with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, but expecting it to suddenly transform into a fully-fledged accountable democracy overnight was never going to happen. Britain remains in a position to help the Crown Prince move away from the path of a leader lethally intolerant of dissent. As our ally, there is a necessity for Saudi Arabia to uphold the highest standards of a consultative monarchy by better engaging with its citizens. There remains an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to set a course for a better future for its society and its economy, learning from the human rights disasters of 2018. Those are the terms used by Saudi Arabia's own Foreign Minister about what happened to Jamal Khashoggi—it was described as a disaster.

The alternative to a consultative monarchy is an absolute monarchy, and down that route lies disaster and probably eventually revolution. Before that disaster and revolution lies terror and repression. In the west we need to ask ourselves whether we want a penitent reformer in charge of Saudi Arabia or a rolling back to a hard-line clerical domination that reflects the values of centuries earlier or some other revolutionary horror. To reapply the words of Talleyrand, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi was not only a crime; it was a mistake. We must help Saudi Arabia to deliver accountability for the crime, and for its future, we must do our best to ensure that it does not compound the mistake.

3.19 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I thank the right hon. Member

for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), who secured the debate, for his eloquent and comprehensive assessment of the human rights picture. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) for linking some of the issues that we have debated, such as our military relationship and the events playing out in Yemen, with the recent judgment on the case brought by the Campaign Against Arms Trade.

Hon. Members may be aware that, today—or perhaps overnight, if my sense of Washington time is correct—the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly, by 238 to 190, to block the supply of the precision-guided munitions that are being used against civilians in the Yemeni civil war. There are lessons there for our sales regime. I hope that we will continue to develop links between Parliament and Congress, as the Committees on Arms Export Controls began to do last week in Washington, so we can have a business-like relationship with the people with whom we do business on the arms and defence question.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) was rather optimistic in his assessment of the human rights picture in Saudi. He believes that it is correct for the UK and the US to be involved in targeting expertise and training in the use of military equipment in Yemen, but targeting can sometimes go wrong, as we have potentially seen in some test cases regarding the blowing up of buses, weddings and other civilian occasions. We do not quite have the evidence yet, but there are enough questions to make it necessary to comprehensively link the human rights picture with what is happening in the war in Yemen, particularly in relation to the recent cholera outbreak and the deaths of many children.

I commend the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) for his incisive treatment of the issue of the abuse that women, particularly those who work as servants in homes, have suffered over several years. That he spoke in so much detail about them is telling. I hope that the Minister will address the questions his hon. Friend raised about what the Government are doing to hold the Saudi Government to account for women who are particularly vulnerable because they are servants in Saudi homes. Obviously, the high-profile cases involving women's rights are those related to driving, but the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out that there are more serious issues than just having the right to drive, although that is symbolic of women's liberty.

I reiterate the concern about the treatment of young people in detention, particularly the lack of legal representation, the use of false confessions and their execution, which is simply unacceptable. I am also concerned about journalists. We have already heard about the tragic and revolting killing of Jamal Khashoggi, whose body, if media reports are to be believed, was chopped up into small pieces and melted down using some type of acid, so it was in a form that could be disposed of. I do not think it gets any worse than that, and yet the Saudis are our allies and friends.

We have to join the UN and Dr Callamard, who is looking into the matter as the UN's rapporteur, in applying more pressure. We have to show more backbone in the way we interact with our military allies. In particular, I want the Minister to address what is going on in relation to the investigation. Will the UK join the UN in asking questions about its next steps? We cannot allow the matter to drop and just stand next to Mohammed

bin Salman at G20 meetings and take photos and so on. We have to say something, have some backbone and be much stronger.

Like Jamal Khashoggi, journalists in general and people who tend to speak out and protest about the Saudi regime come under tremendous pressure, including execution. I look forward to hearing from the Minister what steps he will take as a new Minister, with a fresh approach, to inject more backbone and strength into our approach in this important regard.

3.25 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): If ever there were a prime candidate to be the subject of that excellent BBC Radio 4 series, “Moral Maze”, it would be Britain’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate and on the measured and temperate way in which he presented the case.

All the Back-Bench Members who have spoken have shown wisdom and moderation in their remarks. I was particularly struck by the contribution of my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), who knows more about the Arab world than just about anybody I have come across in 22 years in this House. Even he, though, with all his knowledge of the subject, made no bones about the extent to which one must be conflicted about a relationship as complex as this.

I mentioned that I have been in this House for 22 years, which takes us back to 1997, when the Blair Government came in on a tide of optimism and idealism, and Robin Cook, who became Foreign Secretary, stated his admirable objective of importing an “ethical dimension” into foreign policy. The problem with trying to find an ethical dimension, however, is that the choices we face, far from being between good and evil, are often about which is the lesser of two evils. I am afraid that that is the situation in which we find ourselves regarding our decades-long involvement with the countries of the middle east.

It is sometimes tempting to feel a sense of superiority about the way in which our society conducts itself, compared with the brutal and authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world in general, and in the middle east in particular. It is good to remind ourselves, therefore, that a few hundred years ago people in this country, who regarded themselves as Christians, thought nothing of inflicting terrible barbarities on one another, similar to what happened to poor Mr Khashoggi in that embassy, in the name of a belief as to which was the true branch of Christianity and which was what we would call, in another context, an infidel variation on that theme.

If we think of that in the context of our history and say, “What could have been done several hundred years ago to rapidly bring those societies to an appreciation of human rights and democratic politics?”, we realise how difficult that process is. That is why revolutions often have such bloody consequences and make bad situations even worse. That is also why I would like to think that most hon. Members believe in the evolutionary, rather than the revolutionary, process. If we are going to make improvements, we have to take society with us from the point at which we find it.

Let me give an example of the dilemmas that arise in relation to Saudi Arabia. On 20 June, I asked the Secretary of State for International Trade:

“Do the Government accept that, as the years have rolled by since the 9/11 atrocities, it has become harder and harder to justify the closeness of our relationship with Saudi Arabia, but in defence of what the Government are trying to do, would it not be sensible for my right hon. Friend to have conversations with the Foreign Secretary, perhaps with a view to publishing a digest of some of the representations that we make to the Saudis in trying to keep them from straying further away from acceptable standards of international behaviour?”

We could add to that the dimensions of human rights abuse. The Secretary of State’s reply, rather predictably, was as follows:

“The Foreign Secretary and I have answered numerous questions on this issue in the House of Commons, and we have certainly cited some of those incidents and been questioned on specific incidents in the House. On my right hon. Friend’s key point, I do not think the proximity or otherwise to 9/11 is the key determinant here; rather, it is whether Saudi Arabia acts as an important source of intelligence for this country in our shared combat against a global terrorism. It is a valuable partner in that particular battle and has helped to keep numerous UK citizens safe.”—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2019; Vol. 662, c. 379.]

This is where we begin to run up against a dilemma, because we all know that much of the problem of international Islamist totalitarian terrorism derives from sources in Saudi Arabia. When 9/11 happened, it was widely pointed out that there was some sort of pact between the authorities in Saudi Arabia and the totalitarian Islamist revolutionaries that basically they could do what they liked abroad, as long as they kept their activities limited at home. That is what we might call a form of the devil’s bargain.

Because I am not within the ring of secrecy, I am not in a position to know whether the Saudi intelligence services are really constantly feeding us vital information to thwart terrorist plots, or whether, as well as promoting and funding madrassahs all around the world that leach out this terrible form of totalitarian ideology, they are actually just giving us what I believe is known in the trade as chickenfeed, to keep us satisfied that it is better to remain, rather than cease to be, their friends.

Crispin Blunt: I think that the position in Saudi Arabia has radically changed since 9/11. Its Government have had to take on board some of the consequences of their policy up to that point, and of the large scale of their investment to support madrassahs in most of the rest of the world. As I understand it, it is now illegal in Saudi Arabia to make a cash donation within a mosque, and everything now has to be accountable in terms of where the money is going. That is the scale of change that is happening in Saudi Arabia, and it is why our Government are right to see it as a practical and important ally in this ideological battle in which we find ourselves on the same side.

Dr Lewis: That welcome intervention, if accurate—I have no reason to believe that it is not—is a powerful argument in favour of continued engagement with the regime, even though from time to time it does things that we would regard, with justification, as barbaric. That has often been the nature of international relations, and those are often the difficult choices that have to be made. To give the most extreme example, Sir Winston Churchill had a lifelong hatred of bolshevism and communism; he said at the time of the 1917 revolution that he wanted bolshevism to be strangled at birth. When he found himself in alliance with Stalin after the

[*Dr Julian Lewis*]

Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941, he was twitted by a political opponent who pointed out his lifelong hatred of communism. His famous reply was:

“If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.”

The history of diplomacy is that we often have to have relationships with unsavoury regimes in order to avoid something that would be even worse. However, having to have a relationship with a regime that does terrible things does not mean that we should go silent on criticising it. That is why I particularly welcome this debate. In some senses, it was a relief to discover that it would be more about human rights than about the arms trade. Believe me, if we had to have the same debate about the arms trade, which has been touched on slightly, we would face an infinitely more difficult dilemma. We would have to decide, as my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate said in passing, whether it was better to wash our hands of supplying military hardware to Saudi Arabia if the consequence would be to anchor that country in the orbit of Russia or China, as the Iranian regime already is.

I conclude by commending the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland for securing the debate, and by endorsing his notion that pressure on the Saudi regime on the human rights front is one area in which we can safely express our differences without risking a rupture that we cannot afford on overall strategic grounds. I wish him well in his campaign and congratulate all those who stand up for human rights in Saudi Arabia. I hope that they, in turn, will recognise that vast geopolitical forces are and will continue to be at work in the area, and that there are no morally perfect solutions to dealing with an environment like this, in which frankly all the actors are tainted.

I have mentioned Sir Winston Churchill, but perhaps we should go back to the 19th-century concept of the balance of power, which expressed the interests of Britain by ensuring that no one power could become overwhelmingly dominant on the continent and that we did not get drawn in too closely with any power. My fear, which I have expressed before, is that in the conflicts in the middle east we are sometimes in danger of getting too closely involved with one side rather than the other. That side, I am afraid, is Saudi Arabia.

3.38 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Henry. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate and on all his expertise and work on this important area. His speech dealt with three issues, broadly speaking.

First, the right hon. Gentleman spoke about the detainees who are opponents of the regime, and the very concerning lack of regard for international human rights norms and the rule of law in their treatment. I associate the Scottish National party with what he said and with all four of his asks to the Minister: I will be interested to hear the Minister's reply to them.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman dealt with the issue of capital punishment, reminding us that the capital punishment of children is absolutely forbidden

under international law. The examples that he gave were chilling, and it is chilling to think that other children await a similar fate. The United Kingdom is a union of countries that are supposed to be opposed to capital punishment in all circumstances. The representations that the right hon. Gentleman demanded in respect of the three young men who are awaiting execution are right and proper, and he stressed that the UK Government must state their opposition to capital punishment—particularly in respect of children—loudly and publicly.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman dealt with why these matters should matter to us in the United Kingdom—because we are a close commercial, security and intelligence partner of Saudi Arabia. I listened with great interest to what the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) had to say in relation to the moral difficulties here, and I took on board what they said. It is easy to wring our hands and perhaps it is not easy to find a solution, but there are certain things that are absolutely beyond the pale, and the execution of children is beyond the pale. In addition, for any of us who believe in human rights and the rule of law, detention without trial is also beyond the pale.

That leads me to some points made by a number of speakers this afternoon. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about the way in which women and girls who have been trafficked or kept as modern slaves are suffering in Saudi Arabia, and described the sort of domestic servitude in which they are held. He also touched on the issues of women's and girls' rights, which were alluded to by the hon. Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West). Also, the hon. Member for Reigate is to be commended for the interest that he has taken in the plight of female detainees in Saudi Arabia, and I will devote the few comments that I will make to the issue of the human rights of women and girls in Saudi Arabia, particularly looking at the women who have been rounded up and detained in relation to their feminist activism about the right of women to drive.

