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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 26 September 2019

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we get under way with today's business, including a number of urgent questions and statements, I just want to say a few words to the House. I think there is a widespread sense across the House and beyond that, yesterday, the House did itself no credit. There was an atmosphere in the Chamber worse than any I have known in my 22 years in the House. On both sides, passions were inflamed, angry words were uttered and the culture was toxic. This country faces the most challenging political issue that we have grappled with in decades. There are genuine, heartfelt, sincerely subscribed to differences of opinion about that matter. Members must be free to express themselves about it and to display, as they unfailingly do, the courage of their convictions. It ought, however, to be possible to disagree agreeably, and I can see Members on both sides of the House who are fine exponents of that principle and tradition. Yesterday, that was not the majority strain, I am sorry to say.

I have, overnight, received an approach from two very senior Members on either side of the House pressing the case for a formal consideration of our political culture going forward. Manifestly, any such formal structure—any such conference, deliberation—would not take place under my aegis. Like everybody else here, I just want what is best for the House. Pending consideration of that approach and the argument for having a sober consideration of the issue of political culture and conduct over an ongoing period, I can advise the House that

there will be an urgent question later today on the matter to which I have just referred, and that will be an opportunity for colleagues to say what they think.

This is something of concern across the House. It is not a party political matter and, certainly as far as I am concerned, it should not be in any way, at any time, to any degree a matter for partisan point scoring. It is about something bigger than an individual, an individual party or an individual political or ideological viewpoint. Let us treat of it on that basis. In the meantime, may I just ask colleagues—that is all I am doing and all I can do as your representative in the Chair—please to lower the decibel level and to try to treat each other as opponents, not as enemies?

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I genuinely am not convinced, but I will take one point of order if the hon. Gentleman insists. I am not sure how helpful it will be, but let us see.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Would it be helpful for the House to know the subjects of the other urgent questions and statements, please?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The first urgent question is from the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on the subject of the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019. The issues will play out, but it is about compliance with the Act. It is a perfectly reasonable question from the hon. Gentleman. The second is from the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on the situation in Hong Kong. The third is from Mr Chris Law on the subject of arms export licences to Saudi Arabia. The fourth urgent question, to which I perhaps slightly elliptically referred, is from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) on the matter of the toxicity of our political culture and the need to take appropriate steps to minimise that toxicity and conduce to a better atmosphere.

The statement from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is on the subject of international climate action at the United Nations climate action summit. There will also be a further business statement, of which we had notice last night, from the Leader of the House. I hope that has satisfied the legitimate inquisitorial appetite of the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley).

Compliance with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019

9.41 am

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): I am happy to have been slightly delayed by an actual point of order. My urgent question is to ask the Prime Minister to make a statement on compliance with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): In the tone that you are setting, Mr Speaker, perhaps I may refer to a Member incorrectly and thank my hon. Friend, because there are many friends across the Chamber. If one reads the newspapers this morning, there is a feeling that we are permanently adversarial and at war with one another. That is not the case. Many of us work together bilaterally in groups and Committees in this House, and most of the time on the Floor of the House we work in a consensual nature.

Turning to this important urgent question, the Government will obey the law. That has always been the case. The House has heard that from the Prime Minister; it has heard it from the First Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary; it has heard it from the Lord Chancellor, who has constitutional responsibility for upholding the rule of law; and yesterday right hon. and hon. Members had the opportunity to put similar questions to the Attorney General.

The Government opposed the Act that was passed earlier this month. Notwithstanding our fervent attempts to resist the passage of the Bill, even its architects must accept that the Act makes provision for a potential range of outcomes, not one outcome. The outcome the Government want—the outcome this Government have always wanted—is a deal with the European Union. That deal can deliver the mandate of the British people. That deal is possible and is now within reach.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, along with the Prime Minister's negotiating team, has been engaged in constructive negotiations. As the Prime Minister told this place yesterday, we were told that Brussels would never reopen the withdrawal agreement, but we are now discussing reopening the withdrawal agreement in detail. While I appreciate that some may seek to anticipate failure, to frustrate from the sidelines or to speculate for some type of sport, this Government will not indulge in defeatism.

I trust that the House, and the collective wisdom of hon. Members, will focus its energies today and beyond on the prospect of success in the negotiations and prepare to give any revised agreement its full and unfettered support.

Ian Murray: In the same tone, I would like to say to my hon. Friend—we have been on many delegations together—that we should treat one another with respect across the House. I would also like to say, in the same spirit as your opening remarks, Mr Speaker, that I stand in front of the shield of Jo Cox and I hope that today this Parliament could have a little bit more respect—not just for one another and Parliament, but for the public as well.

Mr Speaker, thank you for granting this urgent question. The European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act was passed by the House and given Royal Assent by Her Majesty the Queen on Monday 9 September and brought in the names of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). That Act clearly says that the Prime Minister must seek an extension to article 50 to 31 January if the Prime Minister is unable to meet one of the two conditions of either having a withdrawal deal passed by this House, or having an affirmative vote by this House to back no deal.

The Minister said in his opening response that there was a range of options. That is the only range of options in that Bill—to pass a deal, to pass no deal, or subsequently to seek an extension. The Supreme Court decision this week and the statement in this House followed by questioning of the Prime Minister yesterday were a national embarrassment. Under any other political equilibrium, this Prime Minister would have seriously considered his position as Prime Minister, and potentially resigned from it. Many people have lost their jobs in government for a fraction of what this Prime Minister has done over the last two weeks.

Yesterday, the Attorney General, at that Dispatch Box, during the urgent question tabled by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), said clearly, in answer to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), that he would abide by the law of the EU (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019. He said that with uncharacteristic clarity when he said simply, “Yes” in response to that question. Last night, the hon. Members for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) and for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and many others pressed the Prime Minister to make the same commitment. He did not give the same commitment in this House. And under questioning from myself, very late in the sitting last night, when I asked whether he would fully comply with the provisions of the Act, should he not get a deal through this House, or an affirmative vote for no deal, by 19 October, the Prime Minister answered with one word: he answered, “No.”

I have tabled this urgent question, first, to seek clarity; and secondly, to ask the Minister, in all good faith, to tell us, which he has not done yet, what the Prime Minister meant when he said “No,” because frankly, and with reference to my earlier remarks about respect across this House, I am sure that there are very few people in this House, and very few people in this country, given the events of the last few weeks, who trust the words of the Prime Minister, even when said from that Dispatch Box. The Prime Minister used—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister used, in a direct answer to my question, the word “no,” so I have several questions to ask the Minister, and with this new level of respect I hope he is able to answer them directly.

What does the Prime Minister intend to do if he does not get a deal through this House by 19 October or an affirmative vote for no deal? That is question No. 1.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I very gently say to the hon. Gentleman that he must rattle through the remainder of the questions very quickly, without drama? Very quickly—please.

Ian Murray: Question No. 2: do we have to take the Prime Minister to court again to comply with the law? Question No. 3: what message does it send out when the Prime Minister says no to a straight question whether he will comply with the law? Lastly, and most importantly, the Minister said, and the Attorney General said, that the Government will obey the law. What does that mean? Can the Minister just come to the Dispatch Box and say that obeying the law means that the Government will seek an extension to 31 January if the provisions of that Act are not met?

James Duddridge: In politics, we are quite often berated for not giving a straight answer. I thought that the Government's position was very, very clear: we will obey the law. Does the Prime Minister, do this Government, want to extend? No, we do not want to extend. We want a deal. That is our focus.

The hon. Gentleman talks of equilibrium. Well, in a normal equilibrium we would be having a general election, and we would ask the public to decide. That would bring back the equilibrium.

The hon. Gentleman needs to appreciate that the Prime Minister, the Government, and I, as a Minister in the Department for Exiting the European Union, will obey the law, and we will obey the law at every stage and turn of this process.

Mr David Gauke (South West Hertfordshire) (Ind): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Prime Minister has said that he will both obey the law and not seek an extension. Can my hon. Friend point to any legal argument made by any senior lawyer that suggests that if the conditions are not met—in other words, if Parliament has not voted for a deal, or has not approved no deal—the Prime Minister will have any choice? The law is quite clear: he would have to seek an extension.

James Duddridge: I was interested to read this morning that the right hon. Gentleman nearly became Chancellor of the Exchequer. I apologise—I have never been in such illustrious circles, and I am not, like him, a lawyer—but that was a hypothetical question into which I do not really want to be drawn at this stage. However, we will obey the law.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): The Act that was passed three weeks ago is very simple. If by 19 October the Prime Minister has not got a deal through and has not secured the agreement of the House to no deal, he must seek the extension in the terms that are set out in the Act. It is very simple.

It is true that the terms of the letter that the Prime Minister must write were set out in a schedule, as was the duty to accept the extension that the EU agrees. Those were not in the previous version of the Act, which was passed in April, because there was a consensus that the then Prime Minister would comply with the law, understood the rule of law and could be trusted, and it was therefore not necessary to put them in the Act. They are in the Act now because, I am afraid to say—and this is a low point in our history—across the House those assumptions no longer hold, and the answers given by the Prime Minister last night, and his behaviour, make that less likely.

If the Prime Minister genuinely wanted to get a deal through the House, he would not have divided the House in the way that he did yesterday. That is not the behaviour of a man who is trying to unite the House so that it can come together around a deal. The role of the Prime Minister is to unite the country. This Prime Minister is whipping up division, and I have not seen that from any Prime Minister in my lifetime.

There is a very simple, non-hypothetical question, and a precise question. If a deal has not been passed by the House by 19 October and there has been no agreement in the House to no deal, will the Prime Minister comply with the law by asking for the extension, given that that is what the Act requires? Let me make clear that if he does not do so, this will be enforced in the courts, and we will take collective action in the House to do whatever is necessary to make him comply with the law.

James Duddridge: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that we are at a low point. I agree. One of the reasons we are at a low point is that we asked the public for their views, and now Parliament is ignoring their views. We do have a responsibility—the whole Government have a responsibility—to unite, but not necessarily to unite this Parliament. Our responsibility is to unite the country behind the decision that the country has taken.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked me specific questions about 19 October. The Government will obey the law on 18, 19 and 20 October, and will always do so.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The issue of compliance raises a very simple question. I say this to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer): it is by no means certain that the law of the land is reflected in the passing of the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act, because there is an apparent inconsistency between that Act and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. I have no time to go into the details, but the reality is that compliance is not just a simple question. It is a matter of grave importance in terms of which law is the law of the land.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for advancing that argument. I think that the House will be grateful if I take it outside the House and have a detailed discussion with him, rather than detaining the House when it is dealing with urgent questions.

It appears that that was one of my more popular answers.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I wholeheartedly associate myself and those on the Scottish National party Benches with your earlier remarks, Mr Speaker. Hardened political journalists went home last night in tears, and none of us can feel any pride in what happened. I say this from the SNP Benches. I have had words with some of my colleagues, and I hope that those on other Benches have done so as well. No party is entirely innocent, and it does not take us forward in any way if all we do is blame someone else.

I commend the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for asking the urgent question. The identity of the Minister who has been sent to answer it—I say this with respect to the relative juniority of the Minister—and the fact that the Prime Minister has not come to

[Peter Grant]

answer it, perhaps tell us more than the answer itself. I make this offer from the SNP to those on the Government Benches, and I hope they will take it back to the Prime Minister: if he brings back an extension that takes no deal off the table, he can have his general election. However, the Minister might also want to advise the Prime Minister that he should be careful what he wishes for, because his wish might just be granted.

What an extraordinary position we are in, when we have to ask questions in Parliament about whether the Prime Minister will obey the law of the land. Yesterday, he was asked whether, in a specific set of circumstances in which the law required him to take precise action, he would do what the law required. I heard him say no. This is an extraordinary state of affairs. We have not yet had a satisfactory answer on how the Prime Minister thought that that single one-word answer, no, was not an assurance that he would defy the law. He does not want to extend, but if the law says to him “thou shalt extend,” will the Minister confirm that the Prime Minister will obey the law of the land? Will he also confirm that a Prime Minister who shilly-shallies in any way over obeying the law of the land is not fit to be Prime Minister?

James Duddridge: I particularly reflect on the hon. Gentleman’s comment that there are no innocent parties. Every Member of the House has probably overstepped the line at one point or another, and we must certainly all reflect on the words that we use. I can guarantee that there will be no shilly-shallying. The law will be obeyed, and I look forward to discussing that in more detail when I visit the Scottish Parliament next Thursday—this place permitting.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The difficulty we face is that most laws are relatively easy to interpret because they prevent you from doing something rather than making you do something. They prevent you from murdering your wife; they do not make you love your wife. This Act is therefore capable of numerous interpretations, and we are talking about a completely hypothetical situation. For instance, what is a deal? There is one way round this, however. We just need to compromise and agree a deal.

James Duddridge: I am sure that my right hon. Friend’s mastery of some of the technical details will stand him in good stead in his candidacy for your role, Mr Speaker, as and when that comes. He is right to say that the Act is not perfect. Specifically, the Government believe that the Kinnock amendment has deficiencies and that its effect is unclear.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): May I ask the Minister what his interpretation of the law is? If no deal has been agreed by Parliament or if the Prime Minister does not get a deal and Parliament has not voted in favour of no deal, does he think that the law will then require the Prime Minister to write a letter? Yes or no?

James Duddridge: The Government will take legal advice on this and a number of other issues. As the right hon. Lady knows, there is a long-standing constitutional convention that neither the fact nor the content of Law

Officers’ advice is disclosed outside the Government without their consent, and I am not intending to break that convention today.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I am delighted to hear again of the Government’s commitment to getting a deal, which is actually what this House ought to be debating in the coming weeks. Will the Minister tell us a little more precisely how the passage of this Act has made the negotiations and discussions in Brussels more difficult?

James Duddridge: There was a big shift in the negotiations when the Prime Minister met Macron and Merkel, and that has really opened up the dialogue with the Prime Minister’s sherpa, who has been travelling twice, then three times a week, including to meetings at the United Nations General Assembly and several other forums. That activity has potentially slowed as a result of the House of Commons position. What the House of Commons has done makes a deal more difficult, and no deal, which is not what we want, more likely.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): If the Prime Minister fails to secure a deal by 19 October and refuses to send the letter, as he is required to do by law, does he intend to resign or stand down temporarily and let someone else in the Government sign the letter for him?

James Duddridge: The Prime Minister will obey the law.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Ind): The problem with the Minister’s answers is that he obviously needs to leave the Government significant wriggle room because the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has clearly reflected the underlying Government policy, which is that they want to find a way to avoid complying with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019, which this House passed. That does this country a disservice, because it means it will take us till late October before we resolve the question that the Government are clearly raising. Would it not be better for people in Britain if the Government were simply transparent about their views and intentions and we could find a way to resolve that much earlier?

James Duddridge: If I may try to be clearer, the Government want to be transparent, we want a deal and we will use every bit of wriggle room we can find to get that deal.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The House is grateful to the Minister for confirming that the Government will obey the law, but it should not need saying. The fact that the Minister is here today, having to answer these questions is a sign of the anxiety felt on both sides of the House and by many people in the country about the way in which the Government are conducting this matter. The problem is that the Minister’s clear answer is not compatible with the answer that the Prime Minister gave yesterday evening to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray). I want to read the exchange. My hon. Friend asked:

“if he does not get a deal or a no deal through this House by 19 October”—

those are the two conditions to meet that mean that he would not have to write the letter—

“will he seek an extension to 31 January from the European Union?”

The Prime Minister: No.”—[*Official Report*, 25 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 821.]

How on earth can what the Minister has said, in good faith—and I have great respect for him—possibly be reconciled with what the Prime Minister said to the House of Commons last night?

James Duddridge: I was here when the Prime Minister made that statement—

Peter Grant: Why is he not here?

James Duddridge: The hon. Gentleman asks why the Prime Minister is not here today. He was here for three and a quarter hours, answering, I think, more than 125 questions—

Mr Speaker: One hundred and eleven.

James Duddridge: Thank you for rescuing me, Mr Speaker. Your encyclopaedic memory is better than ours.

The Prime Minister does not want an extension. Every sinew of Government is focused on a deal. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members say that that is not the case, but my day is filled with trying to find a deal. That is the right thing for the country, the right thing for Parliament and it is the right thing to do, and we will obey the law at every single point.

Anne Milton (Guildford) (Ind): I associate myself with your remarks at the beginning of the proceedings, Mr Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Minister's insistence that the Government will comply with the law and his repetition of that sounds as if he is dodging something. That is the problem. I am a simple soul, so I ask my hon. Friend: under what circumstances will the Prime Minister seek an extension?

James Duddridge: A week is a long time in politics and in a negotiation things move—

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Answer the question.

James Duddridge: The right hon. Lady says, "Answer the question", but we are trying to be as simple as we can and use as few words as possible. We will obey the law, but who knows what will happen between now and the end of negotiations? We are seeking a deal and the nature of that deal is moving forward on a daily basis. Beyond saying that we will always abide by the law, I will not get into it any further.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Notwithstanding the Minister's answer today, the Prime Minister hinted in answer to my question last night that he would obey the law but said directly to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) that he would not. The Minister's answers today would be listened to with a little more belief if senior sources in No. 10 did not keep briefing that they are going to break the law.

James Duddridge: The hon. Lady has a Minister, not a senior source in No. 10, saying on the record that we will obey the law. I think that trumps any so-say, off-the-record briefing.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will hold a political Cabinet. May I ask my hon. Friend to make sure it is heard that we support the Prime Minister in his pursuit of a deal and have a huge reluctance to an extension, but that it comes to a very bad place in politics when a Tory Government's adherence to the rule of law comes into question and is in doubt? There needs to be a change in the mood music emanating from No. 10 because, as a Tory party, we obey the rule of law, and the fact that that is in question in this place should bring shame on us all.

James Duddridge: I am sure a number of people will hear my hon. Friend's comments, which I will pass on to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who will attend the Cabinet on behalf of the Department. I thank my hon. Friend for those comments.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Minister has repeatedly said this morning that he will obey the law, but it is the law of the land that, if the Prime Minister cannot get a deal or a no deal through this House by 19 October, he must seek an extension to 31 January from the European Union. Last night, as the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, the Prime Minister was asked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray):

"So for the sixth and final time: if he does not get a deal or a no deal through this House by 19 October, will he seek an extension to 31 January from the European Union?"—*[Official Report, 25 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 821.]*

And the Prime Minister replied, "No."

Again, I ask the Minister to explain how his assurance this morning that the law will be obeyed sits with the Prime Minister's direct denial last night that the law will be obeyed.

James Duddridge: The Prime Minister does not want an extension. He will obey the law, but every sinew of our efforts is based on getting a deal. If this House got behind a deal, perhaps we could move forward and change the tone of this place, with which we are collectively unhappy.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Part of the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act is to agree a deal by 19 October, but a person would not get that impression from this place's obsession with discussing an extension. Does the Minister agree that, if people want to avoid a no-deal exit, all our energies should be behind getting a deal and getting it through this place? Or is the real motive stopping Brexit completely?

James Duddridge: I fear my hon. Friend is right that many are less worried about the law and more worried about stopping Brexit. We have had extension after extension, and the answer to this uncertainty cannot be more extension.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): The most visible evidence giving us grounds to doubt the Government's intention is their £100 million billboard advertising campaign saying, "Get ready—31 October, here we come." That is actually inaccurate and misleading, because nowhere, not even in the small print, does it mention that the law of the land may prevent a no-deal Brexit. Should the Government not be honest with

[Mr Chris Leslie]

businesses and consumers? I will certainly be writing to the Advertising Standards Authority. The Government should be honest in their advertising and not mislead the public in that way.

James Duddridge: Let us be honest that a no deal is a very real possibility. Even if this House extends, whether through this Act or some other mechanism, we still might be in the same position and a deal might not be done. We would then be in a no-deal position. It is right that every responsible business prepares for no deal, despite the fact that we want a deal.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Extension or a renegotiated deal are the two options, but the only demand we have heard today is for an extension. Given that the European Union has shown that it is prepared to move and to renegotiate, does the Minister agree that the House of Commons should unite behind the Prime Minister to get the best deal for the United Kingdom? If it does not do so, this House would be seeking to defeat democracy and the democratic decision of the British people.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. It does worry me that this House seems consistently to agree on what it does not want but fails to grasp what it does want. If we could take some of the energy around the semantics of obeying the law and put it into getting a deal done, I think this Parliament would be held in greater respect than it is currently by the country.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is a popular man in the House. We all know that some Members are more popular than others, and some less so. Indeed, a junior Minister has just left the Chamber shouting. I deplore that. I want us all to work together harmoniously. The Minister has said that he wants greater transparency. There is a rumour running around the place—it is in the press—that the Government are going to shut down Parliament again for their own purposes. Is that right and why are they doing it?

James Duddridge: That is the first time I have heard that I am popular. I think the hon. Gentleman may very well be misinformed, but I thank him for that. When it comes to rumours, I am slightly conflicted. I am not sure what gives me more pleasure: appearing at the Dispatch Box to answer Opposition questions, or speaking to lobbyists at the Conservative party conference.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): People watching will notice that the Minister has been at the Dispatch Box for nearly 40 minutes and has repeatedly failed to answer a simple question, which I will put to him again. In the absence of this House supporting a deal or no deal, how will the Government comply with the Benn Act and leave the European Union on 31 October?

James Duddridge: For 40 minutes, I have tried to give a consistent answer. I think that hon. Members do not like that answer.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (LD): Everyone understands that the Government are trying to get a deal—we know that and do not need to hear it again—but this House bears a responsibility to test the Government's intentions in the event that on 19 October they fail to agree either a deal or no deal. Once again, therefore, I press the Minister: please show respect for the House and give a proper answer to the question. How does he reconcile refusing to ask for an extension with obeying the law, namely the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019?

James Duddridge: We do not want an extension, but we will obey the law as it stands at that time.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has repeatedly answered questions with what the Government want to do. In circumstances relating to the law, however, what is important is not necessarily what we want to do but what we might be obligated to do. May I ask the Minister a slightly different question? What is his understanding of what the Benn Act asks the Government to do if, by 19 October, neither a deal has been agreed by this House nor a no deal has been passed?

James Duddridge: Our focus is on a deal. When it comes to the point that the hon. Lady refers to, we will look at the law very carefully and we will obey the law.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): Many of us in this House genuinely want a deal and have been working cross-party to achieve it—in fact, we amended the withdrawal Bill to make it clear that the purpose of the extension was to achieve and agree a deal. I say to the Minister that we can see what is happening here. We can see what the Prime Minister was doing with that horrendous, divisive language yesterday. We can see that it is a clear electoral strategy to whip up hate and try to divide us and to whip up the hate of people against Parliament. For those of us who want to work cross-party to achieve a deal, that is making it much, much more difficult. Will the Minister now restore some trust to this House of Commons and tell us clearly, on the record, that if a deal is not achieved by 19 October, the Prime Minister will sign that letter seeking an extension from the European Union?

James Duddridge: I want to restore trust in the House. There is genuine division—it is not just an issue of linguistics and language. The House is divided; the country is divided. That is why we want to provide as much clarity as possible: we want a deal, and if we do not get that deal, we will obey the law as it stands at the time.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Is the Minister saying that the Government believe that if this House does not agree a deal and does not agree no deal by 19 October, there is a doubt that the law requires the Prime Minister to sign the letter asking for an extension?

James Duddridge: I am not going into that legal advice. I have not done that. I think the hon. Gentleman is asking if that is the point that I am making. That is not the point that I was making. In my answer to the

right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), I talked of legal advice and the normal conventions around it.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): On Tuesday, I was in Addis Ababa with a delegation from across the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in a meeting with the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union. I sat with my colleagues and saw the shock on their faces as they watched a pronouncement that a British Government were deemed to have acted unlawfully.

In an alliance, trust is essential. It used to be that when people talked to the British, we could say, “My word is my bond.” People no longer have that trust. I understand the Minister’s expertise, particularly in relation to Africa, but is he aware of the damage done internationally to our reputation when we hear of a Government trying to wriggle their way out of a binding legislative decision by this House of Commons?

There is an international danger to our reputation. I saw as my NATO colleagues watched on their iPads—they all speak English—the responses from across the British press. They watch this House daily. They no longer have the level of respect and regard for this House that used to be felt. May I urge the Government to rebuild that respect, because the dangers and the risks to this country are huge?

James Duddridge: I thank the hon. Lady for the work she does on defence and for giving me the opportunity to confirm this Government’s belief in the international rule of law, specifically and incredibly importantly in relation to NATO. Although exiting the European Union is rightly taking up an awful lot of time in this House, the relationship across the eastern border and with NATO is potentially more important than it has been for a long time. Our NATO allies, whether in meetings in Addis or in normal NATO meetings, should know that they can rely on the United Kingdom as they have done in the past.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Minister earlier appropriated the words of Harold Wilson when he said that a week is a long time in politics, so what does he think is going to happen in the next week—or, for that matter, the next month—that will change the terms of the Benn Act?

James Duddridge: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for reminding me whose words I was stealing to try to sound eloquent. Anybody in this House who predicted where we might be in a week would be a fool. If anyone does have any certainty, I suggest that they head to the bookies, shop.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It feels like we have entered into some kind of surreal world or parallel universe, a bit like Alice in Wonderland, where words mean whatever we want them to mean and the Minister is outdoing the Queen—I mean the Queen in Alice in Wonderland—who was thinking six impossible things before breakfast. Anybody watching this will think that this Government have taken leave of their senses. They cannot be trying to claim that two incompatible things are compatible, so I ask the Minister again: will

he stop hiding behind the falsehood that legal advice is necessary to clarify the law on this and tell us how the Prime Minister is going to keep to the law?

James Duddridge: I must say that I did not quite keep up with all those Alice in Wonderland references, but I am more than happy to discuss this matter over a cup of tea, as long as the hon. Lady and I are not considered two Mad Hatters.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I think many of us feel that the Minister has prevaricated with his answers today, so may I just ask him again what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) asked him earlier from the Front Bench? To comply with the law, the Prime Minister is required to send a letter should a deal or a no deal not be agreed by Parliament. The schedule to the Act actually includes the letter; it is part of the law. That letter starts, “Dear Mr President” and finishes, “Yours sincerely, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom”. How on earth can the Minister stand there and say that the Prime Minister can comply with the law without reassuring Parliament from the Dispatch Box that the Prime Minister would sign the letter as set out in the schedule to the Act in the circumstances that the two conditions laid out in the Act are not met?

James Duddridge: I have consistently said that the Prime Minister will obey the law, but we do not want to get to that position; we want to get to a deal position as early as possible, and that is what we are trying to do. That is what we were mandated to do by the British people in the referendum, and it is what previous laws have instructed us to do.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Prime Minister hit the nail on the head last night when he described the Act in the way he did, because the fact is that he has two choices: to go in all sincerity and negotiate a deal, which we know would be voted down by those who do not want us to leave the clutches of the EU; or to crawl to Brussels begging to be allowed to stay at the cost of £1 billion a month. Does the Minister agree that if there is such distrust in the Prime Minister, the courageous thing to do would be to hold a general election and allow the people of UK to decide what they think of this humiliating piece of legislation? If it was not for the fact that the scarey-cats on the Opposition Benches are running away from the electorate, they would be calling for an election today.

James Duddridge: I should thank the right hon. Gentleman for what now appears to be a cross-party consensus that we should have a general election. It is good to see other people—even hon. Friends on the Opposition Benches—saying that they would support an election. A general election will lance the boil that has been festering here in the Commons. We are a divided House, and we are divided not just on normal party lines; crucially, we are also dividing ourselves against the nation. That is only going to be resolved by delivering Brexit or by going back to the nation and saying, “What do you want?”

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): The Minister has repeatedly told us this morning that his Government are focused on a deal. If that is the case,

[Luciana Berger]

why did the Prime Minister yesterday call for an immediate confidence vote, which would shut down Parliament within 14 days and make voting on a deal impossible?

James Duddridge: The new Parliament would be able to vote on a deal and negotiations would continue. Ministers remain Ministers as we go through the process and negotiations would continue.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome the change in tone from last night, which many people have already said was absolutely appalling, but I have to say that I do not find it helpful to question the legitimacy of the EU (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act. Is this the basis for the apparent contradictions between what the Minister has said and what was said to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) last night, or is there something else?

James Duddridge: Let us be clear: I did not question the legitimacy of the EU (Withdrawal) Act. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) questioned it. I did say that there were a number of outcomes within that Bill, but I did not question, and had no intention of questioning, the legitimacy of a Bill that has been passed through the House. We opposed that Bill and we lost.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Exactly, because that was the House exercising the sovereignty and taking back the control that the leavers were so desperate to do. I do not know what message the Minister thinks it sends even to leave voters when there are questions about whether the Government will respect a law that this House has passed. The one thing the House does agree on—the one majority that there is—is that we do not want to crash out with no deal. So if they really want to get around the Benn Act, the way to do it is to agree an extension now, and then we can all have the general election before the extension period ends.

James Duddridge: All I will say to that is that it is somewhat amusing to see a member of the SNP defending the sovereignty of this House.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I accept what the Minister says—that the Prime Minister wants to secure a deal—but may I respectfully suggest that the best way for us to do that with our European friends and allies is in a relationship of mutual regard and respect? To talk of the legislation as being a surrender Act implies that they are somehow trying to bully us into accepting a deal that will be good for them but bad for us. May I invite the Minister to pass back to the Prime Minister that that language is not only unacceptable in creating divisions in this country but divides us further from our European neighbours?

James Duddridge: Without wanting to up the tone of a debate that has been quite consensual, the Act does surrender some of our negotiating power by matter of fact. It compels the Government to do something, reducing the leverage in negotiation. I am actually seeing that as being part of the negotiating. It is deeply unhelpful and it has surrendered some of our powers of

negotiation, which makes it more likely that we will get no deal. It is unfortunate. I am trying not to up the tone in any way but just to speak factually about what is happening.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Am I right in understanding that the British Government have sought and obtained legal advice on how to avoid the provisions of the Benn Act?

James Duddridge: We do not discuss what legal advice has been taken; nor do we discuss the contents of that legal advice, as I have already said in the House.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. We have had a lot of discussion and intimation today about complying with the rule of law. Section 3 of the Act will oblige the Prime Minister to do something. In the spirit of the law, how will the Prime Minister meet that obligation?

James Duddridge: The law very clearly lays out the obligations in section 3 and other sections. I have nothing further to add.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): If, as many of us suspect, the Prime Minister and Mr Cummings will attempt to navigate a path around the effect of the Benn Act—a feeling that the Minister's answers this morning have not assuaged—what will the Government's response be when the Court of Session in Edinburgh uses its nobile officium powers to sign a letter seeking an extension for him?

James Duddridge: I do not think I am sharing a secret: it is the Government's intention to navigate their way around the Benn Act by getting a withdrawal agreement and a deal through the House of Commons. That is our plan A.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I have to tell the Minister that I am extremely concerned that he has indicated that it is acceptable to the Government and the Prime Minister, for whom he is speaking this morning, that no deal will be acceptable. Can I just remind the Minister of the very serious consequences of no deal for Northern Ireland? I should not need to remind him or, indeed, the Government. If there is any hardening of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it will incentivise dissident republicans, who are already attacking the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to commit even greater violence along the border. With that, I suspect there will be a backlash—certainly a reaction—from loyalists. I do not predict that with any pleasure at all, but this Government should be aware of the consequences of no deal in Northern Ireland.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Disgraceful.

Lady Hermon: It will also embolden—

Mr Campbell: Outrageous.

Lady Hermon: Thank you. It will embolden Sinn Féin to campaign for a border poll, to take Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom into a united Ireland. The Government need to be extremely mindful, and for the Minister to imply that it is acceptable that we leave without a deal is totally unacceptable.

James Duddridge: We want to leave with a deal, but no deal is a possibility. I am very aware of the concerns that the hon. Lady raised, and the Government are committed to the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. In fact, one of the first things I did as a Minister was go to Belfast and also down to visit the border and the people who live around it. In itself, turning up and looking around does not solve the problems, but I am very aware and consistently bear these things in mind when looking at negotiations, particularly those that are currently happening in relation to the Northern Ireland border. That will continue to be very important in the Government's machinations.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD): The terms of the Benn Act are very clear, but so too is its intended purpose and spirit. The Minister has not been asked today whether the Government and the Prime Minister want to comply with the terms of the Act. He has been asked a very specific question: if, by 19 October, the House has not agreed to a deal or no deal, will the Prime Minister write the letter asking for an extension, as set out in the Benn Act? Can he answer yes or no, because I am afraid we have no clarity at all on that specific question today?

James Duddridge: We will obey the law.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister is knowingly confusing the Government's negotiating position with the authority of the law as made in Parliament and enforced by the courts. The Prime Minister says, without evidence, that the Supreme Court is wrong, and now he is saying that he will not follow a very clear provision in an Act of Parliament. Does the Minister accept that that trivialises and undermines the rule of law?

James Duddridge: No. It is not the Government who are causing the confusion; it is the Act itself and the constitutional position we found ourselves in through a number of areas, including the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which means that we cannot have a general election and resolve this by going back to the people, who have already decided in a referendum—a referendum that our predecessors in this House fully supported.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To any rational person, the law of the land states that if the Government do not get a deal through the House of Commons or a mandate for no deal, they must write a letter by 19 October asking for an extension. The Prime Minister has said that he will not do it, and the Minister at the Dispatch Box will not answer yes or no about sending a letter; he just keeps saying that the Government will obey the letter of the law, sometimes adding "at that time". Without breaking convention and giving away the contents of legal advice, will he confirm—yes

or no—that the Government are taking legal advice on alternatives to sending that letter and complying with the law?

James Duddridge: Successive Governments do not comment on not only the detail of advice but whether legal advice has been taken, so the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no, I cannot comment on that further.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Businesses are telling me that thousands of jobs in my constituency are at risk if there is no deal, but it sounds to me like the Government think that that is a price worth paying to get Brexit done by 31 October. Is that right?

James Duddridge: We have the highest rate of employment for decades. I am specifically responsible for small and medium-sized enterprises in deal and no deal. While some of the larger businesses are well prepared, there is still more room for further preparations in smaller businesses, and I recommend that they visit the Government website, which is absolutely superb and very detailed. Last week, I was in Birmingham and while some specific issues were raised, which we are working on, people were impressed with the Government's preparations.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): A few moments ago, the Minister said that the Benn Act was unclear. Will he explain to the House why he thinks it is unclear?

James Duddridge: That is a fair question, but I am not necessarily going to give the hon. Gentleman an answer that he will be happy with. I have already said that the Government will take advice, but that legal advice will be confidential. That cannot and would not be shared with the House, and that would have been the case when the hon. Gentleman was a Member of the European Parliament and when he was a Minister.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): In some countries, Governments try to make compliance with the law considerably easier for themselves by making political appointments to the judiciary. Can the Minister please categorically rule out reports that the Government are seriously considering political appointments to the judicial bench?

James Duddridge: I think that is well beyond my pay grade.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I say for the benefit of those observing our proceedings as much as for Members of the House that there is a notable although on the whole healthy competition between two hon. Members who share the same surname but whose first name is spelt in one instance Stewart and in another Stuart. One is Stuart C. McDonald and the other is Stewart Malcolm McDonald. I have called Stuart C. I do not want Stewart Malcolm to feel socially excluded in any way. That would be very damaging.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am grateful for that, Mr Speaker.

The Minister and I are both successors of the late Teddy Taylor. When Teddy was a Glasgow MP, he was known as the Tenement Tory who talked straight. Let me invite the Minister to find his inner Teddy this morning. Are there circumstances in which the Prime Minister will write to Brussels as outlined in the Benn Act?

James Duddridge: I thank the hon. Gentleman enormously for allowing me to pay tribute to my successor—[*Interruption.*] Predecessor, apologies. It is a great disappointment that, while he saw the referendum—I campaigned with him and he was in good health at that point—he has now passed away. Even after we won the vote and we knew he was in ill health, we thought that we would have Brexit before he died. I think that, looking down on us, he will be disappointed that, collectively, the House has not continued in that light and delivered on the referendum result.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Minister, this House and the country would have more confidence in the Government's will and ability to do a deal within the rapidly reducing timeframe if we had any evidence of that happening. The Prime Minister's update yesterday contained a lot of criticism of the Opposition but not a single word on the actual progress he had made in negotiations in the past few months. Will the Government bring a statement to the House on their progress and the abundant options that the Prime Minister has claimed there are?

James Duddridge: The Prime Minister answered a large number of questions and there was plenty of opportunity when he spoke for more than three and a quarter hours. I suspect that there will be plenty of opportunity to go into more detail on the negotiating strategy over the coming days and weeks.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Minister pointed to the Opposition Benches and suggested that those who want to remain will vote against a deal or never vote for one, but there are also Government Members who would never vote for a deal. Twenty-one Tory MPs have been thrown out of their group, including some who said that they would vote for a deal. Has the Prime Minister held negotiations with the European Research Group, some of whom are in the Cabinet, and have they signed up to say that they would vote for a deal that he negotiates?

James Duddridge: The Prime Minister constantly meets and talks to all members of the Conservative party and other parties.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister said there would be ample time after an election for any new Government to legislate accordingly and vote on a deal or seek an extension, but it normally

takes at least four weeks for a new Government to pass substantive legislation. Does that reveal that having an election before seeking an extension is simply a bogus device for this Government to engineer a no-deal Brexit by default?

James Duddridge: No, not at all. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the timetable is highly constrained, but after three and a half years we have only ourselves to blame collectively as a House.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Nearly every question from the Opposition has included the word "if". Does the Minister feel that it is unreasonable to expect him to have a crystal ball and predict what situation this country will face on 19 October, and what complying with the law will require? Is it better just to accept his assurance that the Government will obey the law?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. A lot could change between now and 19 October, and providing clarity that we will obey the law is clearer than picking specific laws and saying how we will obey them.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Notwithstanding the Minister's previous response, he said that plan A is to get a withdrawal agreement agreed at the European Council, which is merely three weeks away. He also said that we are only just at the stage of reopening the withdrawal agreement. If—if—no agreement is reached at the European Council, does he guarantee that the House will get the opportunity to vote on a motion on whether or not we will accept a no-deal Brexit?

James Duddridge: It is not that negotiations have just restarted. Michel Barnier's mandate to negotiate has not formally started, and that cannot happen until the European Council, where effectively all the work will be done. However, right from the point of the meeting with Macron and Merkel, there was a step change in meetings at sherpa, political and technical levels with the Commission—that was the point I was trying to make, not that negotiations have only started recently.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): At the start of the urgent question, the Minister rightly reiterated your call, Mr Speaker, for greater respect. One way of being respectful in this House is to be transparent, but the Minister has clearly not been transparent after repeated questions about whether the Prime Minister will write the letter seeking an extension. I now give the Minister one final opportunity to be clear and unequivocal in his response, and not to hide behind some form of words about obeying the law or dodge the question: if the first two conditions of the Benn Act are not satisfied, will the Prime Minister write a letter seeking that extension—yes or no?

James Duddridge: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but we will obey the law.

Hong Kong

10.43 am

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): I wish to ask the Foreign Secretary to update the House on protests in Hong Kong.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): I thank the hon. Lady for her urgent question. This is an example of when all sides of the House can come together to discuss an issue that is of joint concern across the political spectrum.

I remain seriously concerned by the situation in Hong Kong. Protests are now in their 16th week, and millions have exercised their right to peaceful protest. The majority are doing so peacefully and lawfully, but I know the House will join me in condemning the violence that we have seen on the streets of Hong Kong from a minority of those engaged in protests. It is essential that protests are conducted peacefully and within the law and that the response of the authorities is proportionate.

With that in mind, the United Kingdom supports the one country, two systems model and framework and of course the rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy granted to Hong Kong and its people under the Chinese-British joint declaration. That joint declaration was signed by the Government of the People's Republic of China and Her Majesty's Government in 1984, and the autonomy, rights and freedoms it guarantees are enshrined in the Hong Kong Basic Law. It remains as valid today as when it was signed almost 35 years ago and is a legally binding international treaty. We expect China to live up to its obligations under it and, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to its wider international human rights law obligations, including those in the UN charter.

The UK Government believe that a resolution can only be achieved with meaningful political dialogue that builds trust between all the parties on all sides. I welcome Carrie Lam's formal withdrawal of the extradition Bill on 4 September and some of the incremental steps she has taken to improve the credibility of the Independent Police Complaints Council. The initiative this week from the Hong Kong Government to consult the people they serve will be a first step on the essential path towards a more inclusive political dialogue—one that builds trust with all communities in Hong Kong.

In recent weeks, I have spoken to both the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, and to the Chinese Foreign Minister, State Counsellor Wang Yi, and I have made it clear that the UK continues to support one country, two systems. I have also made clear, however, our concern about human rights and, in particular, the mistreatment of those exercising their right to lawful and peaceful protest. The concerns of those peaceful protesters should be addressed by political dialogue, not crushed by force.

I have also spoken to a wide range of my counterparts internationally, and I welcome the strong statements from our international partners. The Prime Minister raised Hong Kong at the recent G7 meeting, where all G7 partners reaffirmed the importance of the joint declaration and called for an end to violence. We will

continue to engage with Hong Kong and the Chinese Government, reiterating the fundamental importance of upholding the UK-Chinese joint declaration. Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy is what guarantees its future prosperity and success. It is incumbent on all sides to respect it.

Catherine West: Throughout the summer, Hong Kong has remained gripped by protests, with tens of thousands of demonstrators filling the streets each weekend to demand their fundamental rights. Although the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, has announced that the controversial extradition Bill will finally be withdrawn, this for some is far too little, too late. The level of protest has grown in the face of brutal police repression, and I have been appalled by the way that protesters have been beaten by police officers and gangs rumoured to be associated with the Hong Kong Government.

Basic democratic freedoms of the press, the right to assemble and the right to protest are enshrined in the Sino-British joint declaration, an internationally recognised treaty to which we are of course a signatory. In the past few weeks, protesters have also been gathering outside the British consulate in Hong Kong demanding that our Government do more. Will the Foreign Secretary please tell the House what contact he has had with the Hong Kong Government about the ongoing protests in Hong Kong and specifically on the issue of police brutality? What dialogue has he had with the Hong Kong Government to promote a move towards universal suffrage as per the joint declaration? What steps are the Government taking to support any holders of a British national overseas passport in Hong Kong who are facing undue risk or harassment as a result of taking part in the protests? Finally, when will the next six-monthly report on the joint declaration be published?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and interventions on the substance and the constructive way she has presented them to the House. I share her concerns about the repression of peaceful protest, though mindful, as I have said, that some of the protests have been violent, which is unacceptable, too. I also share her concern to make sure that the right of peaceful protest enshrined in the joint declaration is respected on all sides in Hong Kong and by us and the Chinese Government.

I will, if I may, make a couple of further points. The joint declaration, as a bilateral treaty, reflects not just the right to peaceful protest but the basic international human rights obligations, which would apply to China in any event. It is a bilateral expression of those rights, and it is important not just for the people of Hong Kong but for the wider model that China advocates—the one country, two systems model—and which we wish to respect.

The hon. Lady asked what contact I had had with the Chief Executive, Carrie Lam. I spoke to her at length on 9 August, and I raised all the issues that I have already expressed, particularly the disproportionate use of force by the police against the protesters. I also raised the issue of the Independent Police Complaints Council. In line with and alongside the withdrawal of the extradition Bill, that is an area where the Government in Hong Kong have taken some steps to try to strengthen and

[*Dominic Raab*]

reinforce their impartiality and therefore their credibility. We need to test that very carefully and see whether it produces an impartial and objective review.

The hon. Lady rightly raises the issue BNOs, and I thank her for that. The status of BNOs is part of the package that was agreed in terms of the joint declaration. There is no right of permanent residence under the BNO passport, but it is part of the overarching model of one country, two systems which, at least at this point, we are arguing needs to be respected, but it needs to be respected by all sides, including by China.

Finally, on the six-monthly report, I would hope that to be due at the end of October, or by November at the latest.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Again, I welcome my right hon. Friend to the Chamber today, and I thank the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), a fellow member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for raising this important question.

Although I appreciate the points that the Secretary of State has already made about BNOs, it is clear that the UK Government did take a subtly different position at the time of handover when certain key members of the Administration were granted UK citizenship to give them the confidence to stay on at a moment of—let us face it—trouble and doubt. Is there not an opportunity now to assure people that they do not have to make urgent decisions now, by knowing that their rights will be guaranteed? Will he also talk to his friend the Lord Chancellor about the presence of UK judges in the Court of Final Appeal? We all know that Hong Kong's economy is underwritten by the rule of law, as, indeed, is ours. The independence of the judiciary and the ability to have judges who can speak freely and fairly and without threat of influence from Beijing is one of the things that underwrites not just Hong Kong's economic expansion but China's. Therefore, valuing those judges, knowing that they are an integral part of the rule of law—not just on commercial rights, but on civil rights—would seem a very good place for the UK to start.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee. He makes a number of very important and powerful points, and I have been reflecting on them and, indeed, on the reports from his Committee. May I just say that I will of course pass on his comments in relation to the judiciary to the Secretary of State for Justice? He makes those points in an important way. Of course, they are good for Hong Kong and its reputation and the wider reputation of China as a place that is open to do business.

Let me be clear about this issue of BNOs. The BNO status, which did not entitle the holders of those passports to a right of permanent residence in the UK, was part of the delicate balance and negotiations that were conducted and then concluded at the time of the joint declaration. We are seeking not to change the status of any one part of that package, but rather to press all sides, including the Chinese, to respect the delicate balance reflected in that package. That is why, for the moment, we will not change or alter the status of the BNOs, but we will make sure that, in terms of their rights and entitlements they are entitled to expect within that status, they have our full support.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on securing it.

As the Foreign Secretary said, we are now entering the 16th week of this chaos and there is absolutely no sign of the crisis abating. We continue to witness appalling brutality by the Hong Kong police against the protesters. The abandonment of peaceful methods by some sections of the pro-democracy movement does nothing to help its cause, which we in the Opposition believe is right and just.

Will the Foreign Secretary tell us whether the Hong Kong Executive have made any progress in setting up the independent inquiry that we have all called for? Did the Foreign Office get any credible explanation from the Chinese Government for the paramilitary forces massed on the Hong Kong border over the summer?

The announcement that the Hong Kong Executive will formally withdraw the extradition Bill is welcome, but it is too little, too late. Peace and normality will be achieved only if the Hong Kong Government meet the largely reasonable demands of the protesters and fulfil the promises made to Hong Kongers in the Basic Law. That needs to start with democratic reform and moves towards universal suffrage.

The Foreign Secretary is the fifth Minister in four months to have spoken on the UK's moral and legal responsibility to safeguard the rights of Hong Kong citizens, and I would like to ask him two further questions. What are the implications for BNO passport holders of the Government's announcement over the summer of changes to the rights of students studying in the UK? Also, what is he going to do to fulfil the UK's obligations to Hong Kong under the joint declaration if the situation does not improve?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for the measured and careful way in which she has responded to this issue. Amidst all the Brexit divisions we have, it is important that we have some cross-party consensus where it is practicable on this issue, because that allows us to send the clearest signal to our international partners, and indeed to Hong Kong and China, on its importance, so I welcome that.

I share the hon. Lady's concerns around the issue of peaceful protest. We have expressed those to the Chinese Government. I spoke to the Foreign Minister about this. I have also spoken to Carrie Lam. The hon. Lady is also right to say that we condemn violence and that it risks tainting the protests, which, on the whole, have been conducted in a peaceful way by the majority.

The hon. Lady asked about the independent inquiry. The Administration in Hong Kong have not gone the full way we would like them to, but they have taken steps to reform and reinforce the independence of the Police Complaints Council. Whether that is enough, we shall see. What we need to ensure ultimately is that we have the goal of a proper, thorough and objective review of some of the conduct by the police against protesters.

I share the hon. Lady's concern about reports of troops being increased at the border. We in this House and across the international community must be clear with our Chinese friends and partners about the Rubicon

that would be crossed if we saw a major intervention in Hong Kong. No one wants to see any repeat of the tragic circumstances in Tiananmen Square all those years ago. We want China and Hong Kong to move forward, not backwards.

The hon. Lady made the point that the action on the extradition Bill is not enough, and I share her frustration to see more done on political dialogue. In fairness, it is important to note that steps are taking place this week, and indeed today, to engage local groups in political dialogue. As she said, it is the long-standing view of the UK that there is a transition to universal suffrage for the elections of the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council, because that is provided for in the Hong Kong Basic Law, and that would be the best way to guarantee the stability of Hong Kong, but also to respect one country, two systems, which is advocated by China. There has been no change in the status of BNOs.

Overall, I share the hon. Lady's concerns. There is not silver-bullet answer. We know that the Chinese Government will be very mindful of behaviour and of its reputation, and of what is going on in Hong Kong in the lead-up to the anniversary on 1 October. We need to make sure in this House and across the international community that we are seized of this issue and that we make it clear to the Government of China that we want to respect one country, two systems, but that also needs to be reflected on their side.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Freedom of speech, including on constitutional matters, is one of the rights enshrined in the joint declaration, yet we have recently seen pressure exerted on individuals to desist from dialogue on certain issues—pressure that is completely unacceptable in any country, let alone in Hong Kong, where these rights are enshrined in the joint declaration. What can our Government do publicly to ensure that the right to free speech is upheld in Hong Kong?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's tenacious efforts to raise the issue of free speech and peaceful protest right around the world. She is a credit to this House and is doing a lot of work for the party on this. The UK has raised the issue of peaceful protest and the right of free speech, mindful that it must be lawful and peacefully conducted. I have done that consistently and will continue to do so, and I know the Prime Minister feels the same way.

As my hon. Friend and, I think, the shadow Minister said, we need to see steps towards meaningful political dialogue. We have seen the removal of the extradition Bill and the initiative from Hong Kong to consult with people from across the communities in Hong Kong. That is a first step, but we should recognise and credit the Administration in Hong Kong when they take steps in the right direction. We now need to see that followed up with meaningful, inclusive dialogue that preserves the autonomy of Hong Kong and the one country, two systems approach that China advocates.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I welcome much of what the Foreign Secretary has said this morning. Of course, it is important that we recognise the courageous strength of those in Hong Kong who have protested over the past few months. Indeed, this all takes place on the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way.

What an inspiration it is to see the spirit of the Baltic Way invoked, with people standing up for liberty and freedom as they rightly should.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned the legally binding agreement with China. While it is not for me to defend old empires, he is right that it is, to this day, a legally binding agreement. Of course that must be upheld, not least because international treaties are being picked away at by populists around the world. However, context is everything, and the UN Security Council that he mentions—as we know from the conflict in Syria, for example—is utterly broken. This matter cannot be resolved in a broken Security Council. I have been asking the Government for years what proposals they have for reform of the United Nations Security Council. That will be pivotal in this affair and much else.

Finally, this issue in Hong Kong is undoubtedly falling prey to international disinformation and misinformation campaigns, from China to Russia and many others. What steps are the Government taking to support people in Hong Kong to get the truth out to the world?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and his support for the approach we are taking. He made some valuable points about the joint declaration. It is legally binding and, of course, there is always the need to be vigilant to make sure that international treaties are respected on all sides. It is not just a bilateral arrangement, but reflects wider international human rights obligations, particularly those on peaceful protest reflected in the international covenant on civil and political rights.

I do not think the situation in Hong Kong is necessarily analogous to Syria, but I do—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I did not say that.

Dominic Raab: I know, but the hon. Gentleman made that reference. I do, however, share his sense that we need to make the UN work as effectively as possible. We have been out at the UN General Assembly this week. That has been curtailed, as he will know, but those are the kinds of things we talk about. Of course, China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, so it is reasonable and legitimate to expect China to uphold the values of the United Nations when it comes to Hong Kong.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Following directly the point that was just made by the SNP spokesman, is there any evidence that the Chinese intelligence services, adopting classic communist methodology, are trying to discredit the protesters by infiltrating them with agents provocateurs, where the violent fringe is concerned? Will my right hon. Friend give special consideration to about 265 former members of the Hong Kong armed services, who should in the past have been offered the choice of a British passport but, I believe, have yet to receive that offer?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks; I know that he follows these issues closely. I am going to be a bit careful about commenting on what is really happening in relation to intelligence services from any other country, but one thing I would say is

[Dominic Raab]

that it is becoming increasingly clear, in relation to some of the counter-protests, that there are criminal gangs involved, and it is not clear entirely what their links may or may not be with the various administrations. I think, for our part, we need to play this in a very straight way, which is to say that there are some legally binding obligations on the Hong Kong Government, and indeed on China, to respect peaceful protest. Frankly, wherever those incursions or erosions or impingements come, we will call them out.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): In response to a written question tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), Ministers have confirmed that UK law enforcement agencies provide training to the Hong Kong police. With that in mind, has that training been put through the overseas security and justice assistance risk management system? If so, what assessment, particularly in the light of recent events, has been made of the risk that that training may now be assisting in human rights violations in Hong Kong?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Of course, one of the reasons that we might take a judgment in relation to Hong Kong, or anywhere in the world, to provide police training is precisely to make sure that policing is done in a proportionate way, and with some restraint where that is called for. So I would not quite accept the premise that he has argued from.

Chuka Umunna: An assessment.

Dominic Raab: We will constantly consider all assessments in relation to this kind of support. The hon. Gentleman will know that, as the former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), stated during his remarks in the House of Commons on 25 June in relation to, for example, crowd control equipment, no further export licences will be granted for that kind of equipment unless we have got absolutely clear assurances that our concerns around human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected and addressed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Such illustrious colleagues! It is very hard to choose—wow. Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Might my right hon. Friend consider raising with Carrie Lam, when he next has a conversation with her, an issue that has been raised with me by a number of young people, including the demonstrators: social mobility in Hong Kong? For the ordinary person, even if they have actually got a good degree, it is very difficult to get a job that is well enough paid to better their standard of living from that of their parents.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend. He raises a very important point, which is that the protests that we are seeing have been fuelled by the economic/social concerns that, in any mature democracy, would find

expression through the democratic institutions. I think he is highlighting, in a very specific way, why having political dialogue leading to the democratic autonomy that is reflected in the Basic Law would be valuable and important, not just for the individuals raising those issues, but for Hong Kong as an autonomous entity within the one country, two systems model, to address those issues in a way that is constructive and in the long-term interests of the people of Hong Kong.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): All UK citizens' rights and means to travel subject to entry requirements should continue to be protected, and we in the Scottish National party call on the Government of China and Hong Kong to facilitate the safe passage of UK citizens when they are compliant with the law. BNO UK passport holders in Hong Kong, however, are not currently recognised by China. Can the Foreign Secretary update the House on the consular services and support that have been offered to those UK passport holders?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. We do provide consular assistance to the BNO passport holders, but he is right also to talk about the limitations on that status. That was part of the careful balance that I referred to in my earlier remarks. We want to see that respected on all sides. That is one element of the one country, two systems model. That is what China advocates. That is what we want respected. It must be respected on all sides.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A noted sinologist, I think—Mr Richard Graham.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The 98th anniversary of the Communist party of China approaches imminently, and there are range of issues which the Foreign Secretary knows are delicately balanced. One, of course, is the importance of what happens in Taiwan; the second is what is going on in Xinjiang; and the third is the current crisis in Hong Kong.

The Foreign Secretary knows that Committees in both the Senate and Congress have advanced a new Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which would require an annual assessment to see whether Hong Kong is sufficiently autonomous still to justify that city's special trading status with the United States. Has he discussed that with his US counterparts, and are things at a stage where Hong Kong's special trading status could be seriously endangered by the situation?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend has raised quite a few questions. Let me try to address just two of them.