We all know that women in Saudi Arabia face formal and informal barriers when they attempt to make decisions or take action without the presence or consent of a male relative, and some speakers today alluded to Saudi Arabia's discriminatory male guardianship system, which remains intact despite pledges by the Saudi Arabian Government to abolish it.

It is interesting to observe that in June Saudi Arabia passed a law on sexual harassment with a sentence for offenders of up to two years' imprisonment, which can be increased in certain circumstances. However, that law also provides that anyone who falsely reports a crime of harassment or falsely claims to have been a victim shall be sentenced to the same punishment as for the offence that they alleged took place. That could be used to punish victims. I am all in favour of the concept of innocent till proven guilty, but I do not believe that the law should be used to punish victims, and there is a real risk that the way in which this law against sexual harassment has been introduced in Saudi Arabia will deter victims from coming forward.

In February, the Saudi authorities came before the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to defend their record on women's

rights, and the committee called on Saudi Arabia to accelerate efforts to abolish the male guardianship system, adopt an anti-discrimination law and adopt a written, unified family code, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

However, as I said earlier, perhaps the most concerning example of the abuse of the human rights of women comes with the treatment of those feminists who have campaigned to lift the long-standing ban on women driving. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, the right to drive is an important one; it is fundamental to women's autonomy for them to have the option to be able to travel freely, in the way that men can take for granted.

It is very concerning that there has been a wave of arrests of prominent women's rights activists. They have been charged with serious crimes, such as suspicious contact with foreign parties, and Government-aligned media outlets then carried out an alarming campaign against them, even publishing their photographs with the word "Traitor" branded across their faces.

In March, a number of those women—including Loujain al-Hathloul, who I will say a little about in a moment—appeared before a court and were charged with communicating with external hostile powers, providing financial support to external parties, and luring and exploiting minors to work against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Basically, the women were women's rights bloggers who had been advocating for gender equality, including the right of women to drive. Despite the fact that that right has now been granted in Saudi Arabia, those women have been imprisoned; some of them are still in prison.

When those women appeared before the court in March, they were not informed of the charges before the hearing, they were not permitted to speak during the proceedings, and no lawyers or foreign journalists were permitted to attend the hearing, which of course is absolutely unacceptable.

Some of those women have now been released, but others are still in custody. Loujain al-Hathloul has been imprisoned for more than a year and when her parents visited her last December, she showed them black scars on her thighs that had been caused by electric shocks. Also, towards the end of May, a *Guardian* journalist interviewed Loujain al-Hathloul's brother, who explained what kind of person his sister is. All her life, she has advocated for women's rights, but she was pulled over while driving in the United Arab Emirates last year and deported back to Saudi Arabia. Basically, what began then was a really brutal campaign to silence her. She claims that she was detained for three days, then freed, before being seized again from her family home in Riyadh, blindfolded, thrown into the boot of a car and taken to a detention centre, where she was tortured and threatened with rape and death.

As a feminist—I am sure that all the men in Westminster Hall also count themselves as feminists as well—I have to say that that treatment was absolutely unacceptable. I make no apology for focusing on the particular issue of women's and girls' rights, but it reflects on the overall approach of a regime when we see, as others have said eloquently today, the way that it treats journalists, the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and religious minorities.

So, while I take on board all that Conservative Members have said today to urge some caution in the way that we deal with these matters, I wholeheartedly support the points made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, I wholeheartedly associate myself and my party with the asks that he has made of the Government, and I very much look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in due course.

Sir Henry Bellingham (in the Chair): I thank the hon. Lady for that very succinct wind-up.

3.47 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): As always, Sir Henry, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate and on his excellent introduction to it. He rightly pointed out that Saudi Arabia is a very important nation in the region and in the Gulf area. However, as he also said, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia is getting worse.

Of course, the right hon. Gentleman also told us about the many people who have been held since 4 November 2017 and tortured; some fatalities have also been recorded. He asked the Minister for a number of things to be made clear, one of which is whether the Minister would ask for proof of life of those detained, and clarification of specific charges, and like every other Member in Westminster Hall today I wait to hear the Minister's response to that.

The right hon. Gentleman also reminded us of the urgent question that was tabled in the main Chamber of the House of Commons recently regarding the 37 executions that took place on 23 April. Many right hon. and hon. Members have told us some of the details of those executions, which are horrific, but the most important issue is that three of those who were executed—brutally executed—were still children at the time of their alleged offences. The right hon. Gentleman also said that the UK Government need to be more public in their condemnation of the Saudi Government, which was a feeling echoed by many this afternoon.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who always makes an excellent contribution to debates in this place. He concentrated—rightly—on human rights in Saudi Arabia, specifically on modern slavery and the abuse of women. His contribution to the debate was very important and relevant.

Then, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about Mohammed bin Salman being seen originally as a reformer, but of course we now know, having seen his regime develop, that that is not the case. There has been no contrition whatever over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. My hon. Friend mentioned arms sales to Saudi Arabia; he also mentioned that in other countries, many of those held on death row would have been seen as simply exercising their democratic rights. When will Saudi Arabia be able to do the same, and not regard those democratic rights and criticisms as crimes against the state? He also said that the United Kingdom was colluding with abuses in Saudi Arabia, and I am sure that the Minister will reply to that point.

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

The right hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt)—sorry, the hon. and gallant Member; he is not right honourable—

Sir Henry Bellingham (in the Chair): Not yet.

Fabian Hamilton: Not yet; I am sure he will be very soon. He told us again that Saudi Arabia was an important ally, which is absolutely true. However, like many of our allies, we must hold them to account for abuses that are taking place in those countries, and I believe we should never be apologetic about that. Saudi Arabia is, of course, a human rights priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the hon. and gallant Gentleman said that disengagement from Saudi Arabia would send a very bad message to other human rights abusers: that if we did not like what was going on there, we had no more to do with them. Maybe he has a point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) talked about the vote in the House of Representatives in Washington to block the supply of munitions for the war in Yemen, which is an important point. She also said that there were question marks over the accuracy of the targeting of some of the weapons—some of which may well have been supplied by the United Kingdom—used against schools, hospitals and innocent civilians in Yemen. That is an issue that we have discussed on many occasions.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) mentioned Robin Cook's ethical dimension to his foreign policy, something that we are all trying to build on. Certainly, we on the Opposition Benches hope to build on that in preparation for being in government after the next general election is held, whenever that may be. However, the right hon. Gentleman rightly said—as every right hon. and hon. Member has said this afternoon—that we should never be silent in criticising regimes, even when the relationship is vital to our national strategic interests. One cannot disagree with him. He said that there is no morally perfect solution, and I certainly support that view.

As I have said and according to the former Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), Saudi Arabia is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country. FCO officials have consistently stated that they regularly discuss human rights with the Saudi Government. We have also heard that Saudi Arabia is to host the next G20 summit next year. Agnès Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, has urged the G20 countries to reconsider holding that G20 meeting in Saudi Arabia in the light of the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

As has been referenced in some of this afternoon's contributions, the Saudi authorities set up the specialised criminal court system in 2008, ostensibly to prosecute terrorism-related cases. In 2014, the Saudi Government issued a new penal law for crimes of terrorism and finance, which broadened the authority of the SCC to prosecute anyone who

"disturbs public order, shakes the security of society or subjects its national unity to danger, or obstructs the primary system of rule or harms the reputation of the state".

That broad language has been used to arrest and prosecute many human rights defenders and try them in the SCC. The SCC is highly restrictive and refuses to allow even diplomats to observe its trials, in clear violation of the Vienna convention. The Foreign Office has already criticised Saudi Arabia for not allowing diplomats to observe the trials of women's rights defenders in March 2019. I wonder whether the Minister can update us on what conversations he or his colleagues have had with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding access to the SCC by our, and other countries', diplomats.

Saudi Arabia continues to detain people without charge for indefinite periods, and—this is the important thing—without access to counsel or fair trials. Many arbitrary arrests are made to deter others from speaking up, such as women's rights defenders, as the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said. As we have also heard, many prisoners are denied the medical attention that they often desperately need.

Saudi Arabia is one of the most prolific users of the death penalty in the world, often doing so in mass executions of over 30 people, as happened in April this year. According to Reprieve, since the ascension of King Salman to the throne in January 2015, the state has signed off more than 700 death sentences as of May 2019. In the first six months of this year, Saudi Arabia executed 122 people, making it the bloodiest year since 2015. During the same period in 2017, 41 people were executed; in 2016, that figure was 88, and in 2015, it was 103. Reprieve also noted that in 2018, at least 12 human rights activists were sentenced to death.

We have heard a bit about women's rights this afternoon. In mid-2018, Saudi authorities arrested prominent women's rights activists, many of whom are still in detention today, although I am glad to hear that some have now been released. The Saudi Government are allegedly planning to relax the strict guardianship laws to allow women to travel without requiring the permission of their male guardian. However, as we know, the Saudi Ministry of Interior has created a smartphone app called Absher that notifies a male guardian if a woman under his guardianship passes through an airport. He can then automatically withdraw her right to travel. No other country in the world has such restrictions on women. As we have heard, after lifting the ban on women being able to drive in the kingdom, the authorities jailed the women activists who had been campaigning for that right for years. Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan and Aziza al-Yousef were jailed under the country's cyber-crime laws, which can carry sentences of up to five years in jail.

Since the protests related to the Arab spring broke out across the region in 2011, more than 50 children have been arrested in Saudi Arabia. Some remain in custody, lacking any kind of due process. At least six individuals arrested as minors were executed in the first half of 2019. On 24 April, six minors were beheaded in a mass execution; none had been informed of their impending execution, and all were refused the right to see family members before they were executed.

Saudi Arabia has been a signatory of the convention on the rights of the child since 1996. Under that convention, a minor is described as anyone under the age of 18; under international law, it is illegal to sentence a person

under 18 to death. Murtaja Qureiris, aged 18, has been sentenced to death by the Saudi authorities. He was arrested in September 2014, aged just 13 years old. Thanks to international pressure, he was given a stay of execution last month, but we do not know how long that will last for. We have heard about Ali al-Nimr, Abdullah al-Zaher and Dawood al-Marhoon, three other juveniles who were arrested in 2012 and sentenced to death. They were tortured, and confessions were forced out of them.

The UK continues to give assistance to Saudi Arabia despite a deepening crackdown on dissent. Saudi Arabia is a key ally in a strategically important region; it is an important partner in trade, investment, education, counter-terrorism, defence and energy security. The Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), has written:

“We are committed to maintaining and developing the relationship.”

Recently, the former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband told *The Washington Post*:

“All those countries that have a relationship with Saudi Arabia need to use those relationships in a way that curbs the failed war strategy in Yemen.”

In February 2019, the Lords International Relations Committee stated in a report that the United Kingdom was

“on the wrong side of the law”

by allowing arms exports to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen. That was before the Supreme Court judgment. That report stated that

“relying on assurances by Saudi Arabia and Saudi-led review processes is not an adequate way of implementing the obligations for a risk-based assessment set out in the Arms Trade Treaty.”

Labour has consistently criticised the UK Government for allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia, especially for their use in the civil war in Yemen. The shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), has said that

“Ministers have wilfully disregarded the evidence that Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law in Yemen, while nevertheless continuing to supply them with weapons.”

Labour has continually called for a full parliamentary or public inquiry to find out how that has happened.

A UN report earlier this year said Saudi Arabia executed an “extrajudicial killing” by a 14-man team linked to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. At least 30 journalists are detained in Saudi Arabia. Saudi blogger Raif Badawi was sent to prison in 2012 for insulting Islam and has received 50 of the 1,000 lashes he was sentenced to. Saudi Arabia is ranked 172nd of 180 countries in 2019’s world press freedom index.

4 pm

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison):

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) and a number of extremely fine speeches. Although it is a Thursday afternoon, it is a pity more hon. and right hon. Members are not here, but I am sure that does not reflect the interest the House of Commons has in these matters.

I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this debate. I welcome the opportunity to discuss and debate the UK Government’s approach to Saudi Arabia which, as we

have discovered in the course of this afternoon, is complex and nuanced. In the points I make in response to colleagues, I will attempt to explain why that is. In doing so, I want to be completely frank about our significant concerns. Ultimately, we believe that progress will be hastened through constructive engagement with the kingdom, so I will highlight work we are doing to support human rights in Saudi Arabia.

People often suggest—Members have done so today—that there is a contradiction between UK interests in Saudi Arabia and our democratic values. They suggest we choose to put our interests above human rights. Those are simplistic arguments based around a false premise, and they miss the point. It is precisely our shared interests and our extensive ties with Saudi Arabia that give us an effective platform to raise our concerns and to encourage human rights progress. If there is no dialogue with those we seek to influence, the debate is purely among ourselves and we become a deluxe debating society. As such, I find common cause with my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), and commend him for two things: first, his work for women’s human rights defenders, about which he was very modest; and secondly his very fine speech.

I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) for his typically fine speech. He balanced our desire to ensure that we encourage progress in Saudi Arabia with being unashamed of our norms, values and realpolitik. He raised the spectre of what might happen in the event we did not engage in the way I believe we are. It is a choice that Members make. We either bring down the shutters and give ourselves a warm feeling and do virtue signalling, which makes us feel good, or we engage, understanding the sense of frustration, unhappiness and awkwardness it gives us, while giving ourselves at least the prospect of having a dialogue with Saudi Arabia. I choose the latter, though I am tempted by the former, since I rather like the absolutist, black and white way of approaching some of these matters. It would be fairly straightforward. We could all stand here and in the Chamber and make fine speeches about the evils and wickedness of regimes with which we do not see eye to eye, but it is not clear to me how that will move things on for our intended beneficiaries, which in this instance are the people of Saudi Arabia, the people in the wider region and, ultimately, ourselves.

Catherine West: Will the Minister accept that the situation is getting worse as per the evidence given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) in his speech? Will he also accept that the situation in relation to our business relationships and the war in Yemen puts this in a different light from other countries where there are human rights concerns?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady cited something from the United States that happened fairly recently, but I do not accept her position. I understand her concerns. She did not cite the recent Court of Appeal case, but we could discuss that in relation to some of the businesses that I think are in her mind. The fact of the matter is, as the 2017 judgment made clear, that the people exercising these judgments are full of anxiety and anguish—those words are used in that judgment. On my part, as well as that of my predecessors and my officials and advisers, I have to say how much I resent the implication that those

[*Dr Murrison*]

decisions are made lightly. We are human beings, and sometimes we will get decisions wrong, but the consolidated criteria on which we and our allies depend are rigorous and robust, and even the appellate court was good enough to acknowledge that.

I remain convinced that the standards we apply in this country are among the best in the world and are a beacon for others to follow. That does not detract in any way from the fact that, in a complex situation where our intelligence is—from time to time, if not most of the time—inevitably partial, we can get things wrong. That is inevitable, but we have to weigh things up.

Returning to the points I made earlier, it is my view that our engagement with Saudi Arabia is, in general, positive. It is more likely to engage Saudi Arabia and procure what we would see as good behaviour on its part than the alternative, which is disengagement. I will come on to some further points on defence and security, but ultimately as politicians we have to decide which we choose. I am pleased that the United Kingdom has historically been and remains in the company of those who choose engagement and influence rather than distance.

I am concerned, as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East and my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate clearly are, that if we changed tack and policy direction, we would isolate the regime in Riyadh. The consequences are very difficult to predict. It is an extraordinarily dangerous region. A change in direction could pose a real and present threat to this country and the people the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and I represent. I would tread warily before dramatically changing Government policy in the way that I think she would tempt us to do, along with the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and, I suspect, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). I disagree with that point. There is a choice to be made; it is a fairly clearcut difference of approach. I respect those who take a different view, but there it is.

Mr Carmichael: The debate is now essentially not about whether we intervene, but about how we intervene and with what force. The asks I made of the Minister in relation to those who were detained in November 2017 were four very basic, modest asks: the right for someone to be told what they are charged with; their right to be released if they are not charged; their right to have their assets given back if there is no legal basis for taking them; and, most fundamentally, the request for proof of life. Surely those requests are at one end of the spectrum, and the Government should have no difficulty in making them forcibly and publicly.

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman because he brings me on to my next remarks. I will try hard not to be diverted by some of the broader issues in addressing what I think are the guts of his thesis, which relate to those who have been detained, imprisoned and misused.

Of course, the big headline figure in all this is Jamal Khashoggi, whose brutal murder and dismemberment truly sickened the world. There cannot be any of us who are not revolted by that story. It is a stain on the

reputation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and I look forward to details of what happened being made public and explicit very soon. It would be appalling if Saudi Arabia decided to obfuscate or obscure that terrible episode. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia must make it very clear what remedial action will be taken in respect of those who are responsible and to prevent such events from happening in future.

The lack of transparency around the anti-corruption campaign, including the Ritz-Carlton detentions, mainly of Ministers, princes and businessmen, gives the international community cause for concern. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland will know that, in February last year, those remaining at the Ritz were released following a number of court settlements, or transferred to prison pending prosecution. Let us be clear: those remaining in prison must be brought to trial or released. Their assets must be unfrozen if it is not the intention of the Saudi authorities to bring charges against those individuals.

The right hon. Gentleman can be sure that the Foreign Secretary and the ambassador in Riyadh lose no opportunity to raise the plight of those individuals, and to insist that their cases must be brought to a conclusion. They must be either charged with the corruption with which they have been associated, or released and their assets unfrozen. I will ensure that we continue to apply what pressure we can on KSA in order to achieve that end. However, it is not just about the 50 who are imprisoned, about whom we remain concerned; it is also about the mechanism within the Saudi state that allows such circumstances to arise, and the judicial process that Saudi uses to apprehend and manage that case load.

The hon. Member for Leeds North East mentioned the specialised criminal court, which is used to try cases that our peers among the international community would not regard as terrorist cases at all. There have been allusions in the debate to the kinds of things that Saudi Arabia might imagine constitute terrorism. I have to say that the same practice is found in a number of states within the Gulf region—it is not unique to Saudi Arabia. It is a source of frustration for many of us who deal with consular issues to try to work out why individuals have been apprehended on particular charges that look, on the face of it, outrageous and ridiculous, but that is because we are judging by our own standards and mores.

The way that many countries in the region regard such things as terrorism and offences against the state can be very different from our own. That is in no way to justify it, but it is to begin to try to understand it. I share the concerns expressed by the hon. about the SCC, and those concerns are shared with our interlocutors on a regular basis. More generally, we believe that civil and political rights strengthen a nation. I think we all believe that—otherwise we would not be here. Those rights make the state more resilient and more stable, and it is in all our interests to see a secure, stable and moderate Saudi Arabia playing a constructive role in a highly volatile region.

Free expression allows innovation to thrive and ideas to develop—an essential foundation for economic development and social cohesion. I was particularly interested in the remarks made by my hon. Friends on the nature of that cohesion, and the implicit threat to it

if Saudi Arabia's friends in the west behave in a way that isolates it and distances it from our norms and values. In our conversations with Saudi leaders and officials, we consistently underline the importance of respecting freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest. In a country wedded to social media, that includes online activity. We make the case that such issues are the guarantors of long-term stability in the region.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have spoken to the Saudi Government about a number of the cases mentioned today. They are listed in my briefing notes, and do not make for easy reading. Some of it has been articulated in the course of the debate, but not all of it. We have raised our concerns at the most senior levels about the increasing number of people detained for crimes relating to freedom of expression, as well as allegations of torture in detention and the lack of transparency in the aforementioned judicial process.

During the UN universal periodic review of Saudi Arabia's human rights record in November, and the UN human rights council in March, we made clear our concerns about the constrained political environment. Right hon. and hon. Members are right to say that we believe that it is getting worse rather than better. The Government utterly condemned Jamal Khashoggi's killing in the strongest possible terms. At the UN human rights council in June, we set out our expectation for a transparent judicial process and urged Saudi Arabia to take steps to ensure that such crimes will not happen again.

I will address the questions raised by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland as fully as I can. If he feels that I have not addressed them fully, I am more than happy to exchange correspondence with him. I agree with him about the appalling spectacle of 37 mainly Shi'a men executed in April. That was an appalling, ghastly spectacle, and I have no doubt that the leadership in Saudi Arabia want to ensure that the good reputation of their country is not besmirched and stained again in the way that it undoubtedly was.

One hon. Member talked about shaming Saudi Arabia. Shaming is dangerous in respect of many of the countries in the Gulf region. Shaming is perhaps a bit of a challenge, but certainly the reputation of our interlocutors is important to them. In our discourse with them, it is important to point out in clear terms, as their embassies in London most certainly will, that such things put the relationship between the UK, and the west in general, and the country in question back many years. It is vital that those countries give full thought and consideration to what such things do in terms of their reputation with those that they wish to influence and, in many cases, to emulate.

Diplomats from our embassy in Riyadh attempt to observe all trials of international concern, with varying effectiveness. We have lobbied at the highest levels for the diplomatic observation of human rights trials to be reinstated as a matter of routine. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland rightly said that the UK condemns the death penalty in all countries and in all circumstances. I think the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West said something slightly different—that the Government say that they condemn capital punishment.

The Government do not just say that they condemn capital punishment; they really mean it. Implicit in the word "say" is, perhaps, an element of doubt. I would

like to use this opportunity to expunge that doubt completely and irrevocably. Let me say it again: the United Kingdom condemns capital punishment in all countries and in all circumstances. On that, I think the great majority—an almost overwhelming majority—of right hon. and hon. Members in this House would agree.

Andy Slaughter: Would the Minister also like to take the opportunity to state the Government's policy on the extradition or return of anyone to another jurisdiction that practises capital punishment, and to explain that they would not do so except on the undertaking that that would not be used? We have had recent examples of queries about that, and it would be helpful to get an unequivocal statement from the Minister.

Sir Henry Bellingham (in the Chair): We need to be a bit careful not to deviate from the subject of the debate.

Dr Murrison: But the hon. Gentleman does give me the opportunity to say once again that the United Kingdom condemns capital punishment in all countries and in all circumstances. I do not think the English language contains a form of words that could make that more explicit.

I hope it is abundantly clear from all I have said that we have held Saudi Arabia to account at every opportunity. It goes well beyond the hand-wringing that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland spoke about. I am sure he did not mean to imply that consecutive Governments, including the one in which he was a senior Minister, have indulged in hand-wringing, but I sensed in his remarks a degree of frustration that we cannot do more to achieve an effect. As a Minister in the Foreign Office, I certainly know that frustration and live with it all the time.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith tried to paint the Government into a conspiracists' corner and cited arms exports and detainees. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green also spoke about arms exports. It is certainly true that some people call for defence and security exports to be halted on moral grounds, which is a perfectly respectable position to adopt, but the legality of our arms exports rests on our rigorous application of the consolidated criteria. The UK takes that responsibility very seriously.

I am not persuaded by calls for a broad-brush end to defence and security exports, for three primary reasons. First, to stop our defence and security exports would signal a disregard for Saudi Arabia's legitimate security concerns. Regional tensions are acute. Saudi Arabia has faced missile attacks on critical national infrastructure and faces cyber-attacks, as do we. Our system of export licensing supports responsible exports that meet legitimate defence and security needs. Revoking long-standing defence and security co-operation would undermine Saudi Arabia's ability to protect itself, creating a vulnerability that could be exploited by malign regional actors. Secondly, halting exports of materials and skills in this area would not prevent Saudi Arabia from procurement elsewhere. Alternative partners of Saudi Arabia are unlikely to exhibit the same standards as our rigorous and robust arms export regimes do. Thirdly, it is no secret that Saudi Arabia is the UK's largest defence export market. The adverse economic impact on the UK's defence

[*Dr Murrison*]

industrial base, which translates into real jobs for real people in our constituencies, would be significant. Before simply waving those off and batting them away, I would have to be wholly convinced that the aforementioned two points were adequately satisfied, which I do not think I ever will be.