When I was in Washington earlier this week, I had a chance to talk to Congressmen on both sides of the aisle about the United States legislation, and they are making progress in that regard. My hon. Friend also referred to the forthcoming anniversary on 1 October and some of the wider concerns beyond Hong Kong, and he mentioned Xinjiang. We are concerned about, for example, reports—and they are credible reports—of more than 1 million people being held in camps against their will. There is, I think, increasing international

concern about that and about the repressive mistreatment of those people and its impact on China's international human rights obligations. Let me again make the point that China is now a leading member of the international community. It is a P5 member of the Security Council, and it is very important for those basic international obligations to be respected.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): There is a long-standing affinity between many of my constituents and Hong Kong, primarily through family links or because they were posted there during service in the Army. There is particular concern about British national overseas passport holders and the rights that are afforded to them. The Foreign Secretary has made it very clear that he does not wish to look at the issue at the moment because it forms part of the agreement, and there is a logic to that, but would he be prepared to move quickly should there be some variance, shall we say, from that agreement in some other regard, in which event their rights might need to be re-examined very speedily?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Lady for the careful and measured way in which she asked that question. Our overarching effort now is to convey the message from the UK, but also from the international community, that the one country, two systems model is respected. It has implications for BNOs, and it has implications for autonomy and the right to peaceful protest in Hong Kong. They are all part of the same package. I am not going to start getting into what will happen if that package is ripped up on the other side, but I do think that—particularly given the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) about the question of troop movements and whether there might be a major intervention from Beijing—we need to be very clear about the fact that that would put at risk the model that China itself has advocated.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary understand the concerns in the House about the BNOs? China is not trying to abolish one country, two systems, but it is squeezing it and pressuring it, and it is therefore right for us to look at alternatives to the current BNO status, such as giving BNOs the right to work in the UK at short notice and, potentially, a fast track to residency. On that point, there are also 250 former servicemen in Hong Kong whom, arguably, we have not looked after well enough. Will the Foreign Secretary and the Government look at that issue as well?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is, I think, right to say that China is so far respecting the one country, two systems model and for the large part is trying to respect—or seeking to respect, or at least talking about respecting—the degree to which it is reflected in the joint declaration. I think that as long as we are in that position, it would be wrong for us to unpick one element of the package, namely the status of BNOs. Of course, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), if it is all reviewed on the side of China, we would obviously want to think again, but I think that for the moment the right thing to do is convey to the Chinese Government and the Administration in Hong Kong why it is in the interests of all sides to respect the one country, two systems model.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Ofcom is currently investigating the Chinese state-backed news channel CGTN following its coverage of the protests. Has the Foreign Secretary spoken to his colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about that investigation and, in particular, about the future of the channel ahead of its launch in London if it continues to propagate state bias in direct contravention of our broadcasting regulation?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady has made an excellent point in a very powerful way. She will understand if I respect the role and the remit of Ofcom in this regard, but of course we follow that issue very closely.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Hong Kong is clearly a major financial and trading centre. Will my right hon. Friend impress on the Chinese Government, and the Chinese, the opportunities that arise from having such a vibrant centre and the fact that anything that prejudices that or brings it into question damages China as well as damaging millions of citizens around the world?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which is that it is in the interests of Hong Kong and China to respect the one country, two systems model and the autonomy, both economic and political, that is reflected within it.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): As has already been mentioned, the 70th anniversary of the Communist party is coming up next week and it has been reported that this could be accompanied by large-scale pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. We have seen aerial photographs of armoured vehicles lined up ready to respond. Have the UK Government been in touch with their counterparts in China to stress the importance of maintaining a proportionate response, of the rule of law and of the protection of human rights throughout what could be a difficult period?

Dominic Raab: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says, and I can reassure her that I met Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Bangkok on 31 July. I was due to meet him again in New York this week, but of course the House is now sitting again.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I welcome some of the comments from my right hon. Friend, especially his condemning violence and praising peaceful protest. How can he use his offices and our position in the UN to make it clear that the Sino-British declaration is a live international treaty and not a historical document, as many Chinese officials have tried to suggest?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is widely accepted that this was an international agreement. It is binding under international law, and while there may be some who call it into question, I do not think it is in the interests of anyone in Hong Kong, in China or, for our part, in the United Kingdom, to call it into question. That is something on which there is widespread agreement among our international partners.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Those of us with friends in Hong Kong know how difficult it is now for people to go about their ordinary lives and how their businesses are being affected. Is it not the responsibility of the whole international community to try to settle these disputes before the situation gets even worse?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the latest developments we are witnessing in Hong Kong are part of a wider trend of civil and political freedoms being reduced over time? What actions can the UK take to halt, or indeed reverse, such a trend?

Dominic Raab: We can make our position clear both to the Administration in Hong Kong and to my Chinese opposite number, as the Prime Minister and all Members of the Government do. We also need to work with our international partners to look carefully at the situation to ensure that we are telegraphing as clear and broad a signal as possible to the Government in Beijing about the concerns that my hon. Friend rightly raises.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the comments from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) about the Chinese side repudiating the joint declaration, will the Foreign Secretary consider making it clear to the Chinese side that there is disquiet in this House about the status of BNO nationals and that if China continues to repudiate that international treaty, this House would consider revisions to the Hong Kong Act 1985 to extend full citizenship to BNO nationals?

Dominic Raab: I do not think that the point right now is to issue threats to the Government of China. The UK and our international partners need to be very clear that we want to respect the one country, two systems model and that some of the things that we are seeing in Hong Kong and the military build-up of troops on the Chinese side of the border—about which concern has been expressed on both sides of the House—would put that at risk.

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Philip Dunne.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am not actually Sir Philip, Mr Speaker, but thank you for elevating me.

Mr Speaker: I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Privy Council. I had thought that he had that additional honour, but I think it is only a matter of time. If I have moved it on a bit, that is surely a positive thing. However, for now, I call Mr Philip Dunne.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I lived in Hong Kong for some years, including during the political transition, so I feel particularly acutely the pressures on the people who are legitimately protesting there. I welcome the fact that concerns have been expressed across the House about the way in which the Hong Kong authorities have handled the protests. Although it was more than 20 years ago, I am acutely

aware of the strong and close trading and financial links between this country and Hong Kong. What can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that business confidence is maintained so that Hong Kong remains the vibrant financial centre that is so important in international trade?

Dominic Raab: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, responsibility for respecting the stability and the economic vibrancy of Hong Kong lies with the Hong Kong Administration and more generally with the Government in China. At the level of business and civil society and in our conduct and dealings with the Hong Kong Administration and the Chinese Government, we will be very clear about where we think their interests lie and the risks of undermining of Hong Kong's autonomy—its economic as well as its political autonomy. That touches on the issues that my right hon. Friend raised.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): There have been widespread reports that crowd control equipment is being used against protesters in a way that violates their human rights. In the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna), he said that export licences would not be granted in respect of crowd control equipment from the UK to Hong Kong unless assurances are given that human rights will not be violated. Is he therefore saying that he has asked for those assurances and that they have been given?

Dominic Raab: I am saying that we have a rigorous and robust system—one of the best in the world—for export licence control and we will keep it constantly under review. We monitor and listen to what the officials on the other side say about importing those goods, but fundamentally we make an objective and independent assessment to ensure that the UK rules are respected.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I was going to ask the Foreign Secretary about the position of BNO passport holders, but he has already answered many questions on that. I just want to add my support to doing all we can for them. What assessment has he made of the treatment of religious minorities in Hong Kong by the Chinese authorities? Will he ensure that the Government do everything we can to support not only the civil and political freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, but religious liberty there?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right. I put on the record that I have had conversations about BNO passport holders and I know that the Home Secretary is apprised of their situation. We have discussed the matter and we keep it under review.

My hon. Friend rightly raises freedom of religion. There is a broader issue around freedom of belief and conscience. We are concerned about the persecution of groups in China on the grounds of religion or belief and that the Chinese Government guidelines on unapproved religious activity, education and travel would restrict the peaceful observation of those rights, which are of course guaranteed under international human rights instruments.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Building on the Foreign Secretary's response to my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), the confidence of the people of Hong Kong in the intentions of the Chinese Government is undermined by clear evidence of the violation of human rights, especially in freedom of religion or belief or the exercise of conscience, as my right hon. Friend described it. Will he be specific about the representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Chinese Government about the 1 million Muslims who are being held in re-education camps?

Dominic Raab: We raise that matter in the United Nations. I have been clear about the UK's position, which is that we are very concerned about it. The reports look credible and it looks as if the most basic undertakings under international human rights law have been violated. We will continue to ensure that those concerns are expressed directly and candidly. We want a friendship and a partnership with the Government of China—I have said that to the Chinese Foreign Minister—but in all good friendships we must be able to talk candidly when there are concerns.

Arms Export Licences (Saudi Arabia)

11.24 am

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade if she will make an urgent statement on the recent unlawful award of arms export licences to Saudi Arabia, in contravention of a Court of Appeal ruling that determined that the UK must cease arms exports to the country.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Today, I will be tabling a written ministerial statement updating Parliament on the latest situation in relation to the undertaking given to the Court of Appeal on 20 June about export licences for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners. As the Government informed the Court on 16 September and followed up with an affidavit today, my Department identified errors in the export licensing procedure in relation to the Saudi coalition's activities in the conflict in Yemen.

As I stated publicly on 16 September, I unreservedly apologise for the export licences that my Department issued in error. I have also given my unreserved apology to the Court. A procedure to ensure that export licences for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners are not granted for goods for possible use in the conflict in Yemen was put in place on 20 June 2019. That followed the Court order and the then Secretary of State's statement to Parliament.

The Export Control Joint Unit subsequently issued export licences for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners and, in line with the agreed procedure, these were signed off at official, rather than ministerial, level. It subsequently came to light that two licences were in breach of the Court undertaking, and one licence was granted contrary to the statement in Parliament, as these licences were for goods that could possibly be used in the conflict in Yemen.

Without seeking to prejudice the independent investigation, it appears that information pertaining to the conflict had not been fully shared across government. I took immediate action as soon as the issue was brought to my attention on 12 September: taking immediate steps to inform the Court and Parliament; putting in place immediate interim procedures to make sure the errors could not happen again; and instigating a complete and full internal review of all licences granted for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners since 20 June. The Department's permanent secretary, on my behalf, commissioned a full internal investigation.

The Court and Parliament were informed on 16 September with the appropriate detail, and the interim procedures mean that senior officials in the Department for International Trade, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence guarantee that the latest information available to the Government is used in their advice. All recommendations to grant licences for the export of items for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners will now be referred to Ministers, rather than being signed off at official level. The full review of licences for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners is currently being undertaken, and this internal review is still ongoing.

As a result of the internal review so far, we have identified one further licence that has been granted in breach of the undertaking given to the Court of Appeal. This licence has not been used and has now been revoked.

[Elizabeth Truss]

My officials are also carrying out an urgent review of the composition of the coalition. This has identified a further licence that is in breach of the parliamentary statement. We reassessed the licence in the light of the latest information and subsequently revoked it in so far as it applies to Jordan.

My officials continue to review all the information relating to licences granted for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners since 20 June 2019, and we will be open and transparent with the Court and Parliament as to any new issues that emerge. In addition, the DIT permanent secretary, on my behalf, has commissioned a full independent investigation, which will establish the precise circumstances in which the licences were granted and whether any other licences have been granted in breach of the undertaking to the Court or contrary to the parliamentary statement, and it will confirm that procedures are in place so that no further breaches of the undertaking can occur.

This investigation will be led by an independent senior official: the director general of policy group for the Department of Work and Pensions. It is possible that more cases will come to light. As I have done so far, I will keep the Court and Parliament informed of any new information that emerges.

Chris Law: I thank the Secretary of State for her response. She made the shocking revelation that two further licences break the law and that more may yet be discovered, but I welcome her unreserved apologies for the errors, as they have been called, made so far.

The situation in Yemen is currently the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world, with half the country's population at risk of famine and 22 million Yemenis in need of aid and protection. Although the UK has given £770 million in aid to Yemen over the past few years, the UK has earned eight times as much from arms sales to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners. That is the result not of a so-called inadvertent error but of a shamefully incoherent foreign policy that has put profit ahead of upholding international humanitarian law.

The UK has licensed £4.6 billion-worth of arms to the Saudi military, which the United Nations has found to be directly accountable for an estimated 10,852 civilian casualties as of November last year. And now, despite the Court of Appeal ruling that the UK's arms sales to Saudi Arabia were unlawful, the Secretary of State has approved arms export licences to the Royal Saudi Land Forces.

The Secretary of State has said:

“Given the fact that RSLF troops were deployed in Yemen at the time the licence was issued, this licence should not have been granted.”

How could there ever have been any doubt that the RSLF was in Yemen, given that it makes up more than half the Saudi armed forces, which have invaded Yemen by land? The situation is crystal clear.

The process that led to the licences being granted demonstrates the same carelessness and utter lack of regard for human life that has defined the UK's arms sales to Saudi over the years. Rather than wasting time and money appealing the Court decision or lobbying other foreign Governments to resume weapons sales to

Saudi Arabia, will the Secretary of State rescind these unlawfully granted arms export licences? Furthermore, does she take full responsibility for her Department's unlawful award of arms export licences, in contravention of the Court of Appeal? If so, will she do the right thing and resign?

Elizabeth Truss: Clearly, the conflict in Yemen is a cause of great concern and we fully support the UN-led process to reach peaceful resolution. As the hon. Gentleman said, we have contributed £770 million of UK aid. What we are talking about today, however, are specific procedural issues relating to export licences.

We have a procedure that follows the consolidated criteria and is very clear about humanitarian law. In its judgment on 20 June, the Court of Appeal was very clear that we have in place a rigorous and robust process. The issue is how that process has been followed. That is why, when I was first informed of this issue, on 12 September, as Secretary of State I took immediate action to have an internal investigation into what had happened. I asked the permanent secretary to get a leader from another Department to fully investigate the process and to make sure that no such licences could be issued in error by putting in place a robust process. At the same time, I took immediate steps to inform the Court and Parliament. I have been completely open and transparent about what has happened.

This is a procedural issue. I do not want to prejudice the investigation, but the issue appears to be the sharing of information across government. That is why senior officials will now be asked to sign off on the advice that is put forward, and Ministers will be asked to sign off these export licences.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. It might be helpful to colleagues if I indicate that, while wishing to accommodate the legitimate and not inconsiderable interest in this urgent question, I want also to move on to the next urgent question at or close to midday. There is, therefore, a premium on brevity from Back and Front Benchers alike.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I think everyone across the House shares my right hon. Friend's views on the significance and the horror of the humanitarian situation in Yemen. I believe that what she has expressed to the House today is quite proper remorse and steps to ensure that the Government follow the well-established procedures for arms exports, but will she reflect on the fact that only yesterday the House was debating the impact on the kingdom of Saudi Arabia of the attack on oil facilities in that country by its neighbours across the Gulf, the Iranians? This is a very sensitive area. One of our key allies in the Gulf is under considerable pressure from the Iranian authorities, and we as a Government need to act responsibly to ensure that we stand by our allies when they come under attack.

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend makes an important point, but the topic of today's question is the following of procedures in the consolidated criteria. The consolidated criteria are right; they are a good way to make sure that we issue export licences to the right

parties. The problem here is specifically whether that process was followed correctly within government and whether information was shared between Departments. That is the issue we have identified. I have taken immediate steps to ensure that information is properly shared when those decisions are taken and to investigate what went wrong, but of course I take full responsibility as Secretary of State, and I have made an unreserved apology both to the Court and to Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Envious eloquence, to be equalled by breathtaking brevity—Mr Barry Gardiner.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Indeed, Mr Speaker.

The Government did know; they just did not tell the Department for International Trade. Which Department knew? Which Minister had the responsibility to tell the Secretary of State, and why are they not sitting alongside the right hon. Lady, making an apology to Parliament?

The evidence presented during the court proceedings earlier this year and the recent revelation prove that the Government have failed to abide by their own undertaking. On two occasions since the Court of Appeal's verdict, licences have been awarded in contravention of the determination precisely because a careful assessment was not carried out. Will the Secretary of State explain why the reports in 2015—the widespread reports that Saudi troops had been deployed on the ground and were leading the co-ordinated efforts of coalition forces in Yemeni territory—were not properly investigated and assessed by her Department? I note her letter to the Committees on Arms Export Controls; the inference is that no such investigation had ever been carried out.

The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), advised that potential breaches were monitored in a number of ways, one of which was through on-the-ground military and diplomatic staff and our positive close relations with Saudi Arabian officials. The Saudi Arabian officials must have known that their country's troops were on the ground, so why was that not communicated in the close positive relations that our staff had with them?

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has launched a full inquiry, but it will not have escaped her notice that the arms export fair took place in London just a short while ago. Some £6.3 billion of arms have been exported to the coalition by this Government—£5.3 billion-worth to Saudi Arabia. What further deals were done there? The Secretary of State has said that it is possible that more illegal deals may have taken place, but does she actually think that instead of it being possible, it is highly probable?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman asked me first about the process that took place within government. The answer is that the joint unit is staffed by officials from the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Trade, and clearly there was a failing when it came to sharing information across government. A director general of the Department for Work and Pensions is conducting an investigation to look precisely at the question of which Department issued, or did not issue, the information and how it was shared. The results of that investigation will be put

forward in due course. This is a complex area. The Export Control Joint Unit approves approximately 16,000 licences a year, so it is important that we get this right and do not rush to an answer before we are ready.

Regarding the consolidated criteria on licensing, it is also important that we adhere to the terms of our undertaking to the Court and our statement to Parliament, and I was talking earlier specifically about breaches of our undertaking to the Court and our statement to Parliament.

Sir George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): This is clearly a matter of serious moment. I welcome the tone that the Secretary of State has taken today and, indeed, her admission that things have not gone right. Can she assure me of two things: first, that there is a full and complete investigation going on, which I think she has already mentioned; and secondly, that the aim of the investigation will not just be to find out how this situation happened, but to ensure that it cannot happen again?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure my hon. Friend that I have put in place an interim procedure to ensure that there is sign-off from senior officials in all three relevant Departments and ministerial sign-off on any proposed export licences to the relevant parties. I also assure him that we are conducting an investigation, which will be led by a director general from the Department for Work and Pensions, into exactly what went wrong in this case to ensure that it cannot happen again.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I recognise and welcome the Secretary of State's apology and acceptance of responsibility. It is true that the breaches in export licensing that are the subject of this urgent question may well be described, as she said, as "procedural", but this case highlights some profound problems with her Department. We are talking about spare parts for armoured vehicles and for military radio used by Saudi land forces, which form half the Saudi military and were operating on the ground in Yemen when the licences were issued, forming part of the invasion by land into Yemen by a country—Saudi Arabia—found to be in breach of international humanitarian law, which is precisely what is supposed to be checked before licences are granted.

Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the provision of incomplete information shared across the Government was simple incompetence? Were her Department and others not aware of their responsibilities in this regard? She will have to be convincing, because I am not convinced that the actions being taken so far remove the perception that this Government and this Department are prepared to ignore the law—in this case, from the Court of Appeal—when it suits them to do so.

Elizabeth Truss: The Court of Appeal was very clear in its judgment that there is a rigorous and robust process in place across the Government. The question is about the specific sharing of information between Departments. I have absolute confidence that the unit, when it receives information, implements that in doing its work. The issue is the sharing of information. That is why we have conducted an internal review of the licences

[Elizabeth Truss]

already issued as well as asking another Department to look across the board at where information was shared. This is not an issue about the process, which was deemed by the Court of Appeal to be rigorous and robust; it is about how that process has been followed. A lot of people are saying, “Why can’t we do this quicker?” It is very important that we get this right. In the interim period, I have put in place a procedure that makes sure that there is senior sign-off from all three Departments—the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the DIT—as well as ministerial sign-off. There was not ministerial sign-off on these licences. This was done under the previous procedure. There will now be ministerial sign-off on all the relevant licences.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Can I appeal to colleagues please to ask single-sentence questions and give brief replies, because in that way we will get through as many as we possibly can in the truncated period?

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. It is important when we get things wrong that we own up to it and take responsibility. Can she please assure this House that no further licences will be granted to Saudi Arabia or its coalition partners for weapons that could be used in Yemen, especially when many are Scottish-made?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree that it is important that we are clear when errors have been made, and I am clear that that is the case. I am confident that we now have a robust interim procedure while this investigation is conducted and make sure that we have a proper procedure in the long term to ensure that the process is followed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: First I call the longest-serving member of the Committees on Arms Export Controls—Ann Clwyd.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Does the new Minister realise that it took almost a year, at the start of this Parliament, to set up the Committees on Arms Export Controls because the Government dragged their feet—and, I would say, dragged their feet deliberately? I am sick of hearing about “rigorous and robust”—this is neither rigorous nor robust. Representatives of the various parties in the Saudi-led coalition were recently at the arms fair. Can she give us an assurance that no new undertakings or contracts were agreed to service or export new goods to the countries involved in the coalition in Yemen?

Elizabeth Truss: The role of the joint unit is to scrutinise licences. I can assure the right hon. Lady that we have put in place an interim process to make sure that all available Government information is reflected in advice to Ministers on the issuance of these licences to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners and that that will specifically have ministerial sign-off.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I very much welcome the Secretary of State’s statement. Britain has played a leading role in both diplomatic and humanitarian aid in Yemen. What more political pressure can we bring to bring about a political solution in Yemen?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right that we play a significant role in terms of aid to Yemen—we have provided £770 million-worth—and it is important that we work through the UN, to which the Foreign Secretary is committed, to seek as quickly as possible an end to conflict in Yemen.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): When Court orders are contravened a couple of times, it can perhaps be dismissed as a failure to follow procedures, but when it happens on multiple occasions, it suggests that there is a systemic problem; the system is not working. Will the Secretary of State look at implementing a policy of the presumption of denial in respect of all export licences to countries listed as human rights priorities on the annual Foreign Office human rights report, so that those exports to those countries would be banned in the first instance?

Elizabeth Truss: To be clear for the hon. Gentleman, it was on 12 September that the errors were identified within the Department and notified to me. We then notified the Court and immediately conducted an internal review of all the licences already issued. All these issues relate to decisions that were made before 12 September, and that is why we have put in place the new interim procedure.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is of vital reputational importance that we maintain the most rigorous and robust export licensing regime in the world. To that end, what is the basis upon which these licences are granted, as in this instance?

Elizabeth Truss: The basis on which these licences are granted is in line with the consolidated criteria. Specifically for Saudi Arabia and the coalition partners, we are very much cognisant of the Court of Appeal’s ruling and the undertaking of the former Secretary of State to Parliament.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Despite repeated assurances from the Government over the years that they had acted within the law concerning export licences for arms to Saudi Arabia, we found out last week that the Government had acted unlawfully and today that there might be further breaches. When will this Government recognise the plight facing the Yemeni people and immediately suspend all existing and future arms exports to Saudi Arabia?

Elizabeth Truss: I acknowledged in my statement that there have been errors in the way that this procedure has been followed, which is why we have put in place interim measures to deal with this and are conducting an internal review, as well as an investigation by another Department.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s apology is welcome, but the narrative is shameful. In August this year, 236 Yemenis were killed, and the

bombing raids reached 20,000. Last week, a bomb fell on a mosque, and a bomb fell on a family eating their dinner. What do they put on the death certificate? Do they put “death caused by administrative error”?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said earlier, I unreservedly apologise for the errors that were made. That is why, when this was brought to my attention as Secretary of State on 12 September, I took immediate action to stop this happening.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Court of Appeal identified a failure by the Government to meet their legal obligation to make a systematic assessment of past possible violations of international law. The Secretary of State today has acknowledged a failure to share information across government. Surely these failures demonstrate that we no longer have a robust system of arms control in this country.

Elizabeth Truss: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have found specific errors, for which I have apologised and taken immediate action to address, but overall, as the Court of Appeal itself points out, we have a robust and rigorous process.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): May I make a declaration? I have just returned from a two-day visit to Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia, facilitated by the kingdom, and in the coming days I will include that in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

As Chair of the Committees on Arms Export Controls, I would like to thank the Secretary of State for writing to me immediately on this issue and making it very transparent what the problems were. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is fighting vile terrorists in Yemen who are using human shields. Does she agree that we are approaching the point where our current arms export regulations are not sufficient to deal with the issue of the rebels—the terrorists—using human shields and that the number of civilian casualties is a result of that?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. In this particular case, we have already identified a problem in sharing internal information within government which led to these exports licences being issued. Of course we are doing further investigation into that, but that is the specific issue around the breach of the Court of Appeal judgment. That is where I am putting my focus as Secretary of State.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. These mistakes are highly regrettable and point to the need for the Government to put their house in order in terms of the overall suspension as quickly as possible. Is it not lamentable for any Member of this House to imply that the suffering in Yemen is principally caused by any arms relationship or our coalition partners rather than the disgrace of the Houthi Islamist regime?

Mr Speaker: I am immensely obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman makes an effective point, but the specific issue I deal with as Secretary of State for International Trade is making sure that our

export licensing regime is in line with the process that we have laid out as well as the judgment of the Court of Appeal.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I would like to accommodate remaining colleagues, but colleagues who ask long questions do so knowing that they are stopping other colleagues from contributing. I am sure that they are not going to do that, because they are comrades and they will behave in an egalitarian manner. I feel absolutely certain of that, starting of course with Lloyd Russell-Moyle.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Last year, the Department issued 30 million rounds of Warsaw Pact weapons to Saudi Arabia incorrectly. Then the Court of Appeal judgment and now this. Is it not time for the joint unit to be turned into an independent unit like any other regulator and for the Committees on Arms Export Controls to be turned into a proper Committee of the House?

Elizabeth Truss: As I have said, errors were made and that is why we have asked the director general at the Department for Work and Pensions to conduct a full review of how this process is being operated.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Are any sanctions available for the companies involved in these mistakes, some of which presumably know full well that they should not be applying for the licences in the first place?

Elizabeth Truss: The issue is the issuance of licences. That is the issue I look at as Secretary of State and make sure that it is in place properly.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Can the Secretary of State describe the action of British officials in Saudi Arabia in overseeing the use of British weapons by the Saudi forces in a process agreed with her Department and the Ministry of Defence?

Elizabeth Truss: This specific issue is how our process was administered within government. The specific cause of these errors, as we have identified so far, has been the lack of information sharing, but of course I will take up the right hon. Gentleman’s point, too.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): When is the inquiry due to report back?

Elizabeth Truss: I hope to have the results of the internal review within the next few weeks.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Was there a change to UK policy on arms sales to Saudi Arabia in 2016 to discontinue consideration of past Saudi humanitarian law breaches?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, the issue here is not the policy so much as how the procedure was or was not followed.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): In the light of continuing breaches of international humanitarian law by the Saudis, and another disregard for the law by this Government, will the Minister withdraw her appeal?

Elizabeth Truss: The issue in question is specifically about whether or not the process was followed, and today we have submitted an affidavit to the court with full details.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): With regard to the kindness of the House, may I be the first to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) for securing this urgent question to expose the utter incompetence around this issue. Thousands of UK citizens, military and civilian, are working on projects that are designed to be beyond the reach of this Parliament. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that they are not involved in projects in Yemen?

Elizabeth Truss: The question refers specifically to the process of issuing export licences, and that is what I have been focusing on.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Is it not the case that this Government will always seek to break their own rules and turn a blind eye to breaches of humanitarian law when there is money to be made and deals to be had?

Elizabeth Truss: As soon as this issue was brought to my attention on 12 September, I took action to ensure that such things cannot happen.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In reality, these so-called errors were discovered only after third parties took the UK Government to court, and the Government have fought this issue all the way through the courts. Rather than having an interim procedure, is it not time to end arms sales to Saudi Arabia altogether?

Elizabeth Truss: The breach in the Court findings is specifically about how the procedure was followed, and that is what we must focus on.