Let me be clear about the anguish and anxiety that I, my ministerial colleagues and officials go through in approving anything that might be used to inflict harm and damage internally or against civilian populations. I have been a Minister in this Department for two months, and the number of these matters I have seen is fairly small, but I can say to this gathering that nothing I have done has caused me more anxiety and anguish than the situation in Saudi Arabia. It is important that people know the amount of work that goes into this, and the district and appellate courts have made that perfectly clear.

Catherine West: I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way. Will he at least consider adopting the same approach to end-use compliance as that of the US? Recent research shows that the end-use compliance of British manufactured arms is not as good as the system used by the USA, which is our closest ally.

Dr Murrison: It is always very nice to take note of what our closest ally is doing, but these days I am probably more inclined to look at what our colleagues in the European Union are doing. In so many respects, they more closely align with our general approach to issues of this sort. I say that not to disparage our best and closest international neighbour, but to state a matter of fact. It is articulated through the EU consolidated criteria, which take note of a number of factors, including where exports are likely to end up—the point to which the hon. Lady refers.

We should recognise where progress has been made in Saudi Arabia. In contrast with the constraints on civil and political rights, there is little doubt that we have seen significant social and economic changes in Saudi Arabia. The scale and scope of reform driven by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has been unprecedented in the history of the kingdom. I am not an apologist for anybody, and I am certainly not a tourist guide for Saudi Arabia, but it is important that we acknowledge where things have been done that we support.

Andy Slaughter: The problem I am having with the Minister's speech is that he keeps answering questions that have not been asked and caricaturing those who have been critical of the Saudi regime as somehow wanting to break off relations for all time or to end any trade with the area. It is all very well talking about social and economic rights, but this is a debate on human rights in Saudi Arabia. Will he answer the question I put to his hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt): where has he seen an improvement in human rights in Saudi Arabia under the Mohammad bin Salman regime?

Dr Murrison: I think the hon. Gentleman wants proof. Well, I cannot do a controlled trial, although I used to be a scientist. We cannot do controlled trials to

determine what would have happened had we not intervened. All we can do is operate on the basis of the evidence in front of us and try to work out the best way forward. That is imprecise, and it may be unsatisfactory to the hon. Gentleman, but it is none the less true. He wonders why I am not answering questions that have been put to me. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West rightly raised the position of women and girls. As it happens, she mentioned driving and made some important points that had not hitherto been made. Some people would say that women being able to drive is a trivial matter and does not in any way compare with the sort of human rights abuses cited by other right hon. and hon. Members.

Joanna Cherry: The point I was making is that it is not a trivial matter for women to be able to convey themselves from A to B in the same way as a man can. However, the more important point I was making, which the Minister will surely appreciate, is that the women who campaigned for this basic right have now been imprisoned, despite the fact that the Government have introduced it, and some of them have been tortured. That is a serious matter, and I associate myself with right hon. and hon. Members' request for a clear response to the points made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael).

Dr Murrison: I was about to say lots of nice things about the hon. and learned Lady in respect of raising this issue, but I might have to change my mind.

I was going to say that, although some might consider this to be a trivial matter, it is really quite extraordinary in the context of what we know to be the nature of Saudi society—a deeply conservative society, particularly outside Riyadh and Jeddah—and it is totemic of wider societal changes within the kingdom that have to be encouraged. It underscores my previous point, which is where we should draw the line and what approach we should have, as a country, towards this nation state—whether we decide to go off in a huff and have nothing to do with it, and perhaps apply a more prurient approach to Riyadh, or whether we engage fully with it, as I believe we are doing. The point I am trying to make is that, although we have to be eternally vigilant, it seems that the balance is about right. Indeed, it is a balance that was struck under previous Governments, including the Government in which the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland served.

I was going to go on to celebrate the fact that women are undertaking new roles in Saudi Arabia, which I would hope the hon. and learned Lady would applaud. Women now sit on the board of the Hajj Authority, and can train as prosecutors and pilots. The first female Saudi ambassador has just been appointed to Washington. The steps taken to curtail the powers of the religious police and to reduce the scope of the guardianship system, which has been mentioned, are also cause for applause. We welcome those positive steps, but our aim is still to see the end of all gender discrimination. We will continue to encourage the full participation of women in Saudi life. As we are listened to by Riyadh, I hope that we will have some success in that endeavour.

We welcome recent statements by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on returning Saudi Arabia to a more moderate Islam that is tolerant of other faiths. To

build momentum, it is important that religious voices from across the spectrum are not excluded, and that inclusive dialogue is encouraged.

Under Vision 2030, social and cultural opportunities are increasing. After a 35-year ban, the first cinema was opened, in March 2018, and there are now 15 cinemas in the kingdom, with more planned. Again, some might think that a trivial point given the human rights abuses that have been the bulk of our discussion today, but it is not; it is totemic of a broader societal change in the kingdom.

In 2018, the General Authority for Entertainment organised more than 5,000 live shows, festivals and concerts, including art and cultural events across 56 cities—an extraordinary and remarkable thing. Again, we should resist the temptation to dismiss that as trivial against what we have discussed, because it is an important indicator of progress and of a leadership that is prepared to change within the constraints of a conservative social system.

This Government firmly believe that our relationship with Saudi Arabia continues to be of utmost strategic importance to the UK. That relationship helps us to address global security challenges, such as Iran's malign behaviour. Our co-operation also supports security inside the United Kingdom for the people we represent. Our common interests and our long-standing partnership give us the platform to raise our concerns and the influence to encourage further developments in the Kingdom.

As we have discussed, rights and fundamental freedoms are severely limited in Saudi Arabia. Progress has been gradual and is not close to where we want the country to be. That is why Saudi Arabia will continue to be a human rights priority country—not a club that any country wants to be a member of. It is right that we continue to be confident about our values and norms and that we promote them globally. It is right that we should express our concerns about human rights in a frank and open way, and we do that with Saudi Arabia at the highest levels, both in private and in public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) made a fine speech about modern slavery. As he will know, at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2017, Saudi Arabia endorsed the Prime Minister's call to end modern slavery. I take that as a positive sign.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland rightly raised the issue of UK funding for police operations in Saudi Arabia. I have covered the tone of that point in my remarks, but to be specific, he will know that the Government complete rigorous human rights assessments of that training and other elements, such as materiel. More specifically, he will know that the overseas security and justice assistance assessments are done before undertaking justice and security operations, to ensure that all work meets our international human rights obligations and our values. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Reigate is an expert in those matters, and I commend him for the work that he did when he was in office.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also asked about the integrated activity fund, which is a relatively recent fund. All IAF projects undergo assessment and review. We cannot disclose information about particular

IAF projects in greater detail, as we have a duty to maintain the confidence and confidentiality of our partners, but I am happy to enter into a correspondence with him, if he would find that helpful.

The hon. Member for Leeds North East asked about funding extremism—I think it was him. I am pleased to report that Saudi Arabia attained full membership of the Financial Action Task Force last month, committing the kingdom to countering terrorism financing and money laundering. That is a positive move. We of course await further developments on that front, but it is again cause for supposing that Saudi Arabia is making progress—not at the rate he wants or I want, but at a Saudi pace. Working with an instinctively conservative country, he will understand that that has to be how this rolls out. Any more than that and we will head for the sort of difficulties referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East and my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate.

We will continue to work with like-minded Governments and organisations, and with human rights defenders, to engage with the Saudi Arabian Government to bring about positive change and to promote and defend universal freedoms. It is important to get that right, not just for the country but for the region and, ultimately, for our own security. I believe that that is the right approach.

4.36 pm

Mr Carmichael: Thank you, Sir Henry, and Mr Evans before you, for chairing our proceedings. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to this excellent and thoughtful debate. I thank the Minister for his very substantial reply. I had not realised that he had been a Minister in this post for two months, which by contemporary standards is a record of durability and longevity. I wish him well in the weeks ahead.

I will take up the Minister's kind offer of further correspondence regarding the force required in relation to the detainees, especially those from November 2017, and to the detail of the IAF funding and the College of Policing. I was perhaps remiss in not giving him advance notice of what I was going to say about that. Rest assured, if the correspondence is not fruitful, I suspect that we will be back here at some point in the future.

In particular, I thank the Minister for his clear and strong reaffirmation of the policy on the use of the death penalty. I suspect this was no accident. I say that because I have been on this beat for quite a few years. I set up the all-party parliamentary group on the abolition of the death penalty more years ago than I care to remember. I have campaigned against it in different parts of the world including the United States, South Korea and Japan. Most recently, I was in Japan at the end of February, working with the bar association there on its policy for the abolition of the death penalty in Japan. The embassy staff in Tokyo engaged on that issue in an absolutely exemplary manner. I could not have asked for better, more committed or more energetic support than I got during my time there. That has been my experience wherever I have gone, working with embassies and consulates in any part of the world in relation to this issue. To hear the Minister reaffirm that policy in the strongest possible terms is welcome and I commend him for it.

[Mr Carmichael]

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) referred to this issue as a moral maze. I think that is absolutely correct. The hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) spoke of the danger of pushing Saudi Arabia into the hands of other global powers, most notably China and Russia. I completely understand the tensions at play there. There is an element of competition when we consider not just human rights records, but our trading aspirations. We have to deal with that tension all the time. The Minister dealt with that in some detail.

I will leave the House with this thought. As we know, the G20 is heading to Saudi Arabia. Before that happens, there is time for this country to give a lead in talking to other members of the G20, so that we can all go to Saudi Arabia ahead of that meeting and say, “Here are

our concerns. These are the matters that will be in our newspapers and television stations when the media of the world come to Saudi Arabia for the G20. You have time on your hands now and the opportunity to do something about it.” It strikes me that that would be a useful multilateral initiative that we could take, which would avoid some of the other tensions that come into play. I hope that is the sort of approach that our Government, which are committed in a meaningful way to human rights in other parts of the world, could take.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered human rights in Saudi Arabia and the detention of opponents of the regime.

4.40 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 18 July 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Furniture and Furnishings: Fire Safety

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): Today, I will publish the Government response to our consultation on updating the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, which set fire resistance requirements for cover materials and fillings used to make domestic upholstered furniture.

The review aimed to ensure that our legislative framework maintains fire safety for consumers, reflects technological advances in furniture manufacturing practices, and facilitates a reduction in the use of hazardous flame-retardant chemicals as a means of making furniture fire resistant.

The consultation sought views on proposals to amend the testing regime. It also sought views on proposals for clarifying and amending the scope of the regulations, strengthening the traceability requirements to bring furniture into line with other product sectors, updating labelling rules, and extending the time period for trading standards to institute legal proceedings.

The Government are committed to protecting consumers from all safety risks, but we will not compromise on fire safety. During the course of the review, to ensure the highest standards, we sought the views of chief scientific advisers from relevant Departments across Government.

The Government will now develop a new approach to address the different sources and chemical risks posed by fire to upholstered furniture and furnishings. It will focus on safety outcomes (such as reduced risk of ignition, reduced risk of fire spread) and will be underpinned by a set of essential safety requirements which all upholstered furniture placed on the market must meet.

This approach is consistent with that taken for other consumer products. The (new) legislation will be supported by British Standards which will be developed by the British Standards Institution in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including industry, fire-safety experts and consumer representatives.

This new approach will continue to ensure that manufacturers place only safe products on the UK market. I will consult on the detail of this new approach in due course. In the meantime, the existing regulations will continue to apply.

[HCWS1759]

Registration of Overseas Entities

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): The Government have today published their response to the report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Registration of Overseas Entities Bill.

The draft Bill was published on 23 July 2018 to enable pre-legislative scrutiny. The Joint Committee formed for the purpose of scrutinising the draft Bill was

established in February 2019 and published their report on 20 May 2019. The report was supportive of the Bill and its intentions, concluding that it is “timely, worthwhile, and, in large part, well drafted”. The Government welcome the Committee’s report and thank the Committee’s Chair and members for their detailed scrutiny of the draft Bill. The scrutiny process has been valuable and the Government have accepted a number of the Committee’s recommendations and will be giving serious consideration to others to ensure that the legislation is as effective as possible in tackling the use of UK property for money laundering purposes by improving the transparency of property ownership.

A copy of this Government response will be laid before both Houses.

[HCWS1737]

TREASURY

Senior Managers and Certification Scheme: Extension to Financial Conduct

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): Today the Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/1136 C. 35) are published.

In my Written Ministerial Statement of 3 July 2018 [HCWS823] I announced that the senior managers and certification regime would come into force for financial services firms regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority only—also known as solo-regulated firms—from 9 December 2019. I would like to update the House that, in these regulations, there will be two exceptions to the commencement date, for newer categories of solo regulated firms.

The first are benchmark administrators. This is a new category of authorised firm introduced by the EU benchmark regulation, which came into force on January 1 2018. The benchmark regulations included a transitional period such that these firms have until the end of 2019 to become FCA authorised. The SM&CR will commence for benchmark administrators on 7 December 2020 to allow the FCA to carry out a dedicated consultation for benchmark administrators before making final rules for the sector.

The second are claims management companies (CMCs). The Government have already legislated to bring CMCs within the FCA’s regulation, and applications for authorisation are currently being considered by the FCA. Firms awaiting full authorisation, but previously regulated by the Ministry of Justice will have temporary permission to operate. Not all CMCs will have gained full authorisation by December 9 this year, so the commencement regulations confirm that the SM&CR begins for these firms on December 9 this year, or at the date at which they receive full authorisation if this is later.

[HCWS1743]

Fiscal Risks Report 2019

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

In accordance with the charter for budget responsibility, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has today published its second fiscal risks report (FRR). The OBR published its first FRR in 2017, which the Government responded to in 2018 through the managing fiscal risks report (MFR). FRR 2019 fulfils the OBR's legal obligation to publish a statement setting out the main risks to the public finances at least once every two years. The report features an updated risk assessment of the original issues the OBR raised in FRR 2017, in addition to highlighting new risks to the public finances. It was laid before Parliament earlier today and copies are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

The UK is one of the few countries in the world to publish a standalone report on fiscal risks and the FRR is the only such report to be published by an independent agency rather than the Government itself. The UK is a world leader in fiscal risk disclosure and management and is determined to set the global standard not only for the disclosure of fiscal risks but also for the active management of those risks. The IMF's 2018 article IV consultation noted that "The UK continues to set international standards with respect to fiscal transparency". This report keeps the UK at the frontier of fiscal management internationally and demonstrates the Government's commitment to fiscal transparency and accountability. The publication of FRR 2019 further strengthens the cycle of accountability that the first report started. As required under the charter for budget responsibility the Government will respond formally to the FRR 2019 within the next year.

The Government have helped to build a stronger, fairer economy—dealing with the deficit, helping people into work, and cutting taxes for people, families, and businesses. The economy has grown continuously for the past nine years, the employment level is currently at a record high, unemployment is currently at its lowest rate and level since 1975, inflation is at the Bank of England's target and real wages are rising. We are tackling the productivity challenge head on because it is the only way to sustainably improve living standards in the long term.

The Government have also made substantial progress in improving the health of the public finances since 2010, which have now reached a turning point. The deficit has been reduced by more than four fifths and debt has begun its first sustained fall in a generation. At the spring statement 2019, the OBR confirmed that the Government are forecast to meet both of the interim fiscal rules early, with the structural deficit now below 2% and debt falling in every year of the forecast. The Government have achieved this through a balanced approach to fiscal policy; continuing to reduce debt, while also supporting vital public services, keeping taxes low and investing in Britain's future.

Within this balanced approach, the Government took the decision to make the NHS the number one spending priority, committing to an historic settlement that provides a cash increase of £33.9 billion a year by 2023-24. This record level of additional funding for our public services has been delivered within a responsible fiscal framework,

and has been accompanied by a clear and credible NHS long-term plan, which includes measures to put the NHS back onto a sustainable financial path.

Furthermore, the Government have taken concrete action to reduce a number of risks, which the OBR has acknowledged in FRR 2019. This includes better management of new contingent liabilities, reducing the issuance of index linked gilts and improvements in the management and reporting of legal risks in the welfare system. The Government have also made significant improvements in monitoring and transparency of their fiscal risks, including introducing stricter disclosure requirements for asset sales and revised budgetary treatment for financial transactions.

While the Government have acted, many of the risks discussed by the OBR in its first report remain. In the medium term, the largest potential risks come from the macroeconomy and financial sector in the form of financial crises and major economic downturns. The OBR has also modelled the fiscal implications of the UK leaving the EU without a deal in its fiscal stress test. The stress test is based on the IMF's less disruptive no-deal scenario. The OBR notes this scenario is not necessarily the most likely outcome and it is relatively benign compared to other possible scenarios (for example, assuming limited short-term border disruptions). The OBR reports that this scenario would add around £30 billion a year to borrowing from 2020-21 onwards and around 12% of GDP to net debt by 2023-24, compared with the OBR's March forecast baseline.

In the long term, the most significant fiscal risks come from structural economic and societal trends such as lower productivity growth, higher interest rates, changes in consumption and working practice, demographic pressures and technological change. Additionally, the report highlights new risks—such as climate change and the costs associated with measures designed to adapt and mitigate the effects. The risks the OBR has highlighted further reinforce the need for prudent management of the public finances and the reduction of debt to more sustainable levels.

[HCWS1749]

DEFENCE

Overseas Detainees: Detention and Interviewing

The Secretary of State for Defence (Penny Mordaunt):

On 20 May 2019, in response to an urgent question, I made a statement to Parliament on Ministry of Defence internal policy with regard to the receipt and sharing of intelligence related to detainees overseas. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), is updating the House today. Sir Adrian Fulford, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, has now finalised his review of the consolidated guidance and has recommended its replacement with a new document: "The Principles relating to the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees", a draft of which was provided to the Government on 12 June 2019. The Ministry of Defence, along with other Government

Departments, has considered these principles, accepts them in full, and has begun work to update its internal guidance accordingly. The principles and revised supporting internal guidance will be fully implemented by the end of the year.

[HCWS1746]

Defence Fire and Rescue Project

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): My right hon. Friend the Minister of State in the House of Lords (Earl Howe) has made the following written ministerial statement.

I am announcing the outcome of the Defence fire and rescue project which has been examining potential improvements in how fire and rescue services are provided to the Ministry of Defence, both in the United Kingdom and overseas.

In June 2018, I announced the Ministry of Defence's intention to award the Defence fire and rescue project contract to Capita Business Services Limited and I can today confirm this to be the case. Following a competitive bidding process Capita's bid was deemed to deliver the best technical solution and the best value for money for Defence. The 12-year contract is worth £525 million and will mark a step change in capability for Defence's fire and rescue capability.

The project will deliver a range of benefits whilst sustaining our worldwide fire and rescue capability. These benefits include improved safety for firefighter personnel and those they protect as well as fire risk management for the Department. This will be achieved through the investment in new equipment, technology and training which the contract will enable to happen faster than it otherwise would. In addition, we expect the contract to deliver significant financial savings over the course of its lifespan; money which can be reinvested into other areas of the Defence budget.

I can assure Parliament that these proposed contractual arrangements with Capita have been subject to thorough scrutiny and due diligence processes conducted across Government, including in the Ministry of Defence, Cabinet Office and HM Treasury. These assurance processes included the financial sustainability of Capita and tested their technical expertise to deliver the contract in a sustainable and resilient manner. Safeguards are in place to ensure there is no break in service provision. Capita have experience in delivering fire and rescue service provision as they already operate the internationally recognised Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh.

Initially, around 560 MOD civil servants, mainly firefighting personnel, are expected to transfer under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations to Capita as the contract is implemented over the next few years. Fire station managers, their staff and trade union representatives of the civilian workforce have been consulted throughout the project and are being formally told of the contract award today. I would like to pay tribute to the work they have undertaken and will continue to undertake for Defence. The Royal Air Force and Royal Navy will continue to employ firefighters. Over time there will be a reduction in the number of firefighters in the Royal Air Force due to the introduction of new technology and there may be opportunities in the future for some roles becoming sponsored reserves.

I can confirm that existing fire and rescue services provided to the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston, the Defence Science and Technical Laboratory in Porton Down and at US visiting forces bases in the United Kingdom are unaffected by these changes. The Defence Fire Training and Development Centre at Manston will close in due course with training transferred to Capita's existing fire training facility at Moreton-in-Marsh. The award of this contract will enable the Ministry of Defence to vacate large elements

of the Manston site which will be released to support economic development, potentially including housing, in the local area.

This has been a complex procurement with a delay in the award of the contract following a legal challenge from Serco Limited, the other final bidder. We have now mutually agreed an out-of-court settlement of £10 million which provides better value for money for the tax payer than an uncertain and costly court case. I can confirm that the MOD'S accounting officer has commissioned an independent review to ensure we learn from this acquisition process. This will be led by Tony Poulter, a non-executive director at the Department for Transport. The findings of the review will be published after the summer.

[HCWS1758]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Equality and Listed Events

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): I have written today to the BBC, S4C, Ofcom and the International Paralympic Committee in a limited consultation on adding the Paralympic games to the listed events regime. I have also copied the letter to Channel 4 which currently holds the broadcasting rights for the next Paralympic games in Tokyo 2020, to other eligible free-to-air broadcasters, and to the Sport and Recreation Alliance.

The Broadcasting Act 1996 gives the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport discretion to designate sporting and other events of national interest as listed events. Once listed, broadcasting rights to such events must be offered to the main free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters ("qualifying broadcasters") on fair and reasonable terms. Qualifying broadcasters are those which reach 95% coverage of UK viewers and at no additional cost to the viewer than the television licence fee. Broadcasters currently meeting these criteria are BBC1, BBC2, ITV1 and Channel 4.

The current list, compiled in 1998, consists of two categories of events:

Group A, in which full live coverage must be offered to the qualifying broadcasters; and

Group B, in which live coverage may be broadcast on subscription television as long as secondary coverage is offered to qualifying broadcasters.

Under section 97 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the Secretary of State is able to amend the list providing that they have consulted with the statutory consultees. In my letter I have asked consultees to consider the following:

whether, based on the guidance and criteria given, the Paralympic games should be added to the list;

whether the Paralympic games should be listed under group A or group B of the list;

other factors affecting the likely costs and benefits to the sport concerned, to the broadcasting industry and to viewers, as set out in the guidance on the criteria for listing; and

any other factors relevant to the final decision.

While the Government do not wish to reopen the list of events for a full review, we are committed to supporting more equality in the coverage of sport on TV, and in particular, disability and women in sport. It is for this

reason that I am considering whether to exercise discretion to add the Paralympics to the list, and that I intend on holding a consultation later this year on adding women's sporting equivalent events to the regime that match the men's events.

I will inform the House of the outcome once I have discussed fully with statutory consultees.

[HCWS1751]

Telecommunications, Radio Spectrum and Postal Services: Statement of Priorities

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): I am today laying before Parliament the Government's draft statement of strategic priorities for telecommunications, the management of radio spectrum, and postal services.

The statement sets out the Government's strategic priorities and desired outcomes in a number of areas, including gigabit capable broadband deployment, 5G, spectrum management, the security and resilience of telecoms infrastructure, and furthering the interests of telecoms consumers.

The statement follows a statutory consultation that ran between 15 February and 27 March 2019. This elicited a number of responses from a large and diverse range of respondents, including industry, consumer bodies, local councils, and bodies representing rural interests. This has given the Government a wide variety of views to reflect upon. I would like to thank all respondents for taking the time and effort to respond.

I intend to designate the statement for the purposes of section 2A of the Communications Act 2003 after the end of the statutory "40-day period" (as defined in section 2C of the Act), unless either House of Parliament resolves not to approve it within that period.