Prime Minister's Role in Creating a Safe Environment

12.3 pm

Mr Speaker: I referred earlier to events in the Chamber yesterday, and what I am about to say I say as much for the benefit of those observing our proceedings as for Members of the House, as I think it extremely important that our proceedings are accessible to the people who are interested in them. In the light of the appalling atmosphere in the Chamber yesterday, and the toxicity that can spawn or exacerbate in the country at large, I have granted an urgent question to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), which treats of this matter. In my book, it is manifestly urgent.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): I had wanted to ask the Prime Minister, but I shall ask the Minister if he will ask the Prime Minister to reflect on his language and role as Prime Minister to create a safe environment both in our country and our country's Parliament.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): British democracy has always been robust and vibrant, and healthy respectful debate is vital to it. Freedom of speech is a fundamental British liberty, but it is not an excuse to threaten or abuse anyone whose views we do not agree with. That liberty is compromised when a culture of intimidation forces people out of public life or discourages citizens from engaging in the political process. Let me make clear and say with no equivocation that such behaviour is wrong, unacceptable and must be addressed.

The Government recognise that this is an ongoing challenge that does not stop after each election. It is important that we tackle this issue and ensure that everyone, no matter their background, can participate in our democracy, free from hatred and intimidation. That is why we are taking action to confront it. The Government have committed to legislating for a new electoral offence on intimidation of candidates and campaigners in the run-up to an election. We have already made secondary legislation that removes the requirement for candidates standing at local and mayoral elections to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper and we will do the same for the Greater London Assembly elections.

Members across the House have faced threats of violence, attacks on their constituency offices and staff, and abuse aimed at family members. This is abhorrent. I know that right hon. and hon. Members from across the House raised this concern yesterday. We want to ensure that people from across the political spectrum can stand for office free from the fear of intimidation and abuse. We want to tackle this extremely serious issue and protect voters. The security arrangements for Members of Parliament have been kept under constant review by the Palace of Westminster authorities and the Metropolitan police's parliamentary liaison and investigation team. Local forces engage with their MPs and other political figures to meet their security needs. Each force has a single point of contact who has contact with the PLAIT through regular updates and meetings as required.

The Government are also considering what further steps are necessary to ensure the safety of parliamentarians and their staff. Crucially, this applies not only to the vicinities of Parliament, but also in constituencies and online. We are working with social media companies to address threats online and abuse of MPs, candidates and others in public life to create a safe environment for debate.

Jess Phillips: I did ask a question, and that was whether the Prime Minister would reflect or could be asked to reflect.

Let me start by saying that I am not—and nobody is in this House—a traitor. They are not ignoring their constituents; they are all acting in good faith. I was raised thinking that we on these Benches were the goodies and over there were the baddies, but what I found when I got here was that everybody pretty much wanted to get to the same conclusion, just in a different way. I will wager that, more so than the Prime Minister, I spend time in my constituency office, loving and laughing with my constituents, no matter what they voted.

I do not just want to probe the idea that we all get abuse—not doubt we will hear a lot of that today—because we all get abuse. I had a death threat this week that literally quoted the Prime Minister. It used his name and words in a death threat that was delivered to my staff. So we know that it gets out. What I want to look at today—and what I want answers to today—is when there is a clear strategy to divide. The use of language yesterday and over the past few weeks, such as “surrender Bill”, invoking the war, and talking about betrayal and treachery, has clearly been tested, workshopped and worked up, and is entirely designed to inflame hatred and division.

I get it: it works; it is working. We are all ambitious. I am not going to pretend that I am not ambitious, but I also have a soul. It is not sincere; it is totally planned; it is completely and utterly part of a strategy designed by somebody to harm and cause hatred in our country. When I hear of my friend's murder, and the way that it has made me and my colleagues feel scared, described as “humbug”, I actually do not feel anger towards the Prime Minister; I feel pity for those who still have to toe his line. Government Members know how appalling it was to describe the murder of my friend as mere humbug. *[Interruption.]* Can I ask everybody to act with calm and dignity in this moment?

I want to ask the Prime Minister to apologise and to tell him that the bravest, strongest thing to say is sorry. It will make him look good. It will not upset the people who want Brexit in this country if he acts for once like a statesman. Calling me names and putting words in my mouth and in the mouth of my dead friend makes me cross and angry, scared even, but I will not react. The Prime Minister wants me to react and join in the chaos that keeps this hatred and fear on our streets. I simply ask the Minister to ask the Prime Minister, who is notable by his bravery today, to meet me in private, with his advisers and with some of my colleagues and my friends from Jo's family, so that we can explain our grief and try to make him understand why it is so abhorrent that he has chosen a strategy to divide rather than to lead.

Kevin Foster: I will show calm and dignity in my responses today as well. I am very clear that the Government are looking at how we can create a safe environment not just for Members of Parliament, but for journalists and others in public life who can face abuse merely for being involved in what they do, and, of course, for members of the judiciary. I am always clear that no one is a traitor for saying what they believe, or for arguing a different political point. That is part of public debate. The last actual traitor was in 1946—someone who tried to support those looking to overturn this democracy by violent means.

It is right to say that the Government are moving to take action. We have the “Online Harms” White Paper. With colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, we are working to tackle some of the corrosive nature of the debate online. We see some of the work that is being done across government to try to tackle the issue and see where things are being done and to make sure that people do feel safe to express their views. We have been very clear that the law applies as much online as it does in the physical world.

We can all look at what may have been said over the years—I am sure that the hon. Lady will look at anything that she has said over the years about particular political figures as well. It is about how we do not get into a game of what-aboutery, but focus on what we can do to protect. I heard the comments that you made this morning, Mr Speaker, about some of the suggestions. I am sure that you, like me, will be interested to hear some of the thoughts that have come out about the idea that has been floated with you.

As the Minister who is responsible for our defending democracy programme, I would be only too happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss in a different format where it comes, and, ultimately, to see where we can go with the approach of this House. As I have said, we are already committed to legislating around intimidation at election time, which is one of the things that many picked up on following the last election, and we see that as an ongoing debate. Actually, I was due even yesterday—if this House had not been sitting—to have a meeting with the police to discuss what we can do to ensure that all candidates receive support in any future general election, as it is not just when people are Members of this place that they face intimidation and abuse.

As I have said, the Government are taking a range of actions. Ultimately, it is for everyone to think about what they say and how they have contributed. Certainly today, what they will get from the Government is a calm dignity in response, making clear what we are doing to tackle this issue and create a safe environment for all, and not just for Members of Parliament.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): When it comes to creating a safe environment in this place, we have a very clear code of conduct, which is enforced by you, Mr Speaker, in this Chamber. Yesterday, you were rightly, I think, rigorous with the Prime Minister, as ever, in the enforcement of his behaviour in accordance with that code. Now, I have the very greatest respect for the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). We serve on the Women and Equalities Committee together, and I know how passionately she feels on many issues, but I am afraid that, yesterday, she was the person I could hear screaming the loudest from her Bench—so

[Mrs Maria Miller]

noticeable was it that she was actually having a conversation with one of the Whips who was standing by the side of your Chair, Mr Speaker. It was that that created a significant impression to people watching this debate of the hostility that the media reported. Is not one of the issues here the equal implementation of the code of conduct, so that all Members of this House feel as affected by the code and its requirement for all of us to treat each of us with respect, regardless of party?

Kevin Foster: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point: it is for all of us to look at how we contribute to respectful debate in this Chamber. Of course when it comes to what happens in this Chamber, Mr Speaker, it is you and your deputies who ensure that Members stick to the code of conduct and, of course, you have taken action when you believe that that is not occurring. Ultimately, it is about—certainly for the Government—not just this place, but the whole of democratic debate. There are people who will be thinking of doing their democratic duty, as they see it, in standing for this place and in giving their fellow citizens a chance to vote for a particular set of policies who will know that, in doing so, they will have their arguments, their thoughts and their proposals put to the test, but what should not be put to the test is just how thick a skin they have.

Mr Speaker: What the Minister has said is absolutely right: that code of conduct has to be enforced and, indeed, as far as the Chamber is concerned, adjudicated by the Chair. The record is clear and the evidence is there for all to see. People can observe week after week after week after week that there can be abuses on both sides—for example, during Prime Minister's questions—and every time without fail the Chair intervenes to seek to restore order. It has been the case; it is the case; and it will always be the case. It is not a matter of party politics; it is a matter of procedural propriety, and that is the way that it must continue to be.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) on securing this urgent question.

It is extremely disappointing that the Prime Minister has not respected this House by attending here today. His language and demeanour yesterday were, frankly, nothing short of disgraceful. Three years ago, our colleague—our Member of Parliament—Jo Cox was murdered by a far right activist, shouting, “Britain First. This is for Britain.” The language that politicians use matters and has real consequences. To dismiss concerns from Members about the death threats that they receive and to dismiss concerns that the language used by the Prime Minister is being repeated in those death threats is reprehensible. To dismiss those concerns in an abusive way, as he did, is completely unacceptable. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and for Batley and Spennings (Tracy Brabin), and other Members, including the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), for what they said yesterday.

Today, I have written to all Members of the parliamentary Labour party expressing solidarity with my friends and setting out the conduct expected of all colleagues. No

part of this House, as you have said, Mr Speaker, has a monopoly of virtue. Inappropriate language has been used by all parties, but we all have a duty to keep our debates political and not to descend into personal abuse.

I disagreed profoundly with the previous Prime Minister, but she did offer cross-party talks to try to find a compromise. She also set out her approach to this House, allowing for scrutiny and debate. I was pleased to participate in a meeting with her and other party leaders about conduct and abuse in the House and around the parliamentary estate. The current Prime Minister, unfortunately, has sought to entrench divisions, refused to set out any detail of the deal that he is seeking and continues to pledge that we will leave with no deal on 31 October, despite the fact that this House has voted against, and legislated against, such an outcome. Not only should he comply with the law, but he should come to this House and apologise for his conduct yesterday, which fell well below the standards expected by the people of this country of the way their elected representatives should behave, should speak and should treat each other.

Kevin Foster: I have outlined what the Government are doing, but the Leader of the Opposition mentioned the murder of Jo Cox—a dreadful crime committed by an extremist. Many of us who were in the House at that time remember exactly where we were when we heard the news of that appalling attack—in my case, I was attending a constituency event. In the same way, many from a previous generation of politics remember where they were when they heard that our colleagues Anthony Berry, Robert Buckland and Airey Neave had been assassinated by those looking to bring terror to this country.

The biggest issue is that delay will just bring more division to this country—

Mr Speaker: Robert Bradford.

Kevin Foster: I apologise. Thank you for correcting me, Mr Speaker.

In terms of how the Government are tackling this issue, we do need to bring a resolution to debates. As the Leader of the Opposition will know, the Government were clear that we were prepared to take our arguments to the country on Tuesday 15 October and to ask the electorate to pass a judgment. That would have not only given us a chance to resolve the division affecting this House, but given the country a way to move forward. As you yourself have reflected, Mr Speaker, the passions that this issue has inflamed will only carry on if there is not a resolution.

Anne Milton (Guildford) (Ind): I once again associate myself with the remarks you made at the beginning of proceedings today, Mr Speaker. I fear that the Minister is going to go to great lengths to take this argument to the wider issues of MPs' safety, but this question is about what happened here yesterday. It was completely unacceptable behaviour in every way. Whipping up a crowd and creating division is not helpful, from whichever side it comes. If we cannot deal with these issues in this place, maybe it is time to put aside our party parliamentary T-shirts and our Brexit and remain T-shirts and to put on a T-shirt that stands for parliamentary democracy,

unity of purpose, consensus and agreement. Yesterday was unacceptable, and if we do not do something to change things, we are putting our parliamentary democracy under threat.

Kevin Foster: The question clearly relates to creating a safe environment in both the country and Parliament; certainly, as the Minister responsible, I do not want this debate to be just about MPs being a case on their own—there are many who face abuse and intimidation, from the judiciary, to journalists, to those who will never be Members of Parliament but who just want to take part in our democratic process.

We heard your comments this morning, Mr Speaker, about some of the thoughts and reflections on what may happen in this place. Ultimately, it is for the House itself to decide how it wishes to regulate itself, how it wishes to behave and what changes it may wish to make to its Standing Orders, and we can, of course, rely on you and whoever is elected to replace you to lead the way in enforcing them.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): As others have said, the scenes in the House of Commons last night were deeply disturbing. The Prime Minister's tone was appalling, his behaviour was appalling and his language was appalling. We have in No. 10 a man who has built his career on making inflammatory remarks, stoking division and shouting down those who disagree with him. The Prime Minister is not fit for office. His behaviour is an outrage, and his Government are treating people disgracefully.

People want leadership, and they want accountability. Yesterday, the Prime Minister should have come in front of this House and apologised for acting unlawfully. He should have held his hands up, agreed he had acted wrongly and pledged not to do it again. Instead, he chose to brazen it out, proving that he embodies the very worst of the wrongs in our society and totally ignoring the seven principles of public life.

Young people are watching our Parliament today. They are watching and learning that, to get to the top, all they need to do is break the law and shout people down. The House of Commons and the Prime Minister should be setting a good example to all those living across these isles. The Prime Minister should be here today. He should pledge to stop using language that incites hatred or violence, whether that is against other MPs, citizens with different political beliefs, or migrants who have chosen to live and work in the UK. Will the Minister ask the Prime Minister to come before us and do that?

Kevin Foster: When we look at creating a safe environment for debate, many colleagues will reflect on exactly how that was shown at times online during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. However, in terms of the comments that have just been made, if the Scottish National party has no confidence in the Prime Minister, it had a perfect opportunity yesterday to table a motion for debate to that effect today. There was also an opportunity for SNP Members to take their arguments to the country on Tuesday 15 October. However, it is an invitation that they declined.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): There is already a danger of these exchanges turning into a “holier than thou” competition. We should reflect on how much unhappiness and anxiety there is among Members of the House and that this is going to be expressed in various ways. People are going to use robust and emotive language to express their views, and that is entirely understandable. May I just make one request, Mr Speaker—that we no longer invoke the name of any person who has been a victim of attacks in order to try to make political points because—*[Interruption.]* Well, there we are. It is simply used as an opportunity to shame other Members of this House. I do not think any of the exchanges and mentions of Jo Cox yesterday were particularly fair on her family.

Kevin Foster: It is always useful to benefit from my hon. Friend's experience in this House over many years. He is right to say that we can have robust, emotive debates. The issues settled in this Parliament are of great concern across the nation, and people will rightly get passionate about them, but we should not do so with disrespect, and I know, of course, that if that happened, it would be dealt with.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I gently say to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) that it is not for any Member of this House to determine whether another Member can talk about their own grief and about how they feel in a certain circumstance and whether that should somehow not be allowed.

The language that leaders use matters because it sets the tone for public debate. I am sure I am not alone in looking across the Atlantic at the rallies with crowds of people chanting, “Lock her up!” about Hillary Clinton or, “Send her back!” about Ilhan Omar—by the way, it is no coincidence that women are often the targets of this hate, and especially women of colour—and seeing worrying echoes in our own politics of that Trumpian approach. Can the Minister give any assurance that there will be no deliberate campaign to use that kind of language to inflame? I fear that he cannot, because the repeated use of those inflammatory words by the Prime Minister yesterday was, it seemed, very obviously deliberate.

I would just end by saying that, on Tuesday morning, I spoke to a group of 400 young women. They asked how I dealt with abuse and hate on social media as a woman in public life. They asked whether going into politics was something I would recommend. I want to be able to say to such young women and to all young people that they should play their role in public life. We in this House need to be able to create the environment that enables those young people to come forward into our public life, and I fear that we are failing to do so.

Kevin Foster: I think we all want to see an environment where everyone feels they can take part. That is why I have outlined some of what the Government are looking to do, such as legislating on intimidation around election times. The hon. Lady gave examples of what we have seen across the Atlantic. I am sure she will join me in saying that, while I never voted for him, seeing a group of people chanting, “Tony Blair can eff off and die!” is something we would all condemn.

Jo Swinson indicated assent.

Kevin Foster: I see her indicating that that is the case.

What would inflame the debate further is the idea that we should just have more delay and people feeling that when they do vote and want to have a say, they are ignored. That is why we need to bring the Brexit matter to a resolution, as the Government are seeking to do.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Kenneth Clarke.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Ind): I was only just beginning to stir, Mr Speaker. You spotted me rather promptly!

What concerns me is whether there is any sense of a deliberate strategy in all this. I would like my hon. Friend to reassure me. I assure him that I have been a junior Minister myself, so I do realise he is probably not consulted closely about strategy—I am not sure many members of the Cabinet have much idea of what the strategy is at the moment. Can he allay two fears that I have?

First, it seems to me that the Prime Minister is absolutely desperate to have an election before 31 October, so that he can fight it before the chance of some untoward effects after that date. Also, I fear that the strategy is to fight it on the people versus Parliament platform that Nigel Farage invented and that we are imitating. Will my hon. Friend assure me that what happened yesterday was one of those occasions when people lost control of themselves and the House, not for the first time, erupted in disorder and that this is not part of some grand discrediting of the usual political institutions in order to fight a populist and nationalist campaign?

Kevin Foster: As a junior Minister, it is always good to benefit from the advice of the Father of the House. I reassure him that the Government's strategy is to do what the vast majority of the nation want, which is to bring a resolution to Brexit and deliver the referendum result. I know that the Father of the House has voted for deals and has seen that as compromising and moving forward. The Government will look to fight a general election on a platform of resolving Brexit, no more pointless delay, bringing 20,000 extra police officers on to our streets, increasing school funding and taking our economy forward. I have to say that our platform will be far stronger than that of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker: Having called the Father of the House, I want now to call the Mother of the House.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) for bringing forward this urgent question and you, Mr Speaker, for your comments last night and your comments from the Chair this morning. I agree with everything the Father of the House said. I think that what happened last night was just an ugly spectacle of things that have been happening for months and months getting even worse. We all know that hon. Members from all parts of the House have felt inhibited in doing the work that they are elected to this place to do. It is important—it is essential—that everybody who is elected to this House is able to speak out without fear

or favour to say what they believe in. Nobody in this House should do anything that stops any other Member exercising that right. Whether it is threats to people who are remainers or people in balaclavas bursting into a university meeting that was being addressed by the Leader of the House, we cannot allow it in our democracy. Nor can we have a situation where Members are fearful not only for themselves and their own safety, but for their staff and their families.

The Minister has mentioned a number of initiatives. Heaven knows, we have had enough discussion and wringing our hands about these problems over the months in this Chamber. We have had a number of initiatives, but there is a lack of coherence and focus for action. That is why the Father of the House and I have proposed a Speaker's conference that brings together the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the House authorities and the parties to look at what can be done to ensure that we protect our democracy. It also needs to look at our political culture. We know, for example, that we cannot call each other blackguard, guttersnipe, stoolpigeon or various other things. We need rules of this House that are updated and that protect us and enable us to do our business today.

Kevin Foster: I reflect on the productive conversation that I had with the women's caucus, when the Mother of the House was present. Again, people should be able to speak out. An example was given at that meeting of a female candidate being advised that a solution to the problem was to not campaign on social media. That completely unacceptable solution had been advised by a local council. That would mean that women could not engage in politics in the same way as men, which is completely unacceptable.

The rules of the House may be something you wish to reflect on, Mr Speaker, or that whoever happens to be elected by the House to replace you wishes to work on. Some of those expressions probably are not in common parlance today, by contrast to other statements that are. The Government's focus is not just on Members of Parliament. This is about all who engages in public life—journalists who face abuse for what they say and others who just want to discharge a public duty or share their opinion in our democracy. We need to ensure that they are covered by any proposals as well.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Ind): Like many people in this Chamber, I was shocked by the unacceptable conduct of the Prime Minister and particularly by his attitude, which succeeded that of the Attorney General earlier in the day, to how this House works. My concern is that these institutions—both the Supreme Court and the judiciary, which we debated earlier, and Parliament, where laws are set in the first place—are absolutely crucial to the wellbeing of people in our country. We all rely on them. All those who are part of these institutions are effectively custodians who should protect their wellbeing for the future.

What we are seeing right now in British politics is effectively, in my view, a deliberate race to the bottom to a form of gutter politics that, unfortunately, directly disadvantages those of us not willing to be part of that race. The sooner the leadership of the main political parties in this country rise to the challenge of showing the levels of integrity in their conduct and behaviour that the British people are entitled to expect, the better.

Kevin Foster: I always reflect on comments by the right hon. Lady. I say again that we as a Government are committed to ensuring that what we do about public discourse, particularly online via the “Online Harms” White Paper, is not just about how we make sure that people are not breaching the law and how people can participate without fear of abuse, but about ensuring that we tackle some of the disinformation that can have such a corrosive impact on our society. Ultimately, the social media giants have made some moves, but there is obviously a need to do even more.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): All of us need to take care of our language and none of us is without fault, but the Prime Minister of our country holds a special responsibility. I say to Members across the House, I spent four and a half years opposite David Cameron and I never saw a performance like the one we saw last night from this Prime Minister. He said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle),

“the best way to ensure every parliamentarian is properly safe and to dial down the current anxiety in this country is to get Brexit done.”—[*Official Report*, 25 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 803.]

Yes, “safe”.

Everyone in this House shares the frustration about the last three and a half years—in fact, some of us did not want the referendum to happen in the first place—but none of us can agree that the safety of Members of this House should depend on the way they vote in this House. It is a disgrace that the Prime Minister said that yesterday. He should apologise and the Minister should apologise on his behalf.

This language and the language of surrender suggest that we are at war either with Europe or with each other. Let me say, as someone who grew up with parents who were born in the shadow of war: we are not at war with Europe and we are not at war with each other. Go down any street in this country and there are people who voted remain, there are people who voted leave and there are people with different views about how Brexit should be resolved.

The Prime Minister has a special responsibility. He is not exercising that responsibility; he is trying to divide an already divided country. Some people say this strategy will work. I say this strategy will not work, because the British people are better than this.

Kevin Foster: It was interesting to hear the right hon. Gentleman’s brief mention of his parents. I remember the attacks he faced in terms of his own father and his reaction to them. I thought those attacks took politics to a place which was not appropriate. We should always judge Members by who they are and what they say, not seek to attack their family. In terms of the strategy, I am very clear, when we liaise with the police and when we talk to them about appropriate measures to be taken, that that applies whatever opinion anyone adopts within this House. I suspect my discussions are more likely to focus on those who may strongly disagree with me but have absolutely every right to put those arguments forward and to have measures in place to protect them—and not just from those things that cross the boundaries of the criminal law, but also from incessant abuse online, particularly when it is ill-informed.

But as we all know, we as a Government wanted to give the British people an opportunity express their views on Tuesday 15 October 2019. Sadly, for the first time in history, a Government wanted an election to resolve the matter but were blocked from doing so by the Opposition.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): There is a strategy. The Prime Minister is the last thing standing against ending the Brexit enterprise entirely. He can expect no quarter. Absolutely everything is going to be thrown at him, isn’t it?

Kevin Foster: I think it is safe to say, as you yourself reflected, Mr Speaker, that the Brexit process has provoked passions and arguments and debate, but I think where the Prime Minister is very clear is that his view is the way to deal with this, and the Government’s view is that we should ensure that we deliver Brexit on 31 October 2019.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The challenge of what the Minister is saying is that this is not actually about Brexit, and nor, for many of us, is this about how we make this stop. If we want to do that we need to understand where it starts, and how the extremists on all sides of our political culture will trump proudly about how they might stand at Cable Street to defend people’s rights, or will listen to Steve Bannon and disagree with him, but have absolutely no understanding or comprehension of how we get to a Cable Street or how we get to a Steve Bannon in the first place. The danger with the Prime Minister’s conduct last night is that it is feeding a culture and a language that normalise extremism, so that those of us who have had “Traitor!” shouted at us in the street, as well as online—because the online and the offline are no different—experience this as “the heat of the kitchen” rather than as language that does nobody any favours in our democracy.

The most important thing the Minister can do now is go and listen to what we are missing, because this does not affect everyone equally. We are still going to have white men of a certain age, with independent means, in our politics. It is the young people, the women, the people from minority communities, who are already saying they are not going to take part in our politics, not because they have already experienced the rape threats and the death threats, the bomb threats and the intimidation, but because they see it. When the trolls are in Parliament, how do we stop feeding the trolls?

Kevin Foster: As the hon. Lady outlines, what is important is that we get the message out there that action is being taken, not just online—as she said, the law applies online as it does offline—and that we tell people that they have a place here, that they can make a difference and that their votes count. Ultimately, the longer indecision goes on on one issue—Brexit—the more there will be frustrations, but that does not justify people crossing the line of abuse in hatred and intimidation. It needs to be clear that the same legal standard will apply, at whichever extreme people are. There are two sides of the same coin of hate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, I will call a few more Members, but what is needed is a single-sentence question from each.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): I fear I might be repetitive because last night I asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister whether it was not just about language but about tone. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for his tone today, but how would he suggest that I should respond to those in the beautiful marketplace of Romsey who three Saturdays ago told me I was a traitor who deserved to be shot, when the language of “traitor” is heard in this House?

Kevin Foster: As I said earlier, there is no one in this House who is a traitor; there is no one in this House who should be threatened in that way. Those who shouted that in the marketplace should realise that if they talk such nonsense and make such threats, there is a criminal law that they can be held accountable to.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): Our words carry consequences. They reverberate far and wide beyond these four walls. The Prime Minister, who holds the highest office in our land, also bears the greatest responsibility for what he says and inspires. I do not believe that the Minister can tell this House that he seeks to reduce online harm while the Prime Minister booms out toxic, divisive soundbites, the clips of which are immediately posted and promoted on online, hate-filled social media channels. We have seen the incidents of hate crime in our country increase, and as a Member of this House who has seen no fewer than six people convicted of harassment and hate crimes directed at me, can I ask the Minister to take back to this Prime Minister that he must urgently reconsider this deliberate strategy of sowing seeds of division in our country?

Kevin Foster: As the hon. Lady rightly indicates, those who behave in certain ways will face the criminal justice system and conviction for their offences. However, I would just gently reflect that a national party going round with the slogan “Bollocks to Brexit” will not necessarily help tone down the debate. Ultimately, for us all, bringing a resolution to this issue is a key part of what this Parliament is meant to be here for, and if we cannot do it in this Parliament, I would look forward to having the mature, sensible and informed debate with the electorate that we should have been having on Tuesday 15 October.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Mr Speaker, if you were to reread your Samuel Pepys, you would find a line in the diaries of over 350 years ago, which says that so low had the rump fallen in the eyes of the people, that the lads in the street “do now cry, ‘Kiss my Parliament’”.

If we are to avoid that same reputation persisting today, in our current politics, may I ask the Minister and all in this House to apply to our conduct of social media the same standards that you, Mr Speaker, are asking for today, and that it should include us, journalists and the wider public if we are not to see the continuing debasement of the body politic?

Kevin Foster: I am not sure whether I shall be using the “Kiss my Parliament” adage. [*Interruption.*] Well, I suppose, it is a new take on the famous “Never kissed an MP” T-shirt that some people like to wear. However, my right hon Friend is absolutely right to say that it is

not just about MPs; it is about journalists, judges—anyone involved in public life. Some of the comments that have been directed at one journalist this morning would hardly be seen as the top brow of political debate. As I said, though, it is about the Government looking to create an environment that is safe for all to engage in, not just within this House, because ultimately the culture of debate outside this House will be reflected in the Parliament that is elected to be in this House.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): Down the years that I have been a Member of this House, we have had memorable and important debates on highly contested issues—on Iraq, when I remember Robin Cook’s speech; on 9/11, when I remember David Blunkett’s speech; on the great crash, when I actually remember Gordon Brown’s speech. When I come into the Chamber today—I think last night was the culmination of a trend—I feel I am coming into a session of the Bullingdon Club. That is what it feels like in here. That culture is set by the leadership; it is always set by the leadership.

The courageous thing that the Prime Minister could have done today would have been to come to this House and explain to us why he thinks that style of leadership is appropriate. In his absence, will the Minister tell us what practical steps the Prime Minister will undertake to set a new culture of leadership that brings this House back to sensible debate on critical issues and makes us the important Chamber that we should be?

Kevin Foster: When reflecting on some of the great debates and issues of the past, I sometimes wonder how the political discourse might have been affected if Twitter, Facebook and other social media had existed at that time. That certainly applies to the 1975 referendum.