[HCWS1748]

Ofcom Provision of Information Regulations

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): I would like to update the House on Ofcom's statutory duty to share information with the Government at least 24 hours before publication, introduced under section 24A of the Communications Act 2003, inserted by the Digital Economy Act 2017. This early access to information from Ofcom is important in supporting the Government's wider policy responsibilities in safeguarding and improving the delivery of essential communications services on which consumers rely.

To commence the duty I must specify by regulations what categories of information will be exempt from this duty, following consultation with Ofcom. Our consultation with Ofcom has now concluded and I can inform the House of our intention to proceed with the implementation of the duty via a negative statutory instrument later in the autumn.

The categories of information to be listed as exempt in these regulations include broadcasting content standards and broadcasting licensing enforcement. This is to ensure that there can be no accusations or perceptions that the Government have had inappropriate prior knowledge

or been involved in these functions. Corporate functions will also be excluded. Other types of information Ofcom proposes to publish, which fall outside of the above exemption regulations, will need to be shared with the Government at least 24 hours before publication by Ofcom once the duty comes into force, unless there are exceptional circumstances or prior agreement is reached.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) will be agreed between Ofcom, DCMS and BEIS, setting out processes to be followed for the provision of information by Ofcom. This MoU will provide the necessary assurances around who will have access to this information and when, as well as reinforcing the strong procedures Government Departments already have in place to handle sensitive information. Furthermore, additional arrangements for highly market sensitive information will see that such information only has to be shared once UK markets have closed (which may be less than 24 hours before publication), to provide necessary assurances to the companies Ofcom regulates.

The Government remain fully committed to Ofcom's independence. This duty to provide information will not influence Ofcom's investigations or decision making. Safeguards in the legislation legally prohibit representations being made to Ofcom before publication and also restricts with whom Ministers, and officials acting on their behalf, can share information before publication. For transparency, the consultation correspondence between DCMS and Ofcom will be published on gov.uk.

[HCWS1750]

EDUCATION

National Retraining Scheme

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): The world of work is transforming. In particular, automation is a key opportunity for the economy, creating new jobs and raising wages, but it could also bring significant changes to the economy. This means it is critical that we develop a national retraining scheme that helps prepare citizens for future changes to the economy, including those brought about by automation, and supports them to retrain into better jobs.

That is why we are developing the national retraining scheme through a unique partnership between the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and Government, which will keep the voices of workers and businesses at the heart of the service.

The scheme will initially focus on employed adults aged 24 and over, without a qualification at degree level and earning below a certain wage threshold that we are testing to focus on those earning low to medium wages. We are investing in this group of people first as they have comparatively less access to existing Government support and are most in need of adapting their skills to take advantage of the opportunities the future changes to the economy will bring.

A key feature of the development of the scheme has been to start small, test, evaluate and scale up. We are putting the needs of individuals and employers at the heart of the development of the scheme, conducting

extensive user research to understand what they need from a national retraining scheme. We are also conducting a range of pilots investigating innovative approaches to overcoming barriers to training that adults face.

Today, I am pleased to announce the release of the first part of the national retraining scheme, “Get help to retrain”, to a small number of eligible adults in the Liverpool city region. This digital service will help adults to understand their existing skills, explore alternative roles or occupations and find relevant training to unlock opportunities for a broad range of good jobs that could be within their reach. “Get help to retrain” will be rapidly expanded to more people and more areas throughout the testing phase before being made available to all eligible adults in England in 2020.

This is the first of a series of products that will make up the complete national retraining scheme and marks the first step of an adult’s journey towards gaining the skills needed to secure a better job.

[HCWS1736]

Student Loans Company

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore): I am announcing that the tailored review of the Student Loans Company has been published today.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) is a non-profit making Government-owned organisation, which pays loans and grants to students, universities and colleges in the UK.

The principal aim of tailored reviews, which are carried out according to Cabinet Office guidance, is to ensure that public bodies remain fit for purpose, well governed and properly accountable for what they do. The full report can be read on gov.uk.

This review involved consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including SLC staff, the Department of Education, the devolved administrations, UKGI and HMRC.

The review found that the SLC is functioning relatively well, meeting the majority of its performance targets even with significant operational growth. However, it is facing some significant operational challenges, particularly from outdated legacy IT systems, a workforce experiencing high turnover and a complex policy commissioning cycle.

The SLC’s own transformation programme seeks to address some of the issues and the tailored review provides additional and complementary recommendations.

The Department for Education is committed to working with the SLC and other stakeholders to develop and implement an action plan to take forward all 39 recommendations.

Copies of the review will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS1753]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Council June 2019

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I attended the EU Environment Council on 26 June in Luxembourg.

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

Adoption of Council conclusions on a sustainable EU chemicals policy

The presidency invited member states to adopt its conclusions on the development of a “non-toxic environment strategy”, and to take action on other commitments made in the seventh environmental action programme (EAP) and other previous texts, which have yet to be fulfilled.

Member states’ interventions focused on the need to improve the safe management of chemicals, and ensuring the chemicals sector continues to adhere to EU standards, especially with regards to human health and the environment. Therefore, all were in agreement that the “non-toxic environment strategy” should be published before the end of the seventh EAP in 2020. The majority of member states also made it clear that they supported the need to ensure the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) was provided with sustainable and appropriate funding to allow it to continue to be the centre of knowledge on the sustainable management of chemicals, for the benefit of citizens and the environment.

I intervened to support the Council conclusions and to welcome an EU-wide chemical strategy. This was an important opportunity to reinforce our shared ambition for high environmental standards and continued improvement in the safe management of chemicals. I therefore highlighted our willingness to continue to collaborate with member states and the Commission, as well as other international partners, once we have left the EU, fully supporting calls to act on those commitments made in the seventh EAP. I also welcomed the gathering of data to better inform future decisions and to promote a risk-based approach to regulation, highlighting the need to minimise the impact on animals to achieve this aim.

Regulation on water reuse - general approach

The presidency invited member states to agree the proposed general approach on the regulation on water reuse.

The UK, along with a number of other member states, supported the compromise text provided by the presidency and its intention to promote waste water reuse across the EU for agricultural irrigation, within the context of future water scarcity and the circular economy. I made clear that harmonised rules could generate increased interest in reuse and stated that as drafted, the regulation offered a good degree of health and environmental protection. I also offered the forthcoming Finnish presidency our support in the trilogue discussions to follow between the European Parliament, European Commission and European Council.

The presidency concluded the general approach had been agreed, although two member states (Germany and Slovakia) abstained. The Finnish presidency has stated that it would like to begin trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament in October.

Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) - exchange of views

The Council exchanged views on the 2019 EIR report and the actions needed to ensure better implementation of EU environment policies and legislation.

The member states who intervened broadly welcomed the approach to the second cycle of the EIR, but agreed that additional work was required to identify workable solutions for closing environmental implementation gaps and addressing the root cause of poor implementation.

I took the opportunity to intervene, acknowledging the findings of the 2019 EIR and highlighting some of the additional actions we have taken since the publication of the report. This included the recent announcement of the designation of a further 41 marine conservation zones; the publication of our clean air strategy for England, which was commended by the World Health Organisation; and the forthcoming Environment Bill, which builds on the ambitions set out in our 25-year environment plan for England.

AOB items

The following items were also discussed under any other business.

Clean planet for all (information from the presidency)

Council noted the information from the presidency regarding the Council debates held on the EU's long-term climate strategy, "Clean Planet for all: strategic long-term vision for a climate neutral economy". The Commission intervened to speak about the EU's position ahead of the United Nations climate action summit in September, and its assessment that the EU will overachieve its current 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target. Several member states intervened with their reflections on the discussion on climate at the European Council on 20-21 June, and to comment on the timescales for securing agreement of the EU strategy by 2020. I intervened to note the Government's legislation for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the Welsh Government's announcement of their intention to legislate next year for a 95% reduction by 2050, and the Scottish Government's amendment to their draft legislation to achieve a 2045 net zero target. I confirmed that the UK supported the EU target of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, while also recognising the need for a just transition.

Draft integrated national energy and climate plans (presentation from the Commission)

Council noted the presentation from the Commission concerning the draft national energy and climate plans (NECPs). The Commission stated that they viewed these first drafts as positive overall, though there were areas for improvement.

Regulation on the monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of CO₂ emissions for shipping (information from the presidency)

Council noted the information from the presidency concerning the regulation on the monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of carbon dioxide emissions for shipping. Three member states intervened to raise the importance of aligning the EU MRV regulation with international reporting requirements.

Carbon pricing and aviation taxes (information from the Netherlands delegation)

Council noted the information from the Netherlands delegation on their conference on carbon pricing and aviation taxes, held on 20-21 June in the Hague. The member states which intervened on this AOB stated their support for the Netherlands' initiative.

Future Environment action programme (information from the Austrian delegation)

Council noted the information from the Austrian delegation on the workshop held in Hainburg on 11 and 12 June. All member states who intervened emphasised their support for an eighth EAP.

Clean mobility and electromobility (information from the Bulgarian delegation)

Council noted the information from the Bulgarian delegation about possible measures to support clean mobility and, in particular, electromobility. Those member states who intervened, whilst supporting the need to look at options to address the rising carbon dioxide levels in Europe and the on-going problems around air quality, highlighted the challenges associated with electric vehicles and the uneven charging infrastructure across Europe.

Recent international meetings-triple COP; UNEA (information from the presidency)

Council noted the information from the presidency with limited interventions.

G7 environment Ministers meeting (information from the French delegation)

Council noted the information from the French delegation with limited interventions.

LIFE regulation (information from the presidency)

Council noted the information from the presidency with limited interventions.

Update on priorities from Finland on their upcoming presidency

Council noted the information from the Finnish delegation with limited interventions.

Additional engagement

In the margins of the Council, I met with a number of my counterparts from member states to discuss on global environmental issues including our legislation for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and the UK's bid to host the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP-26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in partnership with Italy under a UK presidency.

[HCWS1742]

Global Resource Initiative Taskforce

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): In the 25-year environment plan, the Government committed to establishing the global resource initiative (GRI) to identify actions across supply chains that will improve the sustainability of products and reduce deforestation and other environmental degradation.

The GRI taskforce will put forward recommendations for how key sectors and stakeholders can best achieve the transformative change necessary to realise the GRI ambition on sustainable supply chains. Palm oil and

cocoa are key commodities for which viable measures of sustainability already exist. The taskforce will look at a wider range of key commodities and supply chain measures.

The GRI taskforce is meeting for the first time today and will be chaired by Sir Ian Cheshire. Sir Ian will be joined by business and environmental leaders from organisations including Legal and General, McDonald's, Cargill, Tesco, the Green Finance Institute, WWF and NGO Forest Coalition.

The GRI presents an opportunity to transform the UK's approach to sustainable land use and support international commitments on climate and biodiversity, and the sustainable development goals. It can create a model for change that inspires other countries and galvanises wider international action on nature and climate change. The Government anticipate a report in 2020 which can help shape global policies due to be agreed during 2020 and 2021.

[HCWS1739]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council July 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 18 July 2019 to represent the UK. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member state and continue to act in good faith.

The provisional agenda includes:

Multianual financial framework 2021-27

The Finnish presidency will present its plan for approaching the next phase of negotiations on the multianual financial framework (MFF). The intention is for member states to reach an agreement on the negotiations by the end of the year.

Presentation of the priorities of the Finnish presidency

Finland took up the EU presidency from 1 July and will hold it until 31 December. The presidency will deliver a presentation on its priorities which include: strengthening common values and the rule of law; making the EU more competitive and socially inclusive; strengthening the EU's position as a global leader in climate action; and protecting the security of citizens comprehensively.

Implementation of the strategic agenda 2019-24

Ministers will discuss the implementation of the new EU strategic agenda 2019-24. The strategic agenda sets the overarching priorities for the next institutional cycle and it was adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019. The priority areas are: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing the EU's economic base: the European model for the future; building a climate-neutral green, fair and inclusive future; and promoting Europe's interests and values in the world.

Commission communication on further strengthening the rule of law

The Commission will present its new communication on further strengthening the rule of law in the EU.

Rule of law in Poland / article 7 (1) TEU reasoned proposal

The Commission will provide a further update on the rule of law in Poland. This follows the recent judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on Poland's Supreme Court law.

[HCWS1747]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Council Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Morrison):

Copies of the British Council's annual report and accounts for the 2018-19 financial year have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities and it makes a significant contribution to projecting British values overseas and generating soft power for the UK in return. In doing so it makes a lasting difference to the UK's security, prosperity and influence. The British Council is the world's leading cultural relations organisation, with a reach in 2018-19 of 791 million people. This included 80 million direct interactions, through a presence in over 100 countries.

The Council received £184 million grant-in-aid from the FCO in 2018-19, which included additional funding to support its work in Europe.

The report can also be found at the British Council's website: www.britishcouncil.org

[HCWS1740]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Human Medicines Regulations 2012 Advisory Bodies Annual Report 2019

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Lords), my right hon. Friend Baroness Blackwood has made the following written statement:

I have received the annual report of the human medicines regulations advisory bodies for 2018, which has been laid before Parliament today in accordance with the requirements of part 2 regulation 12 (4) of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012.

I am glad to acknowledge the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the human medicines regulations advisory bodies and thank them for the time and effort dedicated in the public interest to this important work.

[HCWS1752]

Regulation of Physician Associates and Anaesthesia Associates

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): Today I am pleased to announce that we have asked the General Medical Council (GMC) to regulate physician associates (PAs) and anaesthesia associates (AAs) across the UK.

On 7 February 2019 the Government published their response to the consultation on the regulation of medical associate professions in the UK.

The response confirmed the decision announced on 12 October 2018 by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to introduce statutory regulation for

physician associates (PAs) and anaesthesia associates (AAs) (formerly known as physicians' assistants (anaesthesia)).

However, we set out that further work was required to decide which regulator would take forward regulation of these roles.

Following the completion of this work, we believe that the GMC is best placed to regulate PAs and AAs. Regulation will enable these groups to work to their full potential and provide the very best care to patients as part of a multidisciplinary clinical team, contributing to the development of a safe and flexible workforce. This is an important step towards meeting workforce commitments in each of the four countries including the interim NHS people plan in England.

The UK and devolved Governments will now work together alongside stakeholders to develop and then consult on draft legislation.

[HCWS1741]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Disclosure and Barring Service Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I am today publishing the annual report of the Disclosure and Barring Service (HC 2539). Copies of the report have been laid before the House and will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS1755]

Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2017-18

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): The 2017-18 annual report and accounts for the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (HC 2486) is being laid before the House today and published on www.gov.uk. Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS1745]

Security Industry Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The 2018-19 annual report and accounts for the Security Industry Authority (HC 2540) is being laid before the House today and published on www.gov.uk. Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS1754]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety: ACM Cladding

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): I wish to update the House before the summer recess on building safety, including: my expectations of building owners on the removal of unsafe aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding; the steps this Government are taking on the remediation of existing buildings; wider updates on

testing programmes; and early action on delivering the recommendations to reform the building safety regulatory system.

My priority is that residents should be safe—and feel safe—in their homes. All buildings with ACM cladding have had interim safety measures put in place as soon as they have been identified, and fire and rescue services are conducting inspections to ensure those measures remain in place.

However, too many people have been living in fear for too long because of the slow progress being made by those responsible for making their buildings permanently safe. While many building owners have rightly taken action, there are still a number of residential buildings across the public and private sectors with unsafe ACM cladding where remediation has not yet started.

I am clear that this situation is unacceptable. That is why I want to set out my expectations on the timing of remediation of buildings with unsafe ACM cladding. Given the £600 million of funding this Government have made available, there is no further excuse for delay.

In the social sector, other than a small handful of exceptional cases, remediation will be completed by the end of the year.

In the private sector, progress has been slower, which is why this Government took action by announcing a £200 million fund. By the end of December 2019, any building in the private sector which I have not been assured is permanently safe should have a clear commitment to remediation, with a start and finish date agreed. Where no such safety assurance or plan has been brought forward by the end of December, building owners can expect enforcement action to be taken. My expectation is that, other than in exceptional circumstances, building owners should complete remediation within six months of agreeing a plan, by June 2020.

I acknowledge that this Government also have a role to play in ensuring that remediation is undertaken. That is why, on 9 May I announced that this Government were introducing a new £200 million fund to unblock progress in remediating private sector high-rise residential buildings. My Department has been in contact with relevant building owners or managers to enable them to start preparatory work on an application to the fund. My Department will today publish a prospectus setting out the scope and eligibility criteria for the fund, how to apply and the timetable for submitting applications.

To help facilitate remediation, I would like to clarify the planning treatment of ACM cladding replacement works. Planning permission may not be required where the external appearance of a building is not materially altered by replacement cladding. Approval for recladding is only needed if the work amounts to “development” within the meaning of section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or is required within the terms of a previous planning permission.

Local planning authorities should take a proportionate approach and work proactively with building owners to identify whether planning approval is necessary. I strongly encourage developers to engage with the local planning authority at the earliest opportunity during development of their remediation plans.

Where a planning application is considered necessary, pre-application engagement can help to resolve any issues and assist local planning authorities in issuing

timely decisions. Local planning authorities should also take a proportionate approach to the amount of information needed to support an application and consider carefully whether charging a fee for their early advice is appropriate in these cases. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible and can be made as soon as the time limit for consultation has expired. Building owners would also need to ensure that the work complies with building regulations and that they obtain the necessary approval.

My Department has also commenced a data collection exercise which will enable the Department to build a complete picture of external wall systems in use on high rise residential buildings. We have asked local authorities and housing associations to identify external wall materials and insulation on all high-rise residential buildings 18 metres and over.

On 11 July a fire test in accordance with British standard 8414 was carried out at the laboratories of the fire protection association. This test was commissioned by my Department on the advice of the independent expert advisory panel and involved a cladding system consisting of a class B, fire retardant, high pressure laminate rain-screen with a non-combustible rock fibre insulation. This is part of an ongoing, systematic investigation into the fire risks from non-ACM cladding systems. I can confirm that this system met the relevant pass criteria and that the expert panel are satisfied that this specific system does not present a risk to public safety. Detailed advice from the expert panel on high pressure laminate cladding systems is also being published by my Department today.

My Department has also continued its investigations into fire doors. We have already made available the results of a sample of glass-reinforced plastic composite fire doors tested by my Department. Following the advice of the expert panel, Government expanded the testing to include timber fire doors. Today I am making available the results from the testing of a sample of timber fire doors from 25 manufacturers. I am pleased to report that all have succeeded in meeting the required 30-minute fire performance standard. The sample included a range of glazed and un-glazed fire doors with a variety of hardware and were tested on both sides of the door. The summary results of the timber fire door tests to inform building risk assessments are now available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fire-door-investigation>

As a result of our tests, the expert panel have concluded that they do not believe there is a performance concern with timber fire doors across industry, where they are purchased directly from the manufacturer and produced to specification.

It is important to be clear that, although the results of our testing provide assurances for residents who have concerns about their fire doors, it is for building owners to assure themselves that the fire doors they install are fit for purpose and have the required documentation and certification. Guidance for building owners who are replacing flat front entrance doors can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-for-building-owners-on-assurance-and-replacing-of-flat-entrance-fire-doors>

Since 2007, building regulations guidance has stated that all new blocks of flats over 30 metres should have sprinklers. In 2013, the Department wrote to all local authorities and housing associations, asking them to

consider a coroner's report recommendation that they should consider retro-fitting sprinklers in existing residential buildings over 30 metres.

The housing revenue account borrowing cap was abolished on 29 October 2018, giving freedom to local authorities to help finance unforeseen capital repairs programmes, such as retro fitting sprinklers, as well as build new homes. It is for building owners to seek professional advice and decide whether to fit sprinklers, on the basis of their assessment of the particular risk faced in their buildings.

At the heart of the regulatory reform is our intention to establish a regulator to oversee the safety and performance of all buildings. We are working closely with the health and safety executive (HSE), who are sharing their considerable regulatory experience and expertise to help us shape the functions of the new regulator, alongside other members of our joint regulators group. My Department is working with partners to develop proposals to allow the regulatory functions to exist prior to the new legislative regime being in place. We are similarly seeking the advice and input of the HSE on implementing the new regime following legislation.

[HCWS1757]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ebola Outbreak: UK Response

The Secretary of State for International Development (Rory Stewart): It is nearly a year since the declaration of the tenth Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This is the second largest Ebola outbreak and the first in a conflict zone. The risks remain very high. And we need—as an international community—to keep a relentless focus on these issues: addressing failings in public health systems, controlling cross-border transmission, working with communities, and getting the basics right on surveillance, tracing, vaccination and treatment.

Since my oral statement to the House on 20 May, the number of cases has continued to grow and despite successes in some areas, new geographic areas have been affected—including Goma in the DRC and across the border in Uganda. Yesterday the World Health Organisation declared this outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. This declaration is highly significant and will bring more focus and instruments to bear on the crisis. The UK has been a major donor since the start. This week we have announced up to an additional £50 million of support to combat the outbreak in the DRC. We have also been pushing hard at meetings of the G7 development ministers, WHO and at the UN for more support from other countries.

The affected part of the DRC has suffered from decades of conflict and under-development, is an opposition stronghold, and there is a deep mistrust of national and international institutions. Despite the best efforts of front-line health workers, the response has struggled to gain trust, and responders have been the direct target of multiple attacks. The outbreak has spread to new health zones in the current two provinces, and several areas that were previously under control are now seeing new

cases again. As of 14 July, there have been 2,501 cases, of which 2,407 are confirmed and 94 are probable. In total, there have been 1,668 deaths (1,574 confirmed and 94 probable) and 700 people have recovered. This is the most complex public health emergency in recent history.

For the first time in this outbreak, three cases were confirmed in Uganda in June. This represents the sixth outbreak Uganda has had since 2000. Uganda's Ministry of Health, with good support from the DRC and significant assistance on preparedness from the UK, reacted swiftly to this long-anticipated outbreak. While Uganda deserves praise for containing these cases, there is no room for complacency, particularly in addressing resources for health facilities where public health systems are weak.

A record number of health zones have now been affected in the DRC. The city of Goma, on the border with Rwanda, has in the last week confirmed its first case. The confirmed case in Goma is a significant development and may increase the risk of further transmission to other areas of the DRC and neighbouring countries. Goma is a significant regional trading and transport hub and we are therefore closely monitoring the situation. We are also asking the WHO to increase its focus on preparedness in the region, particularly in South Sudan and Burundi.

I am thankful for the prompt response by staff at the Ebola treatment centre in Goma, which I visited on my recent trip to the DRC. However, it was clear during my time there that some measures, such as temperature checks at the hospital entrance, are not consistently applied and could be improved. I also visited the Ebola treatment centre in Katwa that has been rebuilt after being burned down in February. This centre seemed to have a good focus on basic procedures and to be making good use of the latest technology, including transparent cubes which allow doctors and families to interact with patients without wearing full protective gear.

I want to once again commend the bravery of the Congolese and international frontline responders who are working incredibly hard to end this outbreak. But they must have adequate support. To ensure a successful response, the UK is committed to supporting the response financially, but also through sending UK-funded experts to the region, including data analysts, response co-ordinators and managers.

The WHO and the UN office for the co-ordination of humanitarian affairs (OCHA) convened a meeting in Geneva on 15 July to focus attention and signal a reset of the response. I was privileged to be able to represent the UK at that meeting, which was timely, as a new strategic response plan (SRP4) covering the next six months of the response will shortly be published.