The Prime Minister and the Government will continue the work that we have already outlined to tackle intimidation, hatred and abuse, and, during the current Parliament, bring back a deal that will deliver the referendum result and finally put the Brexit issue to bed. I hope we can look forward to wide cross-party support for that.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): In the context of creating more diversity in Parliament, does the Minister agree that the toxic, nasty, aggressive behaviour that is emanating from all parts of the House is preventing many more women—and some men—from coming to the House, feeling safe, enjoying it and believing that Parliament is a place where they can achieve, progress and reach their full potential?

Kevin Foster: I hear my hon. Friend’s passion. We do want more people to feel that they can stand for election, not just to Parliament but to their local council, or to become an elected mayor or a police and crime commissioner, without facing the type of abuse that some have sadly faced in recent years. However, people should also see Parliament as a place where decisions are made, rather than a place that ends up on a merry-go-round of delay without actually making a decision on behalf of the nation. That, ultimately, is why people stand for Parliament—they want to make that difference—and we want to see people from all backgrounds here. I am a comprehensive school kid, the son of a Paignton labourer, and not many of my type used to get into Parliament; but we can now.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Yesterday, I asked the Prime Minister to moderate his language, because I desperately wanted to remind him that words have consequences. I accept that it is necessary for all of us in this place to reflect on our language and our behaviour. After all, I have been known to have the odd heckle here.

I am grateful for the solidarity shown by my fellow MPs, including many on the Government Benches, but last night I was horrified to see a tweet from the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke); I will not refer to him as “honourable”. I informed his office that I would be raising this issue today. The tweet that he sent last night appeared to mock me, referring to the Labour party as toxic—which, sadly, brought more abuse.

The Minister has said that his Government want to stamp out abuse, but how can we believe him when the Prime Minister describes genuine concerns expressed by female MPs as “humbug”? This morning, his official spokesperson confirmed that the Prime Minister has no regrets about the language that he used. Will the Minister confirm that the tweet from the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland reflects the view of the Government? Will he also take the opportunity, further to the comments from the Prime Minister’s official spokesperson, to say that he stands by the Prime Minister’s comment that threats to female MPs—death threats and daily abuse—are humbug?

Kevin Foster: My own speeches have been subjected to the odd heckle from the hon. Lady, and I always recognise the spirit in which that is done: a spirit of passionate competition and disagreement rather than, necessarily, of disrespect for my remarks.

The Government are introducing a defending democracy programme and are taking action to deal with online harms and tackle the social media giants in this regard. As the Minister with responsibility for this policy area, I think that the hon. Lady should take account of what the Government intend to do, and I hope that we will have her support when we introduce legislation to deal with intimidation before an election. Ultimately, the test will lie in what difference we can all make through legislation and by tackling those who feel that they can abuse people online with impunity as they would never do in the street.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a sad fact that a study of Parliaments across Europe found that more than four out of 10 women MPs had received threats of death, rape or beating. The language that we use does matter, and the language that was used yesterday by Members in all parts of the House was unacceptable. We need to dial it down.

Let me also remind Members that, unfortunately, the protest on the night when we last met unleashed a huge amount of hatred towards people who had voted to leave. Colleagues who had voted to leave in the House had to pull nails and screws out of their car tyres last week because of the threats and the language used against them—and the Liberal Democrats, sadly, are not innocent in this respect.

There are four actions that I want to see. [HON. MEMBERS: “Four?”] Four. First of all, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: One sentence.

Vicky Ford: Please, Mr Speaker, will you continue to make sure that you are fair and balanced, because sometimes it does not feel like that? [Interruption.] Secondly, please will all Members, including those on our Front Bench, dial down the language? Thirdly, please can we all work together to heal the divisions in our country, and that means respecting democracy? Fourthly, because it matters, please can we bring the Domestic Abuse Bill back to the House?

Mr Speaker: Let me just very gently say to the House that, as experienced Members know, there was a time when statements did not run for very long and not many Members were called. That has changed, and over the last decade I have called nearly everybody most of the time. The idea that if you do not call everyone every time they want to speak, that is somehow unfair, is so manifestly absurd that I think that most of the House would recognise it as such. I do what I can to stand up for the rights of this House and those of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of it. I have done that for a decade; I am doing it now; and I will go on doing it. I am standing up for the important principle of the decency of our democracy, and I should have thought that that was pretty fair.

Kevin Foster: Let me first compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) on the work that she does, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament, to ensure that the views of women both inside and outside Parliament are heard.

Yes, this is about having a calm and dignified debate, taking the challenge in the way it is meant and responding to it in a dignified way. The Government are seeking to work together to heal the divisions by bringing an end to the Brexit process, and doing so by delivering the result of the referendum. The longer the delay and indecision continue, the more, sadly, this argument will continue.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I was elected to this place on the day that Jo Cox was taken from us. A week later, we had the EU referendum.

I have only ever known a politics of division in this place. It is beyond embarrassing that the Prime Minister has sent a junior Minister with a folder full of rebuttals today, making every excuse in the book. So I ask the Minister this: what does it say in your little folder about the Prime Minister acknowledging that unless he dials down the tone, unless he watches his language and adopts the position of statesperson, the wounds that divide this country will turn into scars—permanent scars?

Kevin Foster: The hon. Lady made the point herself that, for over three years, this Parliament has been absolutely focused on rows and debates around Brexit. Hundreds of hours have been spent on it and we are unable to move on to the agenda that many people wish to see us discussing. The best way to finally bring that debate to an end and to move on is to support the Prime Minister in getting a deal, and I hope we will have her support when he brings a deal back.

Mr David Gauke (South West Hertfordshire) (Ind): At best, the Prime Minister's answers to some of the questions last night were deeply insensitive, but the concern that many of us have is that there is a deliberate strategy of division and confrontation. Can the Minister reassure me that the Conservative party and the Government are not going to pursue a strategy of division, of confrontation and of the undermining of the institutions that protect the peace and stability of our citizens?

Kevin Foster: I can reassure my right hon. Friend that the Conservative party, going into a general election, will go forward with a manifesto that seeks to serve the country and unite the country, but a key part of doing that is bringing a resolution to the Brexit process. I know he has supported a deal, and I hope when the Prime Minister brings back a deal we can look forward to his support again.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have another statement to follow in a moment from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. There is also a motion to be voted on and a further debate, so we must proceed. I regret that, because I like to hear everybody, but there is a moment of interruption today in a way that there was not yesterday. We could extend yesterday, but we cannot do so today and I have to take account of that. So unless there is a point of order appertaining to this particular exchange—

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Can I make a point of order, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: Very well. Point of order, David T.C. Davies.

David T. C. Davies: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you confirm that it would be unacceptable under any circumstances for a senior Member of this House to say of a female MP: "We should lynch the bastard"?

Mr Speaker: Yes. That would be totally unacceptable. I am not aware of the particular circumstance to which the hon. Gentleman is referring, but I can confirm that that is totally unacceptable.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: No, I am not going to take a whole series of points of order—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, no, I am now going to proceed with the statement from the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]* Order. I do not require assistance from the hon. Gentleman. We come now to the statement by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. *[Interruption.]* Order. If people who are leaving the Chamber would please do so quickly and quietly, we can attend to the terms of the statement from the Secretary of State. I think there is now something approaching calm.

International Climate Action

1.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrea Leadsom): I am delighted that my first statement as the Business and Energy Secretary is on a subject that matters so much to every Member of this House and also to every person on the planet. As we heard from a 16-year-old girl, Greta Thunberg, it is vitally important to act now so that our children and grandchildren have a bright future ahead of them. We only have this planet, and we all have a duty to do everything we can, cross-party, cross-country and cross-world, to leave it a better place than we found it. So today, with permission, I would like to make a statement on the UN climate action summit in New York that took place on Monday this week.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for International Development joined the UN Secretary General, world leaders and key figures from business, industry and civil society at the UN climate action summit on Monday. The science is clear about the speed, scale and cost to lives and livelihoods of the climate crisis that is facing us. Costs show that the total global damage from climate-related events was more than \$300 billion in 2017 alone. We know that, globally, emissions are continuing to rise year on year with tragic impact. We also know that the world's most vulnerable are being hit hardest by the impacts of climate change. Natural disasters are already pushing 26 million people a year into poverty, with hundreds of millions of people potentially facing major food shortages in the coming decade.

The Prime Minister and other world leaders met because they are determined to take decisive collective action to cut emissions and to improve the resilience of countries and communities, and the Prime Minister showed very clearly what decisive climate action looks like at home and abroad. In the UK, we have cut emissions by 42% since 1990, while growing the economy by 72%. We have cut our use of coal in our electricity system from almost 40% to only 5% in just six years, and we are leading the world in the deployment of clean technologies such as offshore wind. In just that one renewable sector, the UK is home to almost half the world's offshore wind power. We became the first country in the G20 to legislate for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

We are already seeing thousands of jobs being created as part of this transition. Almost 400,000 people are employed in the low-carbon sector and its supply chains, a number that we plan to grow to 2 million by 2030. We are also playing a critical part on the world stage. In his closing speech, the Prime Minister set out his determination to work together with others to tackle the climate crisis. He called for all countries to increase their 2030 climate ambition pledges under the Paris agreement and confirmed that the UK will play our part by raising our own nationally determined contribution by February next year.

To help developing countries to go further and faster, we also committed to doubling the UK's international climate finance from £5.8 billion to £11.6 billion over the period from 2021 to 2025. This funding will support some of the most vulnerable communities in the world

to develop low-carbon technologies and to shift from fossil fuels to clean energy by, for example, helping to replace the wood-burning stoves and kerosene lamps used by millions of the world's poorest families with sustainable and more reliable technologies such as solar power for cooking, heating and lighting.

This new funding will also help our incredible rain forests and mangroves, which act as vital carbon sinks, and help to restore degraded ecosystems such as abandoned land, which were once home to forests, mangroves and other precious habitats. So many of us have been glued to David Attenborough's incredible series, "The Blue Planet" and "Planet Earth", which really brought home the scale of destruction and the need for global action. Doubling our international climate finance will help the most vulnerable to deal with the damaging effects of climate change and to become more resilient.

On Monday, as part of the international climate finance commitment, the Government clearly put technology at the heart of our response with the new £1 billion Ayrton fund to drive forward clean energy innovation in developing countries. The fund is named after the British physicist and suffragette Hertha Ayrton, whose work at the beginning of the 20th century inspired the Ayrton anti-gas fans that saved lives during the first world war. This is new funding that leading scientists and innovators from across the UK and the world can access, to save lives in the future as Hertha Ayrton's work did over a century ago.

Our Prime Minister is not alone in taking action. We led on the summit's adaptation and resilience theme with Egypt, and delivered a powerful call to action, joined by 112 countries. As part of that, we launched a first of its kind coalition for climate-resilient investment to transform infrastructure investment by integrating climate risks into decision making, ensuring that, for example, when roads and bridges are built, climate risk is taken into account. We also launched a new risk-informed early action partnership, which will help keep 1 billion people safer from disaster by greatly improving early warning systems of dangerous events such as floods and hurricanes, giving people vital extra hours, days and even weeks to prepare for them.

We were delighted that 77 countries, 10 regions and 100 cities committed at the summit to net zero by 2050. The incoming Chilean COP 25 presidency announced a climate ambition alliance of 70 countries, each signalling their intention to submit enhanced climate action plans or nationally determined contributions.

Businesses are taking action, too. More than 50 financial institutions pledged to test all their \$2.9 trillion in assets for the risks of climate change. Nine multilateral development banks have committed to supporting global climate action investments by targeting \$175 billion in annual financing by 2025.

However, the climate action summit was by no means an end in itself. It was a call for global action, which the UK and many others heeded. We cannot and will not be complacent. Coming out of the summit, the combined commitments of all those countries and all that good will still do not put us on track to meet the temperature goals of the Paris agreement. People across the country and across the world are every day sending a clear message that we must all go further, and as the Secretary-General said, "time is running out".

Globally, much more is needed. The UK, as an acknowledged world leader in tackling climate change and as the nominated host for COP 26 in 2020, has a unique opportunity to work with countries and business across the world, to build on the foundations laid at this week's summit, to drive the action agenda forward and to turn the tide of emissions growth. There is no other planet: this is it, and we must look after it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the shadow Secretary of State, it might be helpful if I indicate an intention to move on at 1.50 pm.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement.

The climate emergency is worse than we feared. Yesterday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published its special report on oceans and the cryosphere, which set out the danger starkly. Sea levels threaten nearly 1 billion people who live in low-lying coastal regions, and tipping points in the permafrost could release hundreds of billions of tonnes of carbon. The report makes it clear, yet again, that we must do everything to reduce emissions as fast as possible to limit global warming to 1.5°, beyond which climate breakdown will be catastrophic.

The purpose of the UN climate action summit was to spur on greater climate ambition towards that aim, but none of the world's large polluters met the challenge. China, India and the EU were all unable to announce tougher nationally determined contributions. Brazil and the USA refused even to turn up. Our country must step forward to fill that vacuum of political leadership on the world stage.

The UK's commitments at the summit need close scrutiny. The new Ayrton fund that the Government have announced allocates £1 billion to help British scientists and innovators create new clean technology. That is great, but the funding has come from the aid budget. We should not siphon off overseas development assistance to spend on UK universities and firms. They should be funded by non-ODA finance, so will the Secretary of State explain why the funding diverts precious resources from mitigation in climate-vulnerable nations? If she claims that the money is classified as aid because it will help export clean technologies to the developing world, perhaps she can today commit to following Labour's lead and pledge to provide to the citizens of the global south free or cheap access to green technologies that we develop here.

The Government's pledge to double international climate finance, while welcome, also raises questions. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that money will be disbursed predominantly through grants rather than loans, which unfairly saddle the poorest nations with debt to pay the costs of a problem they did little to cause? Climate change is already wreaking hundreds of billions of dollars worth of damage on those communities. Will she commit to devoting any of the resources to covering loss and damage caused by climate disasters? After all, the Government perpetuate the fossil fuel economy for the poorest nations abroad, completely undermining our international climate finance. From 2013 to 2018, UK Export Finance gave £2.6 billion in export support to the energy sector, of which 96% went

[Barry Gardiner]

to fossil fuel projects, overwhelmingly in low and middle-income countries. Will she therefore commit today to ending taxpayer support for fossil fuels abroad, as so many other countries have done?

What we do abroad matters more than ever. The UK is hosting the UN climate conference, COP 26, in Glasgow next year. It is the most important climate summit since the Paris agreement. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) is president of COP 26, but COP presidents are normally Ministers in their Governments, and she has indicated her intention to stand down at the next general election. I therefore ask the Government what staffing resources the office of the COP president will be provided with; how much funding the Government intend to provide for COP 26 preparations; what regular reports the COP president will be able to give to Cabinet; and what objectives the COP president has been set by the Cabinet.

Those resources must be provided because at COP 26 we will need to use our diplomatic leverage to persuade other nations to bring forward much tougher NDCs. I am deeply concerned that staffing levels are inadequate. In 2009, under the Labour Government, the Foreign Office had an army of climate staff 277-strong. Seven subsequent years of austerity halved that. When the Prime Minister was Foreign Secretary, the number of officials working full-time on climate change fell to 55. Do the Government intend to restore the workforce to levels last seen a decade ago in recognition of the diplomatic resource that is now required to support the agenda of a UK-led COP 26?

The failures of the UN climate action summit raise the stakes of COP 26 so much higher. We cannot afford for the talks, or those at COP 25 in Chile, to stumble. The issue of climate breakdown is far greater than the party-political divides that afflict this Parliament, and I urge all Members to find common ground in the pursuit of a healthy and stable climate. In that spirit, I make an offer to the Secretary of State: I and my colleagues in the Labour party are fully committed to doing everything we can in a cross-party manner to ensure that COP 26 delivers the highest possible ambition.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He and I worked together on energy matters some years ago and I welcome his willingness to work cross party on the issue, about which I know he cares a great deal and on which he is extremely knowledgeable. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for his excellent efforts on the Climate Change Act 2008, from which so much of the UK's ambition in this space derives. I encourage the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) to work cross-party. I will be delighted to meet him and his colleagues to discuss how we can take the matter forward in a shared endeavour to tackle global climate change.

The hon. Gentleman asked some specific questions. I will try to answer them all, but if I cannot or if I miss some, I would be delighted to meet and tackle them further. He is right that the recent IPCC report provides the best available science on the wide range of impacts of climate change on the ocean and the cryosphere, and outlines potential measures for building resilience to those impacts. The Government welcome the report.

We are very concerned about the impact of climate change on the oceans. Of course, as island nations, the United Kingdom, its overseas territories, our Commonwealth partners and close friends are especially dependent on a healthy and sustainably managed ocean, so we will be looking carefully at those recommendations.

The hon. Gentleman is right to ask about the tougher NDCs not being met at the climate summit, and he will be aware that those targets are supposed to be raised by February 2020. The UK is committed to doing that and we will, of course, be urging all others to raise their NDCs by next February.

On the Ayrton fund and its use for scientific work, the Government's recently published green finance strategy committed to aligning all UK overseas development aid with the Paris agreement so that all our development finance is consistent with climate-resilient and low greenhouse gas development pathways. Such aid is, of course, essential because so much of the problem for vulnerable communities overseas is related to climate change, so those things are inextricably linked. Again, I am happy to speak to the hon. Gentleman more about that.

On grants versus loans, they will almost all be grants. Again, we can speak further about that.

On fossil fuel export finance, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the Committee on Climate Change has made it clear that, actually, achieving net zero requires a transition through lower-carbon fossil fuels, and I point again to the fact that, in just the past six years, we have gone from a 40% reliance on coal—the dirtiest fossil fuel—to only a 5% reliance today, which is quite an achievement. There is much more to be done, but we recognise there will be an ongoing need to use fossil fuels during the transition period.

On staffing resources for COP 26, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the president is a prime ministerial appointment. I will be working closely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), the COP president, to make sure that all the parliamentary updates will be made available on time. I will also be working closely cross-party. The UK has a huge ambition to decarbonise and to retain our global leadership in tackling global climate change.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I very much welcome the Secretary of State's determination, because this is the greatest challenge we face as a country. I am sure we can maintain the excellent radical consensus achieved by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) through the Climate Change Act 2008. This remains above party politics, and everyone in the country will expect us to do that.

On the road to COP 26, will the Secretary of State assure me that there will be roadshows and lots of opportunities for businesses and enterprises the length and breadth of the country that are coming up with solutions that will enable not only us here at home but so many developing nations around the world to meet our net zero carbon target?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It is important that during 2020 we spend a good amount of time promoting not only the Government's work but the brilliant ideas of UK scientists and the efforts around the world to try to tackle global climate change.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I also thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement and welcome her to her position.

The statement focuses on the international situation, but we are in a climate emergency. Although what we do abroad matters, what we do here is even more important. In Scotland, the landmark legislation passed its final stage in the Scottish Parliament yesterday. The Scottish Government have responded and now have the toughest statutory target of any country in the world to reduce emissions by 75% by 2030.

Scotland will soon generate 100% of its power from renewable sources. Scotland will be planting 85% of the trees in the UK, and it is pushing ahead on insulation. Scotland has committed to becoming net zero by 2045, five years before the rest of the UK and in line with the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change, the recommendations of which are contingent on the UK becoming net zero by 2050.

To hit the same target, UK policies will therefore need to be ramped up significantly. The UK falls short on home and business energy efficiency and it is way behind on carbon capture, utilisation and storage. Decarbonisation of the gas grid must be accelerated, and it must flatten the pedal on vehicle and tax incentives to promote low-carbon choices. VAT must be reduced on energy-efficiency improvements.

The UK Government must remove their ideological opposition to renewable onshore wind and stop holding back solar power. The Secretary of State is new in post, so will she therefore commit to presenting a clear plan and target to address these issues?

Finally, buried among other news yesterday was the revelation that the cost of the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant, already the most expensive development on this planet, will rise by nearly £3 billion. The UK Government should not be pouring money down this bottomless pit of new nuclear when onshore wind, for example, is now less than half as expensive for consumers—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am deeply grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) for his raft of points, and I will try to tackle them all.

First, I congratulate the Scottish Government on their work in also legislating to achieve net zero by 2045. Of course they, like the UK Government, are following the advice and recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change, and we will need to work together to ensure that we all meet those targets.

The hon. Gentleman asks whether there will be a clear plan and pathway for net zero, and there will be. My Department is working flat out to provide particular pathways for us to consult on.

The Committee on Climate Change is clear that our clean growth and industrial strategies provide the right frameworks for delivering net zero, so we will continue to deliver through those strategies, including, for example, recent record low prices for offshore wind, the new future homes standard, the CCUS action plan, the £400 million investment in charging infrastructure for

electric vehicles and the £390 million investment in hydrogen and low-carbon technology to reduce emissions from industry.

Finally, on Hinkley Point C, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is no cost to the taxpayer.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her post and, through her, I thank her excellent officials for their brilliant work in replicating the Euratom treaty provisions and for her Department's continued support for nuclear fusion, which is such an important industry in my constituency. Can she assure me that, in her no doubt long tenure in her new post, she will continue to support investment and research in nuclear fusion, where Britain helps to lead the world?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. I assure him that my Department is looking carefully at many different innovations, including nuclear fusion, which is important to his constituency.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her post. She is deeply committed to this issue, and she certainly has a big task in front of her.

COP 26 is obviously an important moment not just for Britain but for the world. We will be trying to persuade Europe, India, China and others to ramp up their ambition for 2030, because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has told us that we have 10 years to turn round the path of emissions. Can I therefore suggest to her that, as well as having a net-zero target for 2050, we need to ramp up our ambition for 2030? Will she therefore ask the Committee on Climate Change to look not just at the pathway to 2030 but at what more we can do as a country so that we can persuade others to follow us?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point and, as he will no doubt expect, that is exactly the kind of area we are looking at. There obviously needs to be a pathway, as we cannot suddenly decarbonise in 2049, so we are now looking at the trajectory and at the development of different technologies, at how quickly we can deploy them and at the choices to get the best value for taxpayers' money, while setting a real example that we can demonstrate for COP 26 next year.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Air quality is very much part of climate change, and we must increase our air quality in this country. Having more electric cars and charging them at night would use and store a lot of renewable energy, so there is a great advantage in driving those technologies. We must have better quality in this country.

Andrea Leadsom: Of course air quality is vital, and the move to electric vehicles is important. My hon. Friend will be aware that we have a £400 million investment in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, but it is also vital that we generate electricity from low-carbon sources to provide electricity for those electric vehicles.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that the climate emergency demands that we reform the whole financial

[Sir Edward Davey]

system, to decarbonise capitalism and green the City? If so, why are the Government taking three years to implement the mandatory disclosure of climate-related financial risks, when it could be brought in within one year?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that just this weekend the Prime Minister doubled our international climate finance contribution, from £5.8 billion to £11.2 billion, for 2021 to 2025. That demonstrates our commitment to providing support for those in developing countries.¹

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): The Secretary of State might be interested to know that, as well as Greta Thunberg, young people in my constituency of Newton Abbot are absolutely determined to have a voice on climate change. They attend Torquay Grammar school and have uploaded to YouTube content that has gone viral, but they want to know how they can get involved. Could the Secretary of State tell my constituents what they need to do to engage with Government and get young people's voices heard?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises such an important point. So many young people are taking part in demonstrations and want to know what they can do to help. We will hold Green GB Week early in the new year, which will be a great opportunity for schools to get involved and for young people to give their views.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome the commitment to double the aid spending on international climate finance, but it has to be new money and the Government have to be consistent. It makes no sense to give with one hand but to invest in fossil fuels with the other. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) on the Front Bench raised the issue of the 96% of export credit finance going to fossil fuel energy projects. That makes no sense at all. The Secretary of State says that we need a transition, but that locks developing countries into dependence on fossil fuels for decades to come. That is not a transition, so will she look into stopping doing that in the future?

Andrea Leadsom: I think the hon. Lady will be delighted to hear about the Ayrton fund, which provides £1 billion for that transition from fossil fuels—including, as I have said, kerosene lamps, coal-fired stoves and so on—to solar power for cooking, heating and lighting. This is a genuine opportunity for developing economies to transition early.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): British carbon emissions are down by 42% on 1990 levels, which is a fantastic achievement, but we are responsible for just 1% of global emissions, and emissions overall are rising. What can the international community do to ensure that polluters such as India and China, which are responsible for nearly 30% of global emissions, clean up their act?

Andrea Leadsom: It is absolutely clear that this has to be a global effort. The UK, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, is responsible for a small proportion of global emissions, and those emissions continue to rise. It is incumbent on us all to follow the instruction of the

Paris climate change agreements and for the United Kingdom to provide encouragement and do everything we can to lead the way.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I urge the Secretary of State, who is a persuasive woman, to persuade every Member of Parliament—Lords and Commons—to read Professor Steve Jones's compelling new book, "Here Comes the Sun", which is about the fragility of our planet and what human beings are doing to it? Will she also wake up the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union? We as legislators should be persuading our fellow legislators around the world to move on this issue. Let us share technology with them.

Andrea Leadsom: I hope the hon. Gentleman is not the agent for that particular book and taking a commission on every one sold. Obviously, that would be a conflict of interest. Nevertheless, I take his point. We need to be shouting from the rooftops. There are so many brilliant young people out there doing that for us, but he is right: we all need to do all we can to tackle the issue.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): May I welcome the Government's commitment to net zero by 2050 while creating jobs? Given today's paper, I hope that most of them will be green jobs. What is the Government's rationale for not agreeing with the Opposition's target of 2030?

Andrea Leadsom: I regret to say that the 2030 target announced by the Labour party is simply not credible. Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said:

"We need zero emissions. Getting there by 2050 is tough and expensive but feasible and consistent with avoiding most damaging climate change. Aiming for zero emissions by 2030 is almost certainly impossible, hugely disruptive and risks undermining consensus."

I urge Members to work, on a cross-party basis, on zero emissions by 2050.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): The Secretary of State has rightly emphasised the need urgently to decarbonise our economy. Will the Government consider looking again at the contribution that a tidal lagoon project might make to decarbonising our energy supply? Perhaps a regulated asset base model could finance the development.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman may have raised this issue four years ago—we could talk about this for a long time. A lot of consideration has been given to the potential of tidal power. It is incredibly expensive and was ruled out on those grounds. We are looking at a regulated asset base model for the financing of big energy efficient projects. We will continue to keep that under review, but of course it has to offer good value for taxpayers' money. The path to net zero that we are setting out will enable further opportunities to consider different technologies.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I welcome the launch of the Ayrton fund and the £1 billion for the creation of new technologies. We also have a proud history of commitment to developing countries through international aid. How will the fund fit into our existing commitments?

1. [Official Report, 30 September 2019, Vol. 664, c. 10MC.]

Andrea Leadsom: The UK Government have committed to spending 0.7% of our national income on aid. Analysis shows that without urgent action on climate change, development progress is at risk. Tackling climate change and protecting the environment is bound up with development, so it is right that it has to be a priority for UK aid. It is also very important that the OECD criteria for official development assistance include addressing climate change, and that is what we are doing.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Secretary of State has mentioned the £140 million package for protecting and restoring forests around the world. That is all well and good but if we are still bound to the trade in beef and livestock feed for the Amazon, we are contributing to the problem. When is she going to say something about that?

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Lady will know, that would be a matter for comment by the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am sure that the opportunity to raise the issue will come up at DEFRA questions soon.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The decision to hold the UN climate change summit 2020 in Glasgow was a great success for Anglo-Italian diplomacy. It also highlights an advantage for Scotland of being a member of the United Kingdom, with some 30,000 attendees are expected. I do not share the concern of the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) about the £1 billion coming from our international development fund. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that one of the advantages of the money is that it can be used to help to save forests in Indonesia, and does she agree that our climate change unit should continue its good work there?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We are all delighted that COP 26 will be held in Glasgow. We shall all be there. It will be a great opportunity to visit Scotland as part of a stronger United Kingdom post Brexit. We all very much look forward to it. My hon. Friend is exactly right to say that the Ayrton fund offers a fantastic opportunity to contribute to low-carbon technologies for use in developing economies.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): May I begin by saying that it is good to see the Secretary of State in her place and to be able to question the Government on climate change, which we did not think we would have the opportunity to do? Data from Antarctica suggests the onset of irreversible ice sheet instability, which would result in sea levels rising by several metres. This was not the future my father envisaged for his children when he spent years working in Antarctica more than 40 years ago, and it is not what I want for my children either. Why are the Government so reluctant to show leadership in setting hard and fast targets, particularly on the tried and tested technologies of onshore wind and solar?

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Lady for her collegiate approach; I think we should attempt to continue in that vein. She will know that we have more than 10 GW of onshore wind capacity in the UK. No doubt

she knows also that just a couple of weeks ago we had a successful round of contracts for difference for offshore wind, showing costs of sub-£40 per MWh, which is extraordinary; when I was an Energy Minister only a few years ago, the cost of CfDs then was about £150 per MWh. The UK is leading the world. We should be proud of that. Of course, we will continue to look at all renewable technologies.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Conservative Environment Network recently produced its manifesto. One of the proposals for a quick win on emissions is to increase the amount of ethanol in petrol to 10%, which would also help the British bioethanol industry, farmers and us all. Has my right hon. Friend considered that? Will she encourage the Transport Secretary to implement that measure? It would be equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the road.

Andrea Leadsom: I am aware of the idea my right hon. and learned Friend mentions. I am to meet the Secretary of State for Transport soon to talk about how we can speed up the decarbonisation of the transport system, and I am sure we will discuss it then.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): We have mentioned the involvement of young people. One of the demands of the Student Climate Network is to reform the curriculum to reflect the ecological crisis as an educational priority. Has she discussed, or will she discuss, the matter with the Secretary of State for Education?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I have not yet discussed that with the Secretary of State for Education, but I certainly will make a point of doing so.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con) *rose—*

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: James Gray.

Luke Graham: Thank you, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: No, no. The last time I looked, the hon. Gentleman was called Luke Graham, not James Gray.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It is an easy mistake to make, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire is a few years younger.

James Gray: Yes, but I was brought up in Ochil and South Perthshire, so we have a great deal in common, although there is a slight age difference.

One way in which the UK can truly lead the world in this generational battle against climate change is through climate science, in particular polar science. In that respect, I pay tribute to the father of the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorris), after whom the McMorris glacier in Antarctica is named. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State join me in congratulating

[James Gray]

British scientists in universities and institutions throughout Britain, who make a vast contribution to polar and climate science, and will she, today of all days, pay tribute to the launch of SS David Attenborough from Birkenhead and perhaps make passing tribute to the great man himself?

Andrea Leadsom: Yes, the RSS David Attenborough—“Boaty McBoatface”—is launching today. I am always delighted to pay tribute to David Attenborough, whose series on Earth and our oceans have brought home to so many people the urgent need for action. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), himself a bit of an Arctic explorer who has done a great deal to highlight climate change, and we should be grateful to him for that.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): If we are serious about tackling climate change, we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. To that end, does the right hon. Lady agree that the proposals for the west Cumbria coal mine should be cancelled, and will she speak to her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to whom I have written? Will she instead commit Government money through the northern powerhouse to create renewable industry and energy jobs in west Cumbria instead?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is as delighted as I am that we have shifted from 40% reliance on coal to only 5% today. That is quite an achievement. He makes an important point about fossil fuels. He will be aware that we are looking at carbon capture, usage and storage, and an action plan with projects to improve our use of fossil fuels and to make them lower carbon. There is a lot to be done in this area, and we will continue to look at how we can make that work.

Mr Speaker: I call Luke Graham.

Luke Graham: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As part of the Cabinet Office team that pushed for Glasgow to host COP 26, I thank my right hon. Friend for coming through and ensuring that one of the greatest cities in our United Kingdom can showcase the fantastic commitments we are making and how we are developing world-leading technologies. We are making our name known internationally and locally, with UK Government investment in the international environment centre in Alloa and the world-leading recycling facility being built in South Perthshire. Great progress has been made in the past two years, but will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss taking the next step to bring geothermal energy and smart grids to Clackmannanshire?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend tempts me to make some budgetary commitments, which I cannot do right now, but I am always delighted to talk to him about his brilliant ideas for his constituency and the surrounding area.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Our Government in Scotland are consulting on public sector climate change responsibilities and reporting duties. What work will the Department for Business, Energy

and Industrial Strategy be doing with UK public bodies based in Scotland, whose emissions will count against our world-leading targets?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will know that there are regular and frequent discussions between officials at all levels on how to meet our carbon commitments. Those will continue and will, I dare say, be increased in the run-up to COP 26 next year, so there will be plenty of opportunities for collaboration between nations.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It has been reported that 38% of Americans believe that we face a climate crisis—slightly fewer than Americans who believe that aliens walk among us. What is the Secretary of State doing to encourage all countries to treat climate change as a priority?

Andrea Leadsom: As others have done, my hon. Friend makes the important point on the need for global action. In seeking to host COP 26 in Glasgow, we demonstrate our determination to be part of the solution and to lead other nations into showing the same level of commitment.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Secretary of State told my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) that she could not answer her question because it was a matter for DEFRA, which I understand. Will she join the call from the schools and schoolchildren of Bristol to ask the Prime Minister to bring back the Department of Climate Change?

Andrea Leadsom: Obviously, I am delighted to be fulfilling the role of Secretary of State for energy as well as for business. I see the clear link between the amazing UK-led science and innovation and the need for commercialisation of many of the solutions that tackle climate change, so I feel comfortable with the way the Department is now managed. The hon. Lady makes an important point about the specifics of the DEFRA portfolio, but there will be an opportunity to put oral questions to that Department.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Do we have a policy of using our large international aid budget as a means of incentivising other countries to improve their climate change policies?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend will be aware that in our recently published green finance strategy, we committed to aligning all UK overseas development aid with the Paris agreement, so that our development finance is consistent with climate-resilient and low greenhouse gas development pathways. We urge all nations to do likewise.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I want to follow the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who is right to say that we will not be a leader abroad unless we are a leader at home. We in the west midlands have been the leader of industrial revolutions for three centuries, but we need a green development corporation to build homes, we need municipal energy companies to roll out solar, and we need a regional investment bank to roll out climate finance here at home. Give us the tools and we will show the leadership.

Andrea Leadsom: We have already taken a number of actions on charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, investments in hydrogen and low-carbon technology to reduce emissions from industry. We will be doing a lot more, and we will set out our plans in the next few weeks.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): HMRC is having to change VAT rates from 5% to 20% for the installation of renewables, such as solar panels, to meet the EU VAT directive. Will the Minister commit to reversing that decision when we leave the EU?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right. We will be able to choose our own VAT rates.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we must now move on.

ADJOURNMENT (CONFERENCE)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 26 September 2019, do adjourn until Thursday 3 October 2019.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 306.

Division No. 446]

[1.50 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Steve Baker*)
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex
Chishty, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias

Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, Sir George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, rh Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Sir David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
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
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Pateron, rh Mr Owen
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria

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

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir 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 Ayes:
Stuart Andrew and
Iain Stewart

NOES

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
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boles, Nick
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet

Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dodds, Jane
 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
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Forbes, Lisa
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 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
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg

Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham P.
 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
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Milton, rh Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica

Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 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
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 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
 Skinner, Mr Dennis

Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
**Thangam Debbonaire and
 Jeff Smith**

Question accordingly negated.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I am not taking a slew of points of order now. I will take the one from the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) of which I had advance notice. [*Interruption.*] Order. I say very gently to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), whom I am accustomed to indulging, that I think the House wishes to hear the business statement from the Leader of the House. I will take the point of order from the hon. Member for Leeds East and then we will have the business statement. [*Interruption.*] Patience, hon. Member. It will come in due course. If you have got a plane to catch, I am sorry but that is, with the very greatest respect, your problem.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There has been much talk recently about holding a general election. My party wants an election called as soon as possible—[*Interruption*—once an extension to avoid a no-deal Brexit has been agreed. But of course, Mr Speaker, there are rules governing the amount of time needed to arrange a general election. I have today liaised with the Library, who confirmed to me that given those rules, the soonest an election could take place is 5 November. That assumes that we dissolve Parliament early next week. Obviously any such general election would then have taken place past the 31 October Brexit deadline. Mr Speaker, to help the public understand the current debate in Parliament, could you confirm that a general election could not be held before the 31 October deadline?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise it. I can confirm that my understanding of the electoral timetable under the existing statutory framework is the same as his. [*Interruption.*] I said: under the existing statutory framework my understanding is the same as his.

Business of the House

2.8 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to make this statement at a slightly unusual time to facilitate the Division, which makes the business I am going to read out rather more useful than had I done it earlier in the day and then had had to do it again.

The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 30 SEPTEMBER—Debate to approve a motion relating to section 7 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (Historical Institutional Abuse), followed by a debate to approve a motion relating to section 6 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (Victims' Payment), followed by a debate to approve a motion relating to section 5 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (Human Trafficking), followed by a debate to approve a motion relating to section 4 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (Gambling).

TUESDAY 1 OCTOBER—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Transitional Arrangements etc.) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Common Agricultural Policy and Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Import and Export Licences (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Pesticides (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

WEDNESDAY 2 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"] It was worth waiting for, I think.

THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER—Debate on a motion relating to women's mental health, followed by a general debate on the spending of the Ministry of Justice. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 4 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

2.11 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement. He will know that this could have been agreed through the usual channels—we are trying to compromise and come to a consensus—and there would then have been no need for a Division.

This is no way to run a Parliament. Earlier today, we heard how we have to start as we mean to go on and to respect each other in the way we speak to each other, so could the Leader of the House ask the Attorney General to come to the House to apologise? Calling us a "dead Parliament" and "turkeys" is not appropriate language. If the Attorney General so dislikes Parliament, perhaps he should spend more time with his cases and call a by-election.

I know that the Leader of the House has apologised to Dr David Nicholl, but to take up from where we left off prior to the motion on the Adjournment of the

House, could the Leader of the House apologise here in the House to Dr David Nicholl and say that he was wrong and that what he said was untrue? He also did not answer my question about the "constitutional coup"—I thought we had eradicated foot and mouth!

If the Leader of the House wants some business, let me give him some business: the date for Report of the Financial Services (Implementation of Legislation) Bill is to be announced; the date for Report of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill is to be announced; the date for Report of the Agriculture Bill is to be announced; the date for Report of the Fisheries Bill is to be announced; and the Trade Bill had its Third Reading in the House of Lords on Wednesday 20 March and is in ping-pong. Do the Government expect to get their Bills through before 31 October 2019? May I ask the Leader of the House again how long he thinks will be needed for preparations for the Queen's Speech on 14 October? When will Parliament be prorogued?

I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could provide time for a debate on the Electoral Commission report, which estimates that between 8.3 million and 9.4 million people in Great Britain who are eligible to be on the local government registers are not correctly registered, and that there are between 4.7 million and 5.6 million inaccurate entries on those registers. That is the first study since the 2015 assessment of the registers, following the transition to individual electoral registration. This is seriously disfranchising people. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), the shadow Minister for youth and voter engagement, has raised that continuously. Perhaps that is why the Government are so keen to have an election, while the registers are not up to date.

I note the Foreign Secretary's statement yesterday on the cases of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Mr Ashoori, raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) and for Lewisham East (Janet Daby). Has the Leader of the House had any conversations with the Foreign Secretary, and has the Foreign Secretary met Richard Ratcliffe or other family members of the British nationals who are incarcerated in Evin prison? These are lost lives. We cannot wait any longer; they are losing time with their families.

Finally, I want to thank the Leader of the House for his kind words yesterday on my nomination to the Privy Council. I congratulate the Solicitor General, sitting next to him, who has also been elevated to the Privy Council. I know that he is very excited about meeting Her Majesty. Finally, we have good news from the Whips Office: we want to welcome Evelyn Christine Rose Puddick.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady says, quite correctly, that this is no way to run a Parliament, which is why we should have a general election as soon as possible. If only Labour Members would vote for it and have the courage of their convictions, we would have one. She then complains that the Attorney General has called this a turkey Parliament. I think it is more of a chicken Parliament, because it is trying to flap away from the general election that we need and that would clear the air. We get gesticulation and murmurations coming forth from the Labour Benches saying that we are going to get one, but when? The country wants one as soon as

possible. Rather than “dead”, I would use the word “addled”, like the Parliament of 1614, which was known as the addled Parliament. This, I think, may also come to be known in such a way.

The hon. Lady mentions Dr Nicholl; I am happy to repeat the apology I gave before. She referred to a question that I answered at some length yesterday on the question of a coup. I pointed out that if things are said in Cabinet, the 30-year rule means that they will come out in 30 years, but just because newspapers print gossip from Cabinet meetings does not make it fact. I fully support and stand by what the Prime Minister has said, which I will read out again for the benefit of right hon. and hon. Members, which is:

“I have the highest respect, of course, for the judiciary and the independence of our courts, but I must say I strongly disagree with the judgment, and we in the UK will not be deterred from getting on and delivering on the will of the people to come out of the EU on 31 October, because that is what we were mandated to do.”

That is my position.

The hon. Lady mentioned a number of Bills that are blocked. One of the advantages of Prorogation, had it taken place, was that we could start afresh with new Bills, better Bills, bigger Bills and brilliant Bills, and that is what will happen when eventually we get to the Queen’s Speech. She asked about the timing of the Queen’s Speech. The best thing for me to tell her is that that is being discussed with Black Rod. Very few changes need to be made in this Chamber for a Queen’s Speech, but quite a number of changes need to be made in the House of Lords, in addition to the unsightly barriers that are there for security, which of course are removed prior to a Queen’s Speech, and the road closures associated with that. We are trying to work out simply the timings, to ensure that any Prorogation meets the requirements of the Supreme Court’s judgment.

The hon. Lady asked for a debate on the Electoral Commission’s report. It is obviously key and in all our interests that electoral registers should be up to date, though some of us also feel it is important that parliamentary constituencies should be up to date, which would be beneficial. I note with great interest that some Opposition Members are keen on boundary changes.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked me about the dual nationals held illegally by Iran and whether I have had any conversations with the Foreign Secretary. Indeed, I asked him about it yesterday, and he has spoken to his Iranian counterpart about all the dual nationals—including, of course, Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe—as did the Prime Minister when he saw the President of Iran on the fringes of the meeting in the United Nations. I hope I can reassure the hon. Lady that the Government continue to push, and I thank her for continuing to push, because repeating things every week is powerful and keeps people on their toes, and I hope she will continue to do that.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Ind): Far from this being a zombie Parliament, there are lots of Bills that we could consider passing. I am pleased to hear that the Leader of the House has scheduled the Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill, but there are also private Members’ Bills that have all-party support, including one that I was seeking to bring to the House: the Creditworthiness Assessment Bill could help millions of renters to get improved credit scores. As the House is

now sitting unexpectedly, the Government could look at some of those private Members’ Bills and put them into law.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. It has to be said that this Parliament has passed more private Members’ Bills than any since 2003; 13 have gone to Royal Assent and additional Fridays were made available. It was absolutely right that additional time was made available, but the essential point of what we are trying to do is to get through the public business that the Government were elected to get through. That is what we are aiming for. We have done well on private Members’ Bills, but I doubt that there will be additional time for them.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I echo the calls for temperate language in our exchanges in the House and I join in the congratulations to the shadow Leader of the House. I feel that my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is going to be left out in these exchanges. His Privy Counsellorship really must be expedited as a matter of urgency.

As for next week’s business, such as it is, we are happy to support all the efforts to restore the operation of devolved government in Northern Ireland, but my heart bleeds for the poor Conservative Ministers and Back Benchers who will now have to come to the House during their conference. Successive Scottish National party Chief Whips have used the usual channels to communicate the dates of our conferences over the years, and at no point have we been afforded a recess, despite our status as the third party in this place. In fact, the target date—or it may not be the target date—for the Queen’s Speech now is the second day of the SNP conference, and given that none of us has yet mastered the art of bilocation, I would be interested in the recommendations of the Leader of the House for those circumstances.

Given that the House is to continue meeting, thanks in no small part due to the efforts of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), I want to emphasise what my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire said last night. The Standing Orders of this House provide for three Opposition days per Session in the name of the Leader of the third party, and in two years we have had one and a half days. So, however long this Session runs before the next legal Prorogation, the Leader of the House really needs to find time for us to fulfil our role as the third party in the House and the largest party in Scotland, as the Standing Orders of the House, which he considers to be sovereign, require. Knowing how much he cherishes the procedures and customs of this place, I am sure he is the last person who would want to be in breach of either the spirit or the letter of those Standing Orders.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that temperate language is often to be encouraged. He mentioned bilocation. I think Padre Pio, not that long ago canonised, was famed for his ability to be in two places at once, and there is good evidence for this. I am surprised that the SNP do not consider themselves sufficiently saintly to be able to achieve the same and be both at their conference

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

and away from it. The most important point that the hon. Gentleman raised was about the SNP's Opposition day. I will say on behalf of Her Majesty's Government that SNP Members may have an Opposition day any day next week; should they wish to have a vote of confidence, it will be theirs.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Mr Speaker, you will know of the threat that is posed to our countryside in Buckinghamshire and, despite all the rain that has fallen, the drought that has caused the problems with our chalk streams. Will the Leader of the House give us an opportunity, now that we are back in Parliament, to discuss the excellent report by Julian Glover and his team on national parks? We could debate his recommendation that the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty is a suitable subject to receive the protection of national park status.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Anything that my right hon. Friend says is likely to be an excellent idea, so I have a great deal of sympathy for her request for a debate, but I am afraid that I will once again throw it over to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee because it is entirely suitable for that Committee.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House on her elevation to the Privy Council. I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the Backbench Business for next Thursday—two debates, on women's mental health and on the spending of the Ministry of Justice. I remind the House that the Backbench Business Committee is still accepting applications for debates, which can be submitted until 2.30 pm tomorrow for consideration next week. The Committee will need to meet as soon as possible next week on our return.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is an enormously and characteristically helpful intervention from the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee. Members will have heard that 2.30 tomorrow is the deadline for applications.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): We are what we remember. Each of us comprises where we have been, whom we have known and what we have done. But when dementia robs people of all that, they are bewildered and their friends and families are fearful. In this country 850,000 people suffer from dementia, 63,000 of them under the age of 65. It will not be lost on you, Mr Speaker, that 21 September was World Alzheimer's Day. Research into Alzheimer's is still much less than for other major medical problems, so may I ask the Leader of the House for a debate on this subject, which affects so many of our constituents? Hegel said:

"Life has a value only when it has something valuable as its object."

Let it be our object never to forget those who can no longer remember.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have so much sympathy with what my right hon. Friend says. Dementia hits families particularly hard. Sometimes it hits the carers much more than the individual who is suffering from it. All of

us will have known people suffering from dementia and how hard it is for families as they are forgotten by the person they have been closest to, so it is a worthy subject for debate. I am sorry not to be able to promise a debate in Government time, but in Adjournment debate time or Backbench Business time it would certainly have my support if I was still a Back Bencher.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I take the Leader of the House back to his assertion that the 12 Bills that have been started by the Government and are still outstanding are somehow blocked by the House? I offer him one example. The Fisheries Bill is of tremendous importance to my constituents. It passed this House at Second Reading without Division, as I recall. In Committee, only one minor amendment was made to it. There is a broad measure of cross-party support for it, yet it has sat in parliamentary limbo since the end of November. If there is a blockage, that blockage surely is within the Government and not Parliament. Will we get that Bill before the Government try to prorogue again?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making the point. The Government are satisfied that all the Bills that are needed prior to leaving the European Union on 31 October are in place, save for a withdrawal agreement Bill should we get an agreement before that. Therefore, it is not essential that these Bills make further progress. However, I would add that one of the reasons why they have not made progress is that they have been in other cases amended in such a way as not to achieve the object of Government policy.

Mr Carmichael: Fisheries.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman chunters from a sedentary position, "Fisheries". That does not stop the Bill being amended when it comes back either here or in another place. There is no certainty that these Bills will get through without doing things that are contrary to Government policy, and therefore it is unlikely that they will make progress.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I was humbled to be asked in January 2018 to become the world's first loneliness Minister to continue the work at the highest level that our late colleague Jo Cox had championed. On 15 October last year, it was my privilege to publish the Government's loneliness strategy, the foundation for a decade of work ahead. Does the Leader of the House agree that the best way we can talk about Jo's legacy is for there to be an oral statement from the Government on 15 October this year to update the House on progress in implementing the recommendations from the strategy and on a date as close to the anniversary as possible to have a debate in Government time on loneliness so that we can champion the work of those trying to keep society connected and celebrate those famous words from Jo that, even now, we still have more that unites than divides us.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That last point is absolutely true: we all have more that unites us than divides us. I congratulate my hon. Friend who has made a real mark in this area, particularly as the world's first loneliness Minister. The whole House will welcome all that she has done, and continues to do, to build on the legacy of Jo Cox.

People who are lonely are more likely to be readmitted to hospital, visit a GP or go to accident and emergency, enter local authority residential care and perform poorly at work. All that comes at a cost to the individual, communities, employers, and public services, and we want to do everything we can to ease those burdens. Tackling loneliness requires society-wide change, and we have worked in partnership with businesses to capture and share the work they are doing to help to tackle loneliness in the wider community and encourage employers to tackle loneliness among their employees. It is difficult to promise to hold that particular debate in Government time, but if the House is reopened on 14 October with a Queen's Speech, that is the time to raise any issue that right hon. and hon. Members feel is suitable and a good occasion to bring such matters to wider attention.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): My constituent Kayleigh Morgan was the victim of a serial rapist, Dimitris Aspiotis, when working in Corfu. In 2010, he was sentenced to 52 years in prison, so Kayleigh was shocked to learn in the media of his very early release. May we have a statement from the Foreign Secretary about what discussions have been held with Greece about the very early release of convicted rapists and the impact of that on the safety of British women abroad?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This issue must be treated with enormous seriousness, and a 52-year sentence indicates the brutality and horror of what must have happened to the hon. Gentleman's constituent. For Dimitris Aspiotis to be released so soon seems to indicate that the consequences of his action are not being justly imposed on him. I will, of course, bring the matter to the attention of the Foreign Secretary and send a written answer to the hon. Gentleman, and I am glad he has brought this matter to the House's attention.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): May I join the shadow Leader of the House in asking for a debate on the Electoral Commission? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Electoral Commission has referred many people to the police for investigation, including professional people employed by all parties and other organisations, yet those investigations have got nowhere? When a Government body is responsible for referring people to the police, they ought not to do so unless there is good information that there is likely to be a prosecution. On a number of occasions the Electoral Commission has referred people to the police, but there has been no such prosecution.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend raises a matter of the greatest seriousness. The Electoral Commission is publicly funded and must be held accountable for its actions. To say that somebody has been referred to the police leaves a great blot on their reputation and ability to carry out their functions if they are elected to office, because there will be a whiff of suspicion around them. My right hon. Friend is right to say that any suggestion of a police referral must take place only when there is a high likelihood of success. This is more an issue for the Backbench Business Committee, but it is a serious matter.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Leader of the House for illustrating so beautifully why so many of us fought the concept of Parliament being prorogued and the recess. By setting a date for

Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill, he proved that there is business across the House that people want to move forward and work that we could be doing in this place that our constituents would value. Last night I raised the fact that the Government have missed an important reporting deadline in their work to tackle abuse against women, in particular a report to the UN on addressing the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. When will we see that report from the Government, and when does the Leader of the House envisage that the Committee stage of the Bill will take place? Given widespread support for the Bill in its current form, will he commit to the Committee stage being held on the Floor of the House, so that we can all contribute to making this a country where everyone is safe?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very pleased that the hon. Lady welcomes the Government's schedule of business for next week. As I said yesterday, the Domestic Abuse Bill would have been a major part of the Queen's Speech had it been introduced then instead of next week, and the Government are particularly and singularly committed to it. This important Bill will be brought forward to show the Government's intent, and I think the speed of its passage will be no faster or slower if it comes next week than were it to have been included in the Queen's Speech.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): A number of colleagues across the House were in Bangladesh last week, and many of them got to see the plight of the Rohingya. The Government have responded well in providing international aid, but there are 1.3 million displaced people who want to return home. May we have a debate in Government time on what we as a country can do to enable those people to return home to Myanmar in safety and security, and bring this issue to the attention of the world?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The plight of the Rohingya people is one of the great scandals of our time, and that 1.3 million people are displaced is something that the world must be concerned about. This is one area where our overseas aid budget is most properly used. I am sure Ministers will be aware that there are no immediate plans for a debate—I do not want to refer everything to the Backbench Business Committee, but once again this is something that falls into its Chairman's lap.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am pleased that Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill will be next week, but I know that the Leader of the House is a stickler for procedure and doing things correctly. Will he therefore explain to me—a mere novice having been in the House for only 14 years—how the Government have already announced the statutory role of a domestic abuse commissioner, despite the pre-legislative Committee, which I served on with the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) who chairs the Women and Equalities Committee, having recommended that the post should be full time and not for two or three days a week? We also made recommendations about budget and staffing requirements. How was that appointment allowed to be made when the Bill has not gone through Second Reading, Committee stage, Third Reading, or the House of Lords?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady has longer experience in the House than I do by a full Parliament, so I bow to her superior knowledge on procedural matters. I would have thought it welcome that the Government have got on and appointed Nicole Jacobs as the first Domestic Abuse Commissioner. What goes into the Bill and is passed by Parliament will become law and that will include the standing of the post of the commissioner. This is merely an opportunity to get on with things and push ahead, and I would have thought that would be welcome.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): May we have a debate on minimum unit pricing? When it was introduced in Scotland, Ministers said that for England they would await the outcome of that implementation. A report today shows that the implementation of minimum unit pricing in Scotland is benefiting those who are drinking at the risk of their health.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I take everything that my hon. Friend says with the greatest seriousness. She is the most wonderful campaigner and aims to make the lives of people in this country better by everything she does. I particularly admire her support for the family. The issue she raises is crucial, but once again it is much more a matter for the Backbench Business Committee.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): Will the Leader of the House please tell us which Ministers will be taking questions on which days, and whether the ballots are open so that we can submit our questions? Given that the Queen's Speech will apparently be held on 14 October, when will Parliament be prorogued for that occasion?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I understand it, the Chancellor will take questions on Tuesday, and it is normal for a three-day rota to be set. *[Interruption.]* Will it be Monday? It will be available in the Table Office, and I assume that the Prime Minister will make his normal appearance on Wednesday. The Table Office is the right place to go for those questions.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con) *rose—*

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: It is a question of a medical doctor or a doctor of philosophy. I think on this occasion I will take the medical doctor. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is a very distinguished fellow, but he is not a doctor. We will come to him in due course. I call Dr Caroline Johnson.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I know how hard my right hon. Friend works for his constituents, but perhaps there is one he has worked especially hard for, and that is his constituent Max, who has Batten disease and needed Brineura, an important drug for this rare and very unpleasant condition, which ultimately would lead to his death if he did not have the drug. My right hon. Friend asked an urgent question on this before the summer recess, and just after the Prorogation ceremony we heard from NHS England that this drug will now be available. Does he feel that a debate on the rare diseases protocol would be beneficial in ensuring that other people do not have to wait as long as Max?

Mr Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should have explained—I will now do so. The next debate, if it is to have two hours, needs to start at 3 o'clock. If people insist on making long interventions, they must know that they are stopping others. It is as simple and incontrovertible as that.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The issue with Max, who has Batten disease, is one of the greatest difficulty, and I am so pleased that the drug is now being made available, but I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a need for greater debate and discussion on the availability of medicines for rare diseases. Again, I think it is a Backbench Business matter, but the Government are taking it seriously, and I am grateful to NHS England for finding the funding so that Max can get the drug he so needs.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Can we have a debate on the incineration of waste? Many constituents in St Mellons and Rumney are very concerned about the locating of a new waste incinerator and the emissions from vehicles, including big HGVs, going to that plant. I am sure the Leader of the House will agree that this issue will be of interest across the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is an ideal subject for an Adjournment debate, Mr Speaker, and I believe that you are open for applications.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Our parliamentary democracy has taken a battering in the last few years. Will the Leader of the House bring forward legislation in the Queen's speech to ensure that the recommendations of the boundary review are implemented and that we will represent constituencies of equal size and proportion?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The principle that constituencies should have the same number of electors is a very good and important one.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Steady on!