In Geneva I made clear the UK's ongoing support to the Government of the DRC and the region more broadly, with a new commitment of up to £50 million for the response in the DRC. So far, UK aid has provided technical experts to eastern DRC, including senior epidemiologists, data scientists and a clinical trials specialist, and previously funded the development of a vaccine, which has helped to contain the outbreak. More than 160,000 doses have been administered to at-risk people in the DRC and neighbouring countries. The vaccine has proved to be over 97% effective and is a vital part of the response in this fragile and complex environment. However, vaccination alone will not end

this outbreak, and stronger community ownership is essential. We need to build trust in the response. To end this outbreak people with symptoms of Ebola need to come forward and seek treatment. Effective isolation and treatment will improve their chance of survival and allow the response to follow up quickly and vaccinate those who they have been in contact with.

I also made clear in Geneva that we expect other countries to play a bigger role in the response as a matter of urgency. They need to step up their efforts and funding. The US and UK are the two biggest bilateral donors to the response and although other countries have given some financial support, more is needed. Other countries, particularly francophone countries, which have a presence and history in the region, must support the response with funding, technical expertise and political support.

The UK will also continue to play a leading role in regional preparedness—where we are the largest donor. Events in Uganda demonstrate the value of investing in preparedness activities and health systems strengthening; quick action saves both lives and costs in the long term. Again, other countries should step up their support to avoid a crisis that destabilises the wider region.

The risk of Ebola to the UK population remains very low. Public Health England continues to monitor the situation daily and review the risk assessment on a two-weekly basis. The UK Government continue to work across all Departments to ensure all relevant expertise is brought to bear on tackling this important issue.

[HCWS1756]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Prime Minister's Trade Envoys

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Prime Minister has today approved two new appointments to the trade envoy programme. The hon Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has been appointed as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Israel, and Lord Risby as Prime Minister's trade envoy to Lebanon (this is in addition to his current role as PM's trade envoy to Algeria). These new appointments take the total number of trade envoys to 27 parliamentarians covering 58 markets. The Prime Minister's trade envoy programme is an unpaid and voluntary cross-party network, which supports the UK's ambitious trade and investment agenda in global markets.

[HCWS1760]

Consultation on Future Free Trade Agreements: Summary of Responses

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): Last summer, we launched four 14-week long public consultations providing citizens and businesses across the UK and overseas with the opportunity to give their

views on potential future free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and on the UK potentially seeking accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership (CPTPP).

Today, I will place a summary of responses received for each consultation exercise in the Library of the House. I will also publish these online on gov.uk.

The public consultations attracted significant interest with 601,121 responses received across all four consultations. In view of the need to ensure that due consideration is given to each submission, we will publish the Government response at a later date but before any formal trade negotiations begin, alongside an outline approach which sets out our high-level negotiation objectives and will explain how these have been informed by the consultation responses.

The Government are committed to ensuring a transparent and inclusive trade policy, which supports the interests of consumers and businesses across the whole of the UK. The Government will continue to engage with the public, businesses and other stakeholders in order to understand their views and to help develop UK trade policy.

[HCWS1735]

PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Detainees: Detention and Interviewing

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): The Government are today publishing new guidance titled “The Principles relating to the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees”. This will replace the existing “consolidated guidance” and follows a thorough review by Sir Adrian Fulford, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner.

Following my request last June for him to conduct a review, the Commissioner held a public consultation in the autumn and organised a Chatham House event in December 2018 for academics, practitioners and representatives from non-governmental organisations to discuss how the consolidated guidance could be improved. He has also taken into account the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament’s recommendations in their June 2018 detainee report and those of Sir Mark Waller, the then Intelligence Services Commissioner, in his 2016 report on UK relationships with partner counter-terrorism units overseas.

The Government have accepted the Commissioner’s proposed principles in full. It is being published today on gov.uk and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The new guidance is being extended to include the National Crime Agency and S015 Metropolitan Police Service and will provide clear direction for UK personnel on their interaction with detainees held by others overseas and the handling of intelligence derived from them. The principles will come into effect from 1 January 2020 once the necessary underlying departmental training and guidance is in place. The consolidated guidance will remain in use until then. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner will continue to oversee and report on its application.

The Government are grateful to the Commissioner for undertaking this review. The new principles will ensure that the United Kingdom continues to lead the field internationally in terms of providing guidance to personnel on intelligence sharing in a manner that protects human rights.

Our policy remains clear: the Government do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment for any purpose.

[HCWS1738]

TRANSPORT

Trailer Safety Report

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis): Colleagues across the House will be aware that towing safety is an issue of widespread interest and concern, particularly ahead of the key summer caravanning season. In that context I am pleased to announce to the House the publication of a report into trailer safety. This sets out the Government’s position as required by the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Act 2018.

This country has one of the best road safety records in the world, but every death and injury is a tragedy for the families involved. Ministerial colleagues and Department officials have heard directly from families of those affected by fatal trailer incidents. I pay tribute to all those, including the parents of Freddie Hussey, and of Harry Christian-Allan, who have sought to improve trailer safety following such terrible bereavements. I also pay tribute to Members across the House, such as the hon. Member for Bristol South, who have taken action in this area, such as the recently-convened all-party parliamentary group on trailer and towing safety.

This report has helped consolidate and develop the evidence base related to trailers. It is clear, including from roadside checks by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) undertaken for this report, that many light trailers are used on public roads in a defective state. A focus must be maintained on driving up the safety of these trailers. However, only in a relatively few cases do vehicle defects contribute to serious incidents. Trailer-related incidents share some characteristics with the wider light vehicle fleet, including that human error is a far more prevalent reason for incidents. On the basis of the information set out in this report, the Government is therefore not extending current vehicle testing or registration requirements in relation to trailers.

However, as the report highlights, there is further work in this area which the Government will take forward. There is more information to consider and this report proposes some future steps, including additional trailer checks to be carried out by DVSA. This will build the evidence base further. A number of non-regulatory and other regulatory levers, including previous changes in driving licence entitlements now spreading through the motoring public, will also have an effect.

This report is an important milestone and is not itself an endpoint. I look forward to working together with all parties to ensure that momentum is maintained in this area, and that trailer safety continues to improve.

Attachments can be viewed online at <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-07-18/HCWS1744/>

[HCWS1744]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Response to Opposition Day Debate: Inequality and Social Mobility

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Following the recent Opposition day debate on 12 June, I am setting out the approach this Government are taking to tackling inequality and improving social mobility.

This Government are leading the way in creating opportunity so every person growing up in Britain has the chance to build a bright future for themselves and their families—no matter what their background. Employment has risen in every UK region under this Government, as wages outstrip inflation, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed since 2011 and the proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds in education or apprenticeships is at its highest ever—that is social mobility in action.

Our record on employment is vital to our approach, and one of which we are rightly proud. There are now over 3.6 million more people in work compared with 2010. Unemployment is at its lowest rate since the 1970s having fallen by more than half since 2010. This is not just a London or a south-east success story—over 60% of the employment growth since 2010 has occurred in other parts of the UK. We are working across Government and with businesses to ensure everyone has the chance to gain the skills and high quality jobs they need to compete in a dynamic, global market place.

Around three-quarters of the growth in employment since 2010 has been in full-time work, which we know substantially reduces the risk of poverty. Wages have consistently outpaced inflation for 15 months—in fact they are growing at their fastest rate for a decade. The growth in employment rates has overwhelmingly benefited the poorest 20% of households, and household income inequality is also lower than it was in 2010.

Behind these statistics are people whose mental health and wellbeing are improved by moving into work and having the dignity and security that it brings. There are 930,000 more disabled people in work today compared with five years ago, and 667,000 more children in working households compared with 2010. We know that children in households where all adults work are about five times less likely to be in relative poverty than a child in a household where nobody works.

We also know that children growing up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to fail at all stages of their education. Since 2011 we have narrowed the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers by around 13% at key stage 2, and 9.5% at key stage 4. We are supporting pupils to thrive at every stage, that is why we introduced 15 hours of free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds on top of the 15 hours' free childcare offer for all three and four-year olds.

We are investing in our world-class education system; core funding for schools and high needs has risen from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £43.5 billion this year. We are investing £72 million through our opportunity areas programme in 12 places in the country with weak social mobility and up to £24 million through our Opportunity North East programme, tackling the specific

issues that are holding back young people in the North East. Through both these programmes we will improve educational outcomes for children and young people working in partnership with local partners. We have set a 10-year ambition to boost children's early reading and communication skills. We are transforming technical education with investment of an extra half a billion pounds per year once T-levels are fully rolled out. Disadvantaged 18-year-olds are now entering full-time higher education at record rates, and we are providing coaching for young jobseekers to put them on track to succeed.

Supporting people on low income to progress in work is also key to our success in tackling inequality. Universal credit removes the structural disincentives to move into work and to work more hours that were a part of the legacy benefits it replaces. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has reported that universal credit is likely to help an extra 300,000 members of working families out of poverty, the majority of which include someone who works part-time. We want to build a clearer picture of how and why people progress in work, and what we can do to support them as they do that. We have started discussions with the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry on how we can do this. We are going further with two national pilots on in-work progression; one will train work coaches to help those in work to decide when and how to switch jobs, to achieve that ambitious step up. The other will boost our capability for working with local businesses, by creating jobcentre specialists who encourage local employers to support progression and good-quality flexible working.

Childcare costs can affect parents' decisions to take up paid work, increase their working hours, or remain in paid work. To overcome this barrier to employment we increased the level of support for childcare costs from 70% in legacy benefits, to 85% within universal credit. This is in addition to providing a significant package of childcare support to parents and carers, including our 30 hours offer for working parents of three and four-year-olds which has rolled out successfully, benefiting around 600,000 children in the first two years of delivery and introducing tax-free childcare worth up to £2,000 a year per child.

Our national living wage, which is among the highest in the world, is expected to benefit over 1.7 million people; and, with the increase to £8.21 from April this year, has increased a full-time worker's annual pay by over £2,750 since 2016. We have taken action to reduce income inequality through the tax system too. Our tax changes will make basic rate taxpayers over £1,200 better off from April, compared with 2010. Taken together, the most recent changes mean that a single person on the national living wage has, from April, taken home over £13,700 a year—£4,500 more than in 2009-10.

It is absolutely right that we continue to support those who need it and our welfare safety net remains one of the strongest in the world. This year we will spend over £95 billion on benefits for people of working age; and £52.7 billion to support disabled people and those with health conditions. In total, welfare spending in this financial year will be over £220 billion.

We recognise that there is more to do to tackle poverty; and we have taken action to increase the incomes of the poorest in society. In the last Budget we announced

a £4.5 billion cash boost that will make a huge difference to the lives of working families and provide extra support for people moving onto UC. In particular, we have put an extra £1.7 billion a year into work allowances, increasing the amount that hard-working families can earn before the taper is applied. That is an extra £630 a year for 2.4 million families.

It is vital that we have evidence on the effects of poverty in order to tackle it, and in the run-up to the spending review we will examine what more can be done to address poverty, particularly child poverty, and to support social mobility. We are working with the Social Metrics Commission and other experts in the field to develop new experimental statistics to measure poverty, which will be published in 2020 and, in the long run, could help us to target support more effectively.

The welfare system is not just about providing financial support. The most vulnerable in our society often face complex barriers to employment which can prevent them from moving on with their lives. So we are taking wider action to address barriers specific to different groups and ensure that universal credit works for all those with complex needs.

By supporting care leavers through their difficult transition into adulthood with a series of safeguards and easements, work coaches can have a real impact on a young person's life chances. And around 135 prison work coaches based in resettlement prisons across Great Britain help prisoners gain employment on release, supporting with benefit claims pre-release.

We have a proud record when it comes to supporting victims of domestic abuse. Work search requirements can be suspended for up to six months under universal credit to enable them to stabilise their lives. By the end of the summer, we will have a domestic abuse and homelessness advocate in every jobcentre in England, who can build work coach capability in these areas, and make important links with organisations in the community.

In conclusion, work provides economic independence, pride in having a job and improved wellbeing. Through record employment, investment in early years, education, and other public services, this Government are taking long-term steps to tackle poverty. It is the right approach and the only sustainable one.

[HCWS1734]

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