Mr Rees-Mogg: I make an exception for the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, which, for geographical reasons, has slightly fewer constituents, but they are some of the finest people in this country. I would not quite say they count double, but they are heading in that direction. When this matter was being debated some years ago, I thought we should create a rotten borough for him, because he brings so much levity and pleasure to the House through his interjections.

Mr Speaker: Often deliberately.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very sympathetic to what my hon. Friend says. The statutory instrument is prepared but is being considered and will be introduced if there is a suitable opportunity.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): God bless you, Mr Speaker.

I add my voice to that of the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and make a plea for the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill, which is among those private Members' Bills that should see some progress.

May I add, Mr Speaker, that the Chamber today has been a model of civility all afternoon compared with last night? Parliament is back to what it was. May I suggest that to get rid of the toxicity and disorder last night that Acts of Parliament be referred to by their proper names as assented to by the Queen, so that we do not get these tabloid monikers and pejorative titles? The Leader of the House is one of the sticklers and I am sure would like this to happen. Perhaps the Speaker might rule it disorderly. It was the references to an Act that stoked the fires of toxicity and disorder last night.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Stickler though I am—[*Interruption.*] Pardon? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: I cannot believe the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) has forgotten the fact of his pearls of wisdom so soon after he uttered them. Maybe he has a second set of pearls in mind—I do not know—but it may have to wait. I beg the Leader of the House's pardon.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think it is perfectly reasonable to refer to Bills by colloquial names. It is a traditional and perfectly reasonable thing to do. Of course, it is a political matter. People will use the names they use. The forms on language in this House are well set out. As you said earlier, Mr Speaker, nothing disorderly happened yesterday. We have to be really careful. Civility and being polite to each other are important, and when Members on either side are vilified or threats to their safety are made, we must oppose it vigorously, but that is of a very different order of magnitude from robust debate in this House. To conflate the two is a fundamental error and risks making the serious nature of what is happening to some Members appear part of the back and forth of politics. It is not—it is really serious. The term “surrender Bill” is a matter of taste, not a matter of any real importance. I am quite happy with the term “surrender Bill”.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sorry I am not a doctor, Mr Speaker, but I am at least a patient—and patient. The Leader of the House mentioned many SIs, but not the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, which received Royal Assent in May and which requires an SI by the beginning of December in order for opposite-sex couples to enter into a civil partnership by 31 December. Many bookings have provisionally been made. Can he update the House and guarantee that that SI will go through in good time, because many happy couples are expecting it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend—

Tim Loughton: I'm not right honourable.

Mr Rees-Mogg: He can't not be. A gentleman of his seniority! I do apologise. Anyway, he makes an important point. I will take it up with the relevant Secretary of State to see when that statutory instrument is planned.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): As we approach the end of this Session, could I look at one particular issue, which is Government consultations? The Home Office issued a consultation on air rifle safety in October 2017.

It closed in February 2018, but we have still not had a Government response. That is simply not acceptable. Could the Leader of the House look at that consultation period?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is being considered very carefully.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—I advised of my intention to mention him in the Chamber—said in the Chamber on Wednesday:

“The automotive sector, which I met earlier this week, confirmed that it was ready. The retail sector has confirmed that it is ready”—[*Official Report*, 25 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 722.]

The representatives of the industry at that meeting, however, denied this was the case, saying, among many other things, that the claims did not “bear reality”. Similar concerns have been raised by other industries and sectors. Given that the comments were made in this Chamber by the Minister responsible for the UK's Brexit planning and that they appear to bear little relationship to the situation on the ground, will the Government do Parliament the courtesy of scheduling a full debate on this issue to get to the bottom of things and give the right hon. Gentleman a chance to provide much-needed clarity on just what exactly we will be facing in a few weeks?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sure that what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said was entirely accurate. You will always find some remoaner to disagree.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): Yet another ATM in Blantyre in my constituency turned fee-charging in the last few days. The Leader of the House says he wants to find some consensus in the next few weeks. In that case, can we have a debate in Government time about access to cash?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think all of us always want access to cash. It is very important, particularly in rural communities, that access to cash remains possible, as many people want to carry on using traditional forms of payment, so what the hon. Gentleman is calling for is not unreasonable. I am afraid, however, that I will once again refer him to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, although he will have been listening closely earlier and so will know that applications are being received until 2.30 pm tomorrow.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): The fact that the Leader of the House has announced more than a dozen pieces of business disproves the nonsense that we could have had a luxurious five-week Prorogation. There is tons of business that needs to be attended to, including the lack of progress on the Trade Bill. We have a dysfunctional arrangement for scrutinising the trade arrangements with the United States, for example. Those arrangements are continuing, and it is totally unacceptable. When will we get a chance to scrutinise these things according to law?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Trade Bill contains a bit on a customs union, which would be an absolute disaster. It will not come back in that form.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Nine-year-old Ella Roberta died after being admitted to hospital 28 times in three years for acute respiratory problems because she lived 25 metres from a road in south London that exceeded legal pollution limits. When will the Leader of the House find time to debate a clean air Bill and bring forward the Environment Bill to include those provisions, so that 62,000 people do not die prematurely each year?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that very sad case. Obviously, it is important that we have clean air. The Government have an ambitious policy to improve the quality of the air in this country, and we are pushing forward on that.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your words last night acknowledging that it is ethnic minority women who often bear the brunt of words not only by Members in this House, but in columns denigrating them as letterboxes and bank robbers. I want to put to the Leader of the House this point made to me by Matt from Ealing. He says that he was watching the debate last night with despair—I, too, was watching the debate at home very late, as we do not all have a nanny for our childcare—as there was a continual refusal on the part of the Prime Minister to answer any of the questions put to him. He said, “Is it not within the remit for them to answer the questions put to them?” Does the Leader of the House agree that, if the quality of the exchanges were better, there would be more respect outside for us, and we would be able to do our jobs better.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do share the hon. Lady’s concern about the quality of exchanges and the embarrassment of those on the Opposition Benches who saw their leader having his Neil Kinnock moment yesterday.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Leader of the House make time for my now de-prorogued Bill on access to radiotherapy treatment? It is wrong surely that cancer sufferers should have to travel day after day, week after week, for three-hour round trips for cancer treatment. Would it not be right to place satellite units in places such as Kendal, so that we can have longer lives and shorter journeys?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The general point on private Members’ Bills is that, if we get to a new Session, there will be more Fridays, a new ballot and the opportunity for Members to bring forward their bills. That would be the best way to go about it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Would it not improve the atmosphere in all our debates in the House if we returned to an older tradition and took a self-denying ordinance refusing to clap?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, yes and yes.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): By his own admission, the Leader of the House is not very familiar with nappies or how they work, but I am sure that he is familiar with my Nappies (Environmental Standards) Bill. Will he agree to meet me to look at when we can get it a Second Reading? We might even be able to bring him a reusable nappy from TotsBots in Queenslie.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I have a general rule which I am happy to tell the House: as Leader of the House, I will meet any Member who wants to see me to discuss nappies or any other subject that comes to mind. It is important that hon. and right hon. Members have access to people, and I know, Mr Speaker, that you think the same.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): If I can start by asking the Leader of the House to pass on my congratulations to his niece, who, I gather, was selected for Stafford last night. I am slightly disappointed that she is not standing against me again given the 2017 result.

On a more serious note, we both raised at Prime Minister’s questions before the summer recess the case of my constituent Jake Ogborne and access to the drug Spinraza. It has been raised a number of times in various different forums in this House. What does the Leader of the House think that we can do to try to make sure that Jake’s case is raised again?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I thank the hon. Lady for her characteristically generous words? That is very much appreciated and, as my neighbour in Somerset, it is kind of her. I will certainly pass that on to Theodora. I am now bound by collective responsibility, but my views on Spinraza have not changed since I became Leader of the House. She has quite rightly raised this issue, and I will write to the Secretary of State for Health making the point that she has made.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 2719 celebrating the football career and life of Fernando Ricksen, the former captain of Rangers Football Club, who died last week as a result of a long battle against motor neurone disease?

[That this House notes with the deepest sadness the passing of Fernando Ricksen, the former captain of Rangers Football Club and Netherlands International who died on 18 September 2019 at the age of 43 after a heroic and brave battle with the life shortening nerve and brain illness Motor Neurone Disease; recognises his huge contribution to football, winning titles in the Netherlands with Fortune Sittard and AZ Alkmaar, seven trophies including two league titles in Scotland with Rangers FC before going on to win UEFA Cup and UEFA Super Cup with Zenit St Petersburg in 2008; pays tribute to the brave and inspiring way he fought against his illness both raising awareness and funds for the Fernando Ricksen Foundation which aims to help others suffering from the incurable disease; and extends sincere sympathy to his wife Veronika, his daughter Isabella and all his family, friends and in the football family who are mourning his loss.]

May we have a statement or a debate on how the state can support those with this illness?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I understand that a foundation has been set up in honour of Mr Ricksen to raise funds to help people and to have further research into these diseases. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that motor neurone disease is a particularly horrible illness and one that the health service will need to look at with importance. I will pass on his comments to the Secretary of State.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I commend the Leader of the House for agreeing to meet all Members. I have always found that, if any Minister refuses to meet

a Member, a diet of 10 written parliamentary questions a day until further notice soon does the trick—that is just a tip for newer Members. However, on the issue of Prorogation, I understand why the Leader of the House said he cannot give us the date because of his consultations with Black Rod about the arrangements for state opening, but can he at least confirm for the benefit of the House—I am sure he can—that the Government do not intend to prorogue next week?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First, on written questions, I think I put down more than 300 written questions on the European arrest warrant. It did not necessarily get me what I wanted, but it certainly kept somebody busy. Prorogation will meet the judgment of the Court and, therefore, will be the time necessary to move to a Queen's Speech, and no more.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Leader of the House has already dingied my request to have my supervised drug consumption Bill heard in the House, but could he instead, as an alternative strategy, ask Ministers in the Home Office whether a statutory instrument could be laid to create an exemption to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to allow Glasgow to get on with the job of saving lives?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is an opportunity for issues exactly like that to be raised, and I will always pass on Members' comments and requests for statutory instruments to the relevant Secretary of State. Of course I will do that.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Today's urgent question on the arms trade to Saudi Arabia indicates that there is a bigger issue here. Will the Government schedule a longer debate in Government time, and will the Leader of the House, in particular, consider turning the Committees on Arms Export Controls into a stand-alone Committee, which is in his gift?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Very few things are within my gift that specifically; I think that is in other people's gift as well. The issue was raised; there was an urgent question. The hon. Gentleman knows how to ask for Standing Order No. 24 debates and how to go to the Backbench Business Committee. However, the Government have announced their schedule of business for next week.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): When can we have a debate on the strategic road network in the north-west, particularly the M65 extension through to the M1? Perhaps the Leader of the House could advise me how best to pursue this, either through his good offices, or through the office of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin).

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am getting slightly repetitive at this stage, but I think the best opportunity would be during the Queen's Speech, once we have a new Session of Parliament and when there is time—days of debate—for Members to raise, with a Minister present, really serious and important issues, and particularly ones relating to infrastructure. I hope the hon. Gentleman will do that.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The collapse of Thomas Cook has deprived around 300 people in my constituency of their livelihoods. I have been contacted by a Thomas Cook employee suggesting that some of the figures used by the Transport Secretary were incorrect and, moreover, that tens of millions of pounds were stripped from the business just hours before it became insolvent. Can we please have a debate on this important issue?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sorry to hear of the job losses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is always a blow to the individuals concerned when businesses fail. It seems that really serious questions have been raised about the way money was taken out of Thomas Cook and about the payments that were made, and other, more senior Ministers than I have made these points as well. I unquestionably believe in free markets, but free markets require people to behave properly and to view the companies they are running as a trust, rather than as something that can simply be stripped of its assets and run dry. There is therefore a very good argument for what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I hope he will have his application in to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee by 2.30 tomorrow.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent whose husband was declined a credit card because their bank classed a car lease as unsecured debt, when it is clearly secured debt. Yet she herself was able to get a credit card from the same bank, which is illogical. As the ombudsman says, banks can set rules as they see fit. My constituent would like a Government statement on how we can set more competent credit assessment rules for banks so that they can be held to account.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think that really is a matter for the Governor of the Bank of England, but it might be worth taking it up with the about-to-be-elected Chairman of the Treasury Committee, who may be able to call him in to ask him about the important question of credit control by banks.

Mr Speaker: And that election will take place in the course of October, as I suspect the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) will know.

Points of Order

2.59 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Supreme Court told us with great clarity this week that accountability lies at the heart of parliamentary democracy. I seek to know what resorts we have when the Prime Minister respects no boundaries in his tactics, language and conduct—and does that to avoid or deflect accountability. Could you advise me, therefore, on the applicability of an impeachment motion or, alternatively, censure by the House relating to the conduct of the Prime Minister?

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Lady for her point of order and for her characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intention to raise it. There are various ways in which right hon. and hon. Members can seek to debate the conduct of Ministers and, indeed, of others on the Floor of the House. My suggestion is that she visit the Table Office, where the Clerks will be ready to advise her in more detail on the options open to her.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Back in March, I was invited to visit Sufra NW London food bank to understand the work it is taking part in on behalf of my constituents. I followed the parliamentary protocol of informing the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) that I would be visiting Sufra, as it is in her constituency. It therefore came as quite a surprise that the Brent Central Labour party and Brent Momentum tweeted an identical picture of six men saying that they had heard I was planning a photo op and would be going along to make their feelings known. Neither my office nor Sufra had advised anyone of the meeting.

I will not impugn the reputation of another Member, but can you advise me, Mr Speaker? If any Member or, indeed, the staff in their parliamentary office was responsible for leaking information about the whereabouts of another Member, what action would the House take against them?

Mr Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but even if he does not, I cannot possibly be expected to know the circumstances that he has just described. That is the first point. Secondly, although he has kindly told the House that he informed the hon. Lady of his intention to raise the matter, I have not heard her viewpoint on it. Manifestly, it cannot be here

and now, at 3.01 on Thursday afternoon, a matter for adjudication by the Chair. I should have thought that was readily apparent.

The hon. Gentleman has made his point and registered his displeasure. I am sorry if he has felt ill served by the way in which he has been treated or by the reaction to his visit, but palpably it is not a matter for me now. We do have other business that is quite heavily subscribed, which he might concede is more pressing.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You often advise Members of this House that they should persist, persist, persist, so I shall attempt to persist. I wrote to the Prime Minister seven weeks ago seeking a reply on the need for compensation to be paid to those affected by the contaminated blood scandal, on the basis that one victim was dying every four days. I asked the Leader of the House three weeks ago if he would assist me in getting at least the courtesy of a reply and sent my letters to him. Since then, I have heard nothing. I have not had the courtesy of a reply. I wonder what your view is, Mr Speaker, about a Member of Parliament writing to the Prime Minister and his not being able, with the whole range of the civil service at his disposal, to at least provide an acknowledgement of the letter.

Mr Speaker: Frankly, I am astonished by that. There is a long-established convention in this place that questions to Ministers are answered in a timely and, preferably, a substantive fashion. The corollary—I say this as much for the benefit of those who want our proceedings to be intelligible as to Members of the House who may know already—is that letters that are sent to Ministers should be timeously answered.

The Leader of the House at any given time has always accepted the responsibility to chase progress on these matters. I hope the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) will forgive me if I say that the role of Leader of the House could almost have been invented for the benefit of the right hon. Gentleman. I know that he will take his responsibility in this matter extremely seriously. I hope that he will chase a reply.

I also say to the hon. Lady, as I happen to be very familiar with the issue—although the principle applies whatever the issue—and to have granted several urgent questions to her over the years that she has been an indefatigable campaigner on the matter, that whether or not she gets a reply—substantive or not; satisfactory or not—if she wishes when we return to pursue the matter on the Floor of the House, she will get the chance to pursue it all right.

Principles of Democracy and the Rights of the Electorate

Mr Speaker: We come now to the general debate on principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate. We have until 5 o'clock. I have spoken to the Minister, who has undertaken to try to deliver an economical speech, although of course he does have the Floor and it is important that we hear the Government's position.

3.4 pm

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate.

This is a Government who believe in letting the British people exercise their democratic rights, and as Minister for the Cabinet Office my responsibilities include the smooth running and safeguarding of our elections and ensuring that every elector has the opportunity to cast their vote.

Since we came to office in 2010, we have made significant progress to give more people a say. Through the implementation of individual electoral registration, we have grown the electoral roll to nearly 47 million people—the biggest that it has ever been. People across the country are now able to go online to ensure that they have the opportunity to cast their votes. We have worked to open up the franchise for homeless people and increased accessibility for those with disabilities. We have committed to introducing voter ID, to protect the ballot and to stop those who want to steal other people's identities and votes. Voters deserve to have confidence that their elections are secure and protected from electoral fraud.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Can the Minister tell me what evidence he has that introducing voter ID reduces the amount of fraud more than it reduces the participation of legitimate voters?

Oliver Dowden: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I would recommend that he read the Electoral Commission's report on that subject. I frankly find it astounding that Opposition Members should think that we should not have identity for voting. People in major democracies such as Canada are aghast that people can turn up at our polling stations with no evidence of their identity.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Oliver Dowden: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): To help the Minister on this point, I can tell him that the very first moment that I get a chance to sit at my desk I will be asking him to come to the House for an end-of-day Adjournment debate, in which I will give him evidence from my constituents of the kind of practice that is going on in my constituency, in their view, which I am quite sure will stand up to the requirement to make the changes that he would advocate.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will you take it to the police?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe for his intervention. I always welcome his help and support in relation to evidence, and look forward to that discussion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Oliver Dowden: I will give way once more, but am conscious of the need to make progress.

Mr Baker: The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) asked, "Will you take it to the police?" I am happy to tell the House today that in the 2015 election, my agent and I told our candidates—because there was a district council election at the same time as mine—that if there was any evidence of malfeasance we would be the first to take it to the police; so I found myself knocking on the door of the police station with the Liberal Democrat candidate and my agent, to report somebody who was subsequently arrested. Unfortunately he was not prosecuted, and he was one of mine. I will not have any abuse of the electoral system, and although I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, I must tell him that we have got to sort this mess out.

Oliver Dowden: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There is nothing further that I can add to that, but I noticed that the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) was seeking my eye.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Is the Minister aware that in Northern Ireland, as a result of the increase in proxy votes and postal votes, to which the Electoral Commission has turned a blind eye, and which is done on an industrial scale by Sinn Féin, who look at the marked register, find out who has not voted in the last election, visit them and get the forms filled in, at least two members of the SDLP probably lost their seats to electoral fraud in the last election? Will he take that matter up with the Electoral Commission, which seems to have no desire to address that issue?

Oliver Dowden: Obviously, the Electoral Commission Northern Ireland is independent, but the right hon. Gentleman has made his point very clearly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Oliver Dowden: If Members will forgive me, I will make a little more progress, and then I will give way to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown).

We are working to reduce intimidation around the ballot box, and intimidation of those in public life. I am sure the whole House will agree that the latter is a deeply worrying trend that we must reverse. Indeed, earlier this year the Government legislated to prevent candidates in local elections from having to declare their addresses on the ballot paper. We have consulted on, and committed ourselves to, a new electoral offence to prevent people from intimidating candidates and campaigners.

However—and this, really, is the essence of the debate—more important than the preparations for an election are the consequences of that election. One seismic democratic event has dominated our proceedings since I

[*Oliver Dowden*]

was elected to the House in 2015, and that, of course, is our referendum on membership of the European Union. It was something that we had promised in the manifesto on which I was elected, and I well recall the deep scepticism of voters that we would ever deliver on it. Frankly, I do not blame the voters. Other parties had been promising referendums for years: Labour in 2005, the Liberal Democrats in 2008, and the Greens in 2010. In fact, one way or another, every major political party in Britain fought an election between 2005 and 2015 with a pledge to hold a referendum on our relationship with Europe.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Earlier, the Minister talked about how the Government had been extending the franchise. One of the consequences of the in-out EU referendum was an issue involving the franchise: the UK Government did not think that EU citizens were worthy of a vote. In Scotland, in the 2014 referendum, we did give EU citizens a vote, because we recognised the value of their contribution. What message does the Minister think is being sent out by not giving those EU citizens a vote?

Oliver Dowden: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the parliamentary franchise that was applied to the referendum was the same parliamentary franchise that applies in other elections, because there was not a case for changing it.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; he is being very generous.

It is great that we are celebrating the extension of the franchise and that more people are voting in all elections, but does my hon. Friend agree that one issue is very concerning? If our democracy is to work well, citizens must have impartial information. They need to be well informed in order to make informed choices. Websites such as that of 38 Degrees are not providing information about the work of MPs in an impartial way. Will my hon. Friend agree to work with the Hansard Society, which does such an excellent job, to demystify the work of MPs in this place so that our constituents understand it and can make informed decisions when they come to the ballot box?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend has made an excellent suggestion. I am sitting next to the Minister for the Constitution, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster). We would have to proceed on an all-party basis, but I should be happy for us to take that suggestion further.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Oliver Dowden: I will take a couple more interventions, but then I really must make some progress. I will give way to the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer).

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister. He is absolutely right: all the political parties have, at one time or another, made a commitment to a referendum. In their 2010 manifestos, the three major parties gave a commitment to hold a

referendum on what became the Lisbon treaty, better known as the European constitution, although unfortunately the majority of MPs did not comply with those manifesto commitments. Does the Minister agree, however, that the parties that support a referendum, either in the House or in their manifestos, should accept the result when they lose?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman has made an excellent point. As I was about to say, I supported remain during the referendum campaign, but from the early hours of the morning, when we received the result, I was completely clear about the fact that my job, as a Member of Parliament, and the job of the Government was to deliver on it, and that is exactly what we should be doing.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): May I return the Minister to the subject of EU citizens? When I am out campaigning in the streets of Edinburgh South West in a British general election, EU citizens often come up to me and ask why they are allowed to vote in a Scottish parliamentary election but not in a British general election. Given that EU citizens make a net contribution to the British economy, what possible justification is there for not allowing them to vote for the Government of the whole United Kingdom rather than just the Government of Scotland?

Oliver Dowden: It is generally the case that there are not reciprocal voting rights, and our position aligns with that of virtually every other European state in that regard, so I do not think we are outriders in the way that the hon. and learned Lady suggests.

People were surprised that we actually delivered on that referendum. We were not the only ones to support holding it. In the Lobby, we won by 544 votes to 53 to give people a say, which is 10:1. Indeed, seven of the eight Liberal Democrat MPs voted for it. That was quite a strong showing, really, for a party that now says that the outcome of the referendum does not count. After we voted for the referendum, we went to the public and made our case. Did any of us make the argument then, as is now being advanced by some, that the referendum was merely advisory? No, we were absolutely clear that this was in or out, remain or leave. Every vote was equal, every vote would count, and whatever the outcome, we would respect it: no caveats, no small print.

As I said to the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton, I supported remain in the campaign but—do you know what—I accepted immediately that we had lost. The British people took a different view, and that was their right. From the moment that result was declared I accepted it, because one thing I believe passionately is that politicians do not get to choose which votes to respect. When we ask the public for an answer and they give us one, we should simply get on and deliver it, even if it was not the result that was desired. The House seemed overwhelmingly to accept this, and it invoked article 50 with very little dissent. Immediately afterwards, we had an election in which 80% of the people voted for parties whose manifestos explicitly supported the United Kingdom leaving the EU. This represented a second democratic event relating to our membership of the European Union and a second mandate from the British people to leave.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Labour party manifesto, for which many millions of people voted, explicitly said that we would respect the outcome of the referendum but that we would absolutely work against a no-deal Brexit.

Oliver Dowden: I say to the hon Gentleman that a deal was put forward by the last Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), and I voted for that deal three times. I do not remember the hon. Gentleman being in the Lobby with me.

Since that moment of unity on the outcome of the general election campaign, parliamentarians have got stuck. We have talked endlessly about this. There have been hours of debates, motions, votes and Committees, and extraordinary parliamentary manoeuvres on all sides. Three whole years have ticked by, and while we have been double-checking the finer points of “Erskine May”, the public have been wondering what on earth we have been doing in this place.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): The Minister has talked about the spirit of unity. Will he join me in congratulating the 11 members of Her Majesty’s major Opposition party who are attending this debate? Having forced us back after demanding that Prorogation should not happen, the rest have all gone home.

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I remember the cries of outrage on Prorogation and the demands that Parliament should return because we had so much to discuss. Opposition Members were desperate to discuss these things, yet here we are, mid-afternoon on a Thursday, two days in, and I think I can count the number of Labour Members present on the fingers of one hand.

None of us came into Parliament to avoid making decisions, to duck the issues or to indulge ourselves in parliamentary processes, but to the outside world this appears to be exactly what the House is doing.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If, as the right hon. Gentleman says, we were not elected to avoid making decisions, why did he seek to support a Prorogation when we still had 12 Bills outstanding?

Oliver Dowden: We could spend forever rehashing the political and legal arguments relating to Prorogation. The Government have accepted the outcome of the Supreme Court, although we disagree with it, and that has put an end to the matter. I do not think it will serve the House to discuss it any further. That is why we are back in this place.

To the outside world, all the House appears to do is say no: no to a second referendum; no to the single market; no to a customs union; no, no and no again to a deal. Perhaps most bizarrely of all, Her Majesty’s Opposition urge no to a no confidence motion. It is clear that we have reached an impasse. This Parliament becomes more entrenched and less effective by the day.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Ind): The Minister will know that the closest the House came to saying yes was when we held indicative votes. They took place over approximately four sitting days and we managed to get closer to an agreement than the previous Prime Minister had done in about two years, ignoring the House when

it said that it did not support her withdrawal agreement. Is one option for the Government to explore again across the House what can find consensus? If that consensus was on a deal, but a deal to be put back to the people in a referendum, would the Minister accept the House’s yes to that step forward?

Oliver Dowden: The right hon. Lady is a passionate campaigner for a second referendum, but I seem to recall that the only amendment that passed was the Brady amendment, which sought to remove the backstop. That is precisely the position that the Prime Minister is pursuing in his negotiations.

Justine Greening: We are back here because Britain is in crisis. We have not prorogued or had a recess because of that. I simply ask the Minister an important question: if the House agreed to pass the Prime Minister’s deal, subject to a referendum, would the Government accept that?

Oliver Dowden: No, it is not the Government’s position to support a second referendum.

Justine Greening: You’re the one saying “no” there.

Oliver Dowden: For the simple reason that I honestly do not believe that a second referendum would solve anything. I have yet to hear people who voted leave proposing a second referendum.

Mr Carmichael: Will the Minister give way?

Oliver Dowden: I am answering the right hon. Lady’s point, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me.

The only proponents of a second referendum are those who wish to reverse the result of the first. If we were then in a position whereby we had one vote for leave in a referendum and one vote for remain in another referendum, how would that in any way solve the situation? Surely a better solution is to agree a deal and for the House to pass that deal so that the country can move on, which it so desperately wishes to do.

Sammy Wilson: Does the Minister accept that some of those who call for a second referendum have even made it clear that if it gave a result that they did not like, they would not accept it anyway?

Oliver Dowden: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

The Government have offered yet another electoral event to try to solve the matter. We have been clear that we wish to have a general election; so we could go back to the public a third time. However, I do not suspect that, in the end, the result would be any different—people want us to get on with this. The consequences of ignoring the principle of the electorate’s right to have their decisions implemented are only too real. People are losing faith. A recent poll found that 77% of people say that their trust in MPs across the political spectrum has fallen since the Brexit vote. Another found that opinions of our governing system are at their lowest for 15 years—lower even than during the expenses scandal. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that we do not want that to continue.

[*Oliver Dowden*]

What are we, as MPs, here for? We are here to represent the people. We are not here for ourselves, but for the people who elected us—the people whom we serve—and to vote, decide and deliver. When we cannot do that, we must surely accept that the right and proper thing to do is submit ourselves again to the electorate. We go back to our constituents and ask the electorate for the chance to serve them again or let them choose someone else. That is how our Parliament is supposed to work when it faces gridlock—to refresh itself through a general election—and that is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has twice offered the opportunity to have that general election, but now we are faced with the most extraordinary “no” of all. The Leader of the Opposition has twice said no to calling that general election.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): The Prime Minister put forward the chance of an election, and that election would have taken place before the European Council. It would have been possible at that European Council for the Prime Minister, whether the current Leader of the Opposition or the present Prime Minister, to propose a change and to get the deal they want. Why does my right hon. Friend think the Opposition are so afraid of having that opportunity to be in government and to attend that Council?

Oliver Dowden: I think my right hon. Friend answers his own question. It is only too clear that there is only one reason why the Opposition do not wish to have an election: they do not believe they will win it. They wish to keep this Parliament in a state of suspended animation until they think they may have a chance to win a general election.

Indeed, even as the Opposition continue to frustrate a general election, leaflets from the Labour party are dropping through voters’ letterboxes demanding an election. It is an extraordinary state of affairs, and this from a Leader of the Opposition who has spent his life going weak at the knees for revolutionaries. He suddenly seems rather scared of change. Apparently there is a world to win and nothing to lose but chains, but maybe just not right now. Is it not the truth that the public have had enough of this dither and delay? They are saying “enough,” and we are saying “enough.” If the Opposition do not have the courage to say what they are for, they should at least have the courage to ask the electorate what they think of that.

Conservative Members have always recognised that the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate matter. I am proud to be in a Conservative party that, time and again, has embraced reform to give people their say and has represented them effectively. We are the party of Disraeli’s second Reform Act, which helped enfranchise the working classes; of the law that gave all women the same right to vote as men; of the first female Member of Parliament to take her seat; and, of course, of two great female Prime Ministers.

In this case, the principle also unlocks something far more practical: 17.4 million people gave us an instruction three years ago to leave the EU, and they want us to

move on. I am conscious that Mr Deputy Speaker also wishes me to move on, so I will wind up my remarks very shortly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): We are obviously up against time. The spokespeople for the other parties need to come in, and 14 Back Benchers also want to speak. I am concerned that we will run out of time very quickly.

Oliver Dowden: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We want to get on with our job as legislators and move on to the things that people want us to focus on: their hospitals, their schools and the safety of their streets. That is what this Government are determined to do.

I commend this motion to the House.

3.28 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I regret that we are having yet another general debate, rather than making progress on all the outstanding legislation. After all, is it not an important principle of democracy and the expectation of our electorate who sent us here that we make progress on passing legislation?

The principles of democracy are important, and I welcome the topic of this debate. I also welcome the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) back to the Front Bench following the birth of her daughter.

In the current political climate we, as elected Members of this House, must demonstrate our commitment to upholding the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate. I remind the House that we would all do well to conduct this debate in a civil manner and to remember that words matter. I am sure all Members would agree that yesterday was not a good day for this House. Let us acknowledge now that the language coming from two sides is throwing petrol on the toxic nature of debate in our country. It is as wrong to call someone a fascist simply for having voted leave as it is to call someone a traitor simply for having voted remain.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con) *rose*—

Cat Smith: Given Mr Deputy Speaker’s earlier remarks, I will give way only once.

Mrs Moon: It is my hon. Friend’s use of the word “fascist” that got me. I have just had a message from one of our female colleagues, whose office has been attacked and has had to be closed down by the police because a demonstrator was shouting, “Fascist”. I have also read on Twitter:

“Addressing journalists in Westminster, a senior government source has warned that abuse of MPs will get worse if they pursue a second referendum: ‘What do they think is going to happen?’”

Does my hon. Friend agree that such language causes risk and danger to us all on a daily basis?

Cat Smith: I am chilled and shocked by what my hon. Friend has just said, which reflects the language that I think we all know is being used out there in communities.

We in this House must show leadership and do better. It is as inflammatory to call somebody thick for having voted leave as it is to call someone a surrenderer for having voted remain. None of this toxic language makes the world a better place; it just makes the problems worse. However this current crisis ends, we all have to live together, whether we voted leave or remain, or did not vote at all.

Mr Wragg: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Cat Smith: I will not give way again, because I am conscious that the time remaining is very tight and that a number of Back Benchers wish to speak.

Words matter because they have consequences. I am genuinely concerned that the disgraceful, demeaning and defamatory language that is being used in this House will only whip up more division in our country and communities.

I am drawn to something that the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said in her final speech as Prime Minister, namely that

“ill words that go unchallenged are the first step on a continuum towards ill deeds—towards a much darker place where hatred and prejudice drive not only what people say but also what they do.”

It seems fitting that those words, which I completely agree with, were said by a Prime Minister whom I opposed, because it is so important that we do not lose the ability to disagree with each other without demeaning each other.

In the context of this week’s historic Supreme Court ruling, this debate is a timely reminder of why we must respect these crucial principles and rights. It cannot be right that the Prime Minister was found by the highest court in our land to have unlawfully shut down our Parliament, suspending democratic accountability and attempting to gag opposition to his reckless plan to crash out of the European Union without a deal. All 11 judges concluded that there was no reason for the Prime Minister to have shut down Parliament and ruled that his actions were unlawful. This attempt to undermine our democracy shows that the Prime Minister is unfit for office and he really should resign immediately. Anything less than resignation would damage the authority of the office of Prime Minister and further undermine public confidence in our political system.

What kind of lesson does this teach our young people? How can we, as elected representatives, expect our constituents to comply with the law when the most senior person in public office acts unlawfully and appears to show no remorse on such an important issue? As the shadow Minister for youth affairs, I speak with young people up and down the country. Many share a sense of anger over the criminalisation of their music and the narrative coming from certain parts of the media that drill music is behind the tragic surge in violence. How are we as politicians in any position to accuse drill artists of glorifying violence when politicians themselves are not held responsible for the violent language they use and the impact it has on the culture and climate of debate?

During this debate, the Government have said that they want a general election. We can all agree on that. The Opposition would like an election at the earliest possible opportunity. However, we cannot trust this Government and this Prime Minister not to use this

crisis of their own making to drive our country over a no-deal cliff edge in five weeks’ time. If the Government want an election, they should get an extension and then we will have an election.

The only way to respect the electorate when the election comes is to offer the public a vote on Brexit, putting control back into the hands of people in a confirmatory referendum, with a real choice between a credible leave option or remain, but I do not believe for one moment that resolving Brexit or “getting it done” will bring our country back together. Until we acknowledge that the result of the EU referendum in 2016 was not just about the EU, we cannot heal our country. In our heart of hearts, we must surely know that that vote was not solely about trading relationships, single markets or courts of justice.

We need to start talking about why people feel so left behind or have no sense of hope, and why people do not feel security in their jobs or in their homes. We need to start talking about poverty. We need to start talking about the way in which the Government systems treat people as numbers and not as people. We need to start talking about the personal independence payment and universal credit, and why people are being judged fit for work just days before they die. Unless we heal this country by addressing those huge inequalities—regional inequalities and class inequalities—it will not matter if it is a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit, and it will not matter if Brexit does not happen at all, because the real divisions in our communities will still be there.

Let me be controversial: Brexit is not the biggest issue facing our country. We would be a lot closer to the real biggest issue if we looked at the reasons why Brexit happened. What this country needs is a Government who are serious about ending austerity and about providing hope and a decent future for people. Were we having this debate in normal political times, I would have criticised the Government for their track record—their oppressive and mandatory voter ID, unfair constituency boundary changes and the individual electoral registration that has resulted in up to 9.4 million people not being registered correctly on the electoral roll. Those are just a few examples of key policy areas where over the past decade this Government have tried to manipulate our democracy and limit the rights of the electorate. However, I will focus instead on the practical solutions that this House could implement not only to uphold but to enhance our democracy. I believe that one way to achieve that would be to reform the franchise.

For years, Opposition parties and, to their credit, some Government Members have called on the Government to extend the right to vote to 16 and 17-year-olds. This would open up our democracy to a generation of young people, giving them a say on the future of their country and demonstrating that we take their views seriously. Ahead of the most important general election for a generation, I urge the Government to consider their position on that.

Yesterday, at the Labour party conference, a motion was passed furthering our policy to grant voting rights to all UK residents, because people who live here and contribute in our communities deserve a say on the future of this country. Will the Government adopt Labour’s new policy and massively expand the rights of the electorate?

[Cat Smith]

We need to increase voter registration radically. The study published today by the Electoral Commission shows that up to 9.4 million people are not registered correctly to vote—an increase of 1 million voters since the commission's previous estimate. It is an unprecedented democratic crisis, which the Government have done nothing to address. In fact, the Prime Minister even tried to fix the election date to make it harder for students to take part. What kind of message does this send to our young people, who already think that politics is failing them? Instead, all political parties should be using their social media platforms and encouraging their activists on doorsteps to encourage voters to register to ahead of the general election.

We also need policy reform. The current system of individual electoral registration actively punishes mobile, marginalised and vulnerable voter groups and makes it harder for them to take part in our democratic process. To unlock millions of potential voters, the Government should examine the use of Government data to place people the electoral roll automatically. That would help to ensure that every eligible voter can have their say.

We also need to stop big money running our politics and corrupting our democracy, which is why Labour will ban donations to political parties from anyone who is not registered to pay tax in the UK. If people do not want to contribute to our public services, they should not be able to influence our democracy. This is what democratic principles look like. So whatever the motives behind today's debate—and the topic is welcome—our country is at a turning point, and it is the duty of us all to respect the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is clearly a lot of pressure on time to speak in this debate. After the Scottish National party Front Bencher has spoken, I will impose a formal time limit of five minutes. Before that, I call the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who I am sure will also respect the five-minute limit.

3.40 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I was very pleased earlier today that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) acknowledged that there is a common sense of good motive among Members of Parliament from all parts of the House. I confess that that has not always been reflected in the tone of many of the debates that I have attended, which has been a cause of some sorrow to me, because I believe that there is a huge amount of common ground in this debate on the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate. Indeed, we were elected to Parliament to uphold those very rights.

I think most of us have a common dream—a dream of a society that is ever more prosperous and free; virtuous or, if not, at least seeking to become more virtuous; and happy, with people pursuing their goals and flourishing to their fullest extent, not trapped in poverty. The shadow Minister talked about the inhumanity and bureaucracy under this Government. I ask her

please to read the Centre for Social Justice reports at the time leading up to the 2010 election, because they show that the state is never an instrument of kindness and compassion under any Government. It is always rule-bound and it is always inhumane. One of the things we all must do, which is not the topic of this debate, is to work out how to enable all the wonderful public servants in all our public services to be freer to express the compassion that they personally feel for other human beings. Members will find on the record a speech I made some time ago on just this subject in relation to the personal independence payment.

Now, I believe that democracy is the foundation of this common dream, and that foundation of democracy is something that I feel very deeply about: the moral, legal and political equality of every person. Every single person, irrespective of their actual merits, should be treated by our systems as morally, legally and politically equal. Somebody mentioned boundary changes earlier. My constituency happens to represent about the right number of people, but some constituencies are way too large and some are way too small. That does not reflect political equality.

Democracy ought not to be idolised. Goodness knows that things have gone wrong in the midst of this political crisis. I have referred to the economic crisis many times; I believe that we are in a profound crisis of political economy that goes way beyond the topic of any one particular debate. The fundamental issue at stake, though, is that we need to be able to restrain the coercive power of the state peacefully, at the ballot box.

I want to quote Karl Popper, a very important philosopher who started off on the left. I believe he was a Marxist who fled from Marxism when one of his friends was killed in a riot and the people organising it had no sympathy, saying that you had to break some eggs to make an omelette. At that point, he started thinking about whether communism was in fact scientific. Popper said—I paraphrase his remarks slightly to reflect the spirit of the day—that “You can choose whatever name you like for the two types of government, and I personally call the type of government which can be removed peacefully at the ballot box ‘democracy’, and the other ‘tyranny’.” And that is the fundamental point. The public must be able to withdraw their consent from a system of government, and have it removed and replaced with a system that they prefer. We need a general election now, because this House has clearly withdrawn its consent from today's Government. The Government should therefore fall, and we should have a general election. It is unconstitutional—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) grumbles from a sedentary position. I cannot hear him, but I will take an intervention if he wishes to make one.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Surely the point is that what we get with a general election is a change of Government. The hon. Gentleman is talking about a system of government, which is a quite different thing.

Mr Baker: I am talking about both. I am talking about the principle of democracy, which is the stability that comes from both the Government and the system enjoying democratic legitimacy expressed through the ballot box.

My second point is about the European Union. I am here today, although I care about many things, because of the way that the European Union constitution was handled. It was put to referendums in Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Austria, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Belgium, Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Germany and Finland, all of which said yes. I had read the constitution and I knew that when the referendum came I should vote against it because it was too bureaucratic and therefore, I thought, likely to be inhumane. When it went to France and the Netherlands, they said no, and so referendums were cancelled in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and, yes, the United Kingdom.

But what did the European Union and those who govern it do? They did not change course and say, "It turns out we can't get this system through the democratic consent of the peoples of Europe, so we must take another course." As anyone who has read Open Europe's side-by-side comparison of the Lisbon treaty, which replaced the European constitution, next to that constitution will know, they are functionally equivalent. What they did was an absolute democratic outrage. They changed the constitution of France to avoid a referendum and they made Ireland vote twice. That is why I am in politics.

The fundamental issue at stake today—

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I get the impression that my hon. Friend is on his peroration, so I cannot resist adding a historical footnote on the Lisbon treaty. When a number of us argued that we ought to have a referendum on the Lisbon treaty in the United Kingdom, one party said that we should not have a referendum on that—we should have an in/out referendum on our membership of the European Union. That party was the Liberal Democrats. Where are they on that position today?

Mr Baker: Of course, as my right hon. Friend knows, they are now committed to always ignoring a leave result. That, too, is an outrage, but at least they are clear about it, and I feel confident that we could rely on them to abide by it.

The fundamental point is that the people must get the Government they vote for, and they must not get the Government they did not vote for but cannot get rid of. This is a fundamental point related to the dreams we all have of a better society. It is about the dignity of the individual and the right of every person to determine their future peacefully at the ballot box.

3.46 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): If the worst thing the Irish could say of the European Union is that it made them vote twice, I can imagine they have a lot worse things to say about their relationship and their union with England.

This week, we had a sterling reminder from the United Kingdom Supreme Court that in the UK we live in a constitutional democracy with checks and balances on Executive power. We were also reminded that so long as Scotland remains part of this Union, Scots law and the Scottish judiciary are deserving of respect—because let us not forget that the 11 UK Supreme Court justices

followed the unanimous decision of the three judges in Scotland's highest court, the Inner House of the Court of Session. In Scotland, our democratic and constitutional tradition goes back to the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320, which we will be celebrating 700 years of next year, and the Claim of Right in 1689. The principle of those documents is that neither the sovereign nor the Government is above the law. It was very refreshing to hear Lady Hale remind us that the same has been the position in England since at least 1611 when she said in her statement on Tuesday:

"As long ago as 1611, the court held that 'the King (who was then the government) hath no prerogative but that which the law of the land allows him'."

So constitutional democracy means not a tyranny by the Executive but parliamentary democracy with checks and balances. As Lord Drummond Young said in Scotland's highest court:

"The courts cannot subject the actings of the executive to political scrutiny, but they can and should ensure that the body charged with performing that task, Parliament, is able to do so."

I do not think that anyone on these Benches will take any lectures from members of the Conservative and Unionist party about the importance of democracy when it was their leader who tried to shut down parliamentary democracy for five weeks at a time of constitutional crisis in the UK.

Lady Hale stressed that there are two—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to take an intervention if the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) wants to make one.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for offering me the chance to intervene. The point I would make is that we have had this huge national drama over the past couple of weeks as to whether the Prorogation will be ended, because so many Members of Parliament were so extremely zealous to attend and to address the issue of Brexit. But if we look at the Opposition Benches, there are almost as many SNP Members here as Labour Members—that is it—and there are only four of them.

Joanna Cherry: Perhaps if the Government brought some proper business forward, there would be more people here.

I want to return to what Lady Hale said. The judgment of the Supreme Court this week was not very complicated. Many Government Members suggested yesterday that it made new law—it did not. Lady Hale was simply expressing a principle that goes far back in the Scottish constitutional tradition and also in the English tradition that the Government are not above the law. She stressed two principles of our democracy: parliamentary sovereignty and parliamentary accountability. The Executive must be accountable to Parliament. It puzzles me that so many parliamentarians thought this was a novel statement of the British constitution, but that is perhaps because of the lack of a written constitution in the United Kingdom.

Many Members in this House—particularly those on the Opposition Benches—will be familiar with the writings of Justice Albie Sachs of the South African Supreme Court, a great jurist and freedom fighter. When he sat down to write the constitution of the new South Africa, he was shocked to find that Britain, which he was

[Joanna Cherry]

looking to for guidance, did not have a written constitution. One of the things that the Brexit crisis and the horror with which the UK Supreme Court judgment has been greeted by some illustrates is the need for the United Kingdom to have a written constitution. But I am afraid to say that I will not be holding my breath for constitutional reform in the United Kingdom. The Scots are very familiar with the oft mentioned promise of federalism whenever Scotland looks close to voting for independence. Gordon Brown is normally wheeled out to promise federalism, but there is never any appetite in this House to make that a reality.

There are many things that could be done to improve British democracy, but the horrified reaction to the checks and balances imposed by the United Kingdom Supreme Court last week shows me that Government Members do not actually understand their own constitution and would probably find it very hard to write it down. Brexit has thrown the constitution of the United Kingdom into crisis. In 2014, during the Scottish independence referendum, which was a great deal more civilised affair than the EU referendum—[*Interruption.*] Well, nobody lost their life during the Scottish independence referendum.

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

Joanna Cherry: No, I will not give way. The Scottish Conservatives—and sometimes, I am afraid to say, the Scottish Labour party, but in fairness, not the English Labour party—often like to peddle the myth that the Scottish independence referendum was a violent affair. It was not. I was there. It was a celebration of democracy, and I am pleased to say that nobody lost their life.

I return to the Brexit process. It has thrown the UK constitution into crisis because although there are four constituent parts of this Union, two out of the four of them voted remain, and that has been wholly ignored. That could never happen in the European Union. If the European Union was taking a decision as momentous as Brexit, even a small country the size of Ireland, Scotland or Malta would have a veto.

The reason why this is important is that while the Unionist parties were participating in the festival of democracy that was the 2014 independence referendum, they promised people in Scotland that we were an equal partner in the Union and that the way to retain our EU citizenship was to vote to remain part of the UK. Both those promises have been broken. The Scottish Parliament has come under attack, and constitutional conventions such as the Sewel convention that were put on a statutory footing have had a carriage and horses driven through them.

The result of all that is that a YouGov poll published earlier this month showed that the majority of Scots want a second vote on independence. Of course, the last time Scotland voted for Members of the Scottish Parliament, it elected a majority of MSPs who want a second independence referendum, and the last time Scotland voted for MPs in this House, it elected a majority of MPs who want a second independence referendum. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Many Conservative Members—in particular the right hon. Members for Haltemprice and Howden

(Mr Davis) and for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the Attorney General have said in public, “You cannot keep a country in a union against its will.” Of course, they were talking about England and the European Union. It is going to prove impossible in the long term to keep Scotland in this Union against its will, and if democracy means anything it means recognising the mandate that exists in Scotland for a second independence referendum and granting the Scots a second independence referendum, because that is what the majority want.

3.55 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): We in this place are all custodians of this country’s democracy, and I think it is right that we should feel that as a heavy weight on our shoulders. In many ways, the reason why yesterday was such a difficult day in this Parliament is that we faced a perfect storm. We faced questions at the very heart of our principles of democracy. We faced questions about freedom of speech and the rule of law; fundamental questions about the very functioning of this Parliament, all of which are at the core of our democracy.

I will deal with each of those so that Members might reflect as we move forward on how we can strengthen our democracy and not undermine it, albeit unintentionally. Members are right that language matters in politics; behaviour matters in politics. I am afraid that the inflammatory language used by Members accusing others of being inflammatory was as damaging as damaging can be. We have to tread carefully in what yesterday became high politics, which risked people feeling as if they could not speak out in the way that they wanted in this Chamber.

Mr Wragg: It is important that we all accept that we are all entirely responsible for our language and the speeches that we make, from the Prime Minister to the most humble Back Bencher. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the things that was absent from the urgent question earlier today was a sense of personal responsibility? Is it not incumbent on us all to think of a time when we have impugned the motives of another Member and seek them out this afternoon and simply apologise? Is that not a way we can move on and make this a better place?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. We do need to work together. That is what we do most of the time. Hon. Members have said that calling the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Bill a surrender Bill is in some way inflammatory. It is not. It is simply a way of explaining to people who did not, as we all did, read it word for word. I could say that calling something a bedroom tax is inflammatory, but this is part of the cut and thrust of politics. For hon. Members to intimidate other hon. Members using that language is wrong, and people should examine their motives for doing so.

The rule of law matters—the second principle and core of our democracy. It is right that the Government—I heard it from both the Attorney General and the Prime Minister—respect and accept the Court’s ruling. But that does not mean to say that they cannot disagree with it. Anyone in this Chamber who has been a Minister will know that Minister’s judgments are often taken to judicial review. While Ministers accept the findings,

they may not particularly agree with them. Why on earth would judicial review be brought in the first place if things were so clear?

Finally, a functioning Parliament matters above all else. It matters that we do nothing to undermine the very core of our democracy, which is a functioning Parliament. If we do that and make Parliament a weaker place while we are here, we are doing a disservice to our constituents. At the moment, at best we have a weak Parliament; some may call it a dysfunctional Parliament or, worse, an illegitimate Parliament.

We are perceived by many of the public to have ignored the referendum result, and we also run the risk of being perceived as a weak Parliament because we are blocking a general election. We are perceived as a weak Parliament because we have a Speaker who is about to retire, and because we have many disenfranchised Members of Parliament on all sides of the House. Those Members may have been elected under one party banner, but they now do not have that banner, and that is what our constituents see day in, day out.

The Minister was right when he said that politicians do not get to choose which votes to respect, and until those who are attempting to block the referendum result change their ways, we risk fundamentally undermining people's faith not just in politics, but in Parliament itself. In doing so, we risk undermining their faith in democracy in Britain.

4 pm

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I was last elected in 2017 on a Labour manifesto to leave the European Union. Just before that general election, I voted for article 50, and subsequently I voted for two different versions of leaving the EU, neither of which were passed by this House. I voted against the previous Prime Minister's deal because I thought that it undermined the integrity of the UK. Despite the fact that I voted remain in the referendum, on a number of occasions I have voted to leave the European Union, as we all know what the result in the country showed.

Given the time limit, I wish to direct my remarks at the integrity of the Vote Leave campaign and those who ran it, including the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office—I have notified them both that I will refer to them in this speech—as well as Dominic Cummings who advises them, because I think that their conduct and the Vote Leave campaign undermines the vote that took place in 2016. For around two years, I have worked on an inquiry by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee into disinformation and fake news, and I now have a detailed knowledge of the actions of the Vote Leave campaign, which I did not have when I voted to leave the European Union in this House.

The Vote Leave campaign broke electoral law by conspiring to break campaign spending limits. It did so in a document produced by the Electoral Commission that refers to emails and information from Dominic Cummings. He was working as the campaign director for the Vote Leave campaign, and he conspired with another organisation, suggesting the following:

“However, there is another organisation that could spend your money. Would you be willing to send the 100k to some social media ninjas who could usefully spend it on behalf of this organisation? I am very confident it would be well spent in the final crucial 5 days. Obviously it would be entirely legal.”

In fact, it was entirely illegal and the Vote Leave campaign was found to have committed an electoral offence. The illegality of the Vote Leave campaign meant that it was fined, and those fines were accepted by the campaign itself. Unlike in general elections, breaking the law in a referendum campaign does not overturn the result; it simply imposes a financial penalty.

The DCMS Committee wanted to speak to Mr Cummings, because his evidence is directly relevant to the inquiry and work that we have been carrying out. We wished to speak to him about the relationship with a Canadian company called AggregateIQ, and we asked him to speak to us and give us information. He was found to be in contempt of Parliament because he refused to come and give evidence. He disrespected Parliament. When he was appointed as the Prime Minister's adviser, after he had been found in contempt of Parliament, the Committee wrote again, asking the Prime Minister to instruct Mr Cummings to give evidence. The Prime Minister has refused and is thereby obstructing a parliamentary inquiry. That is the conduct of the Prime Minister and it shows real disrespect to Parliament.

We also know that the Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office, who was a co-convenor of the campaign, is now in charge of electoral reform and data protection in the Cabinet Office—at least I thought that was the case. Yesterday, I asked him whether he had overall control of all the matters in his Department, and he said he was not in control of data protection or electoral matters, which is very odd, because they are situated in his Department.

Even more extraordinary was that when I checked the Cabinet Office website today I saw that it had changed since yesterday. The Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office has deliberately taken steps to avoid responsibility for the role that he played in the Vote Leave campaign. That is mendacious, to quote David Cameron, and the Secretary of State needs to come to the Chamber urgently to explain his role in the Vote Leave campaign and what was involved.

4.5 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my near neighbour from Wrexham, though sadly in the time available I will not pick up his points.

I would like to pick up on the early intervention by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who mentioned an horrific attack this afternoon using the word “fascist”. I must sadly remind her that there is balance on both sides. I am a member of the European Research Group.

Mrs Moon: The word “fascist” was not my word. It was the word shouted by the demonstrator attempting to break the windows of an hon. Member's constituency office with her staff behind the windows.

Mr Paterson: Totally understood. The hon. Lady reported this horrendous and completely unacceptable incident. I was making the point that we should all watch our language, but sadly one of her colleagues compared the ERG to Nazis. If you google “ERG fascists”, you get 227,000 results, and if you google “ERG extremists”, you get 176,000. We in the ERG

[Mr Paterson]

would like a system of government where Members are elected to this House, from which a Government is formed. If that Government perform satisfactorily, tax sensibly and spend money sensibly, they are re-elected. If they do not perform well, they are removed by voting. That is a pretty basic summary of representative democracy.

The problem now in this country is the huge collision with the juggernaut of direct democracy. I think we have had 11 referendums in recent decades, and they have all pretty well gone along with what the establishment wanted. The political and commercial establishment were happy with the results—on Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, and probably the alternative vote referendum, too.

Then we have this current problem. In 2015, David Cameron promised, “If you vote Conservative, we will give you a one-off in/out referendum. We the MPs will give you the people the right to decide whether we stay in or leave the EU.” Possibly to his surprise, he won the election, and then promised to deliver. The right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) took the referendum Bill through the House in 2015. In his winding-up speech, he gave a pretty good summary. He said:

“But whether we favour Britain being in or out, we surely should all be able to agree on the simple principle that the decision about our membership should be taken by the British people, not by Whitehall bureaucrats, certainly not by Brussels Eurocrats; not even by Government Ministers or parliamentarians in this Chamber.”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1056.]

The Bill got 544 votes on Second Reading.

We then had the referendum itself. People were bombarded with a Government document costing £9 million. It was made very clear that this was a one-off and that the people would decide—that it was not an advisory referendum, but was giving a clear steer to Parliament and that parliamentarians would have to honour it. That was the understanding: whatever the decision, parliamentarians would deliver.

We then had the biggest vote in British history—17.4 million on a single issue against 16.1 million to remain. The conundrum is this. In the ensuing general election, in which, in fairness to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) who is not in her seat at the moment, she got the second largest number of votes ever—13.6 million—in a general election, her manifesto was very simple. The Conservative party was elected on a manifesto that we would honour the referendum, leave the single market, leave the customs union and leave the remit of the European Court of Justice. Although woollier, there was pretty clear language in the Labour party manifesto that it would honour the referendum result. According to one assessment, what we have against that in this Parliament, which is a remain Parliament, is 485 Members supporting remain and only 162 supporting leave. We may never ever have a referendum again, but I put it to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this has to be delivered. The people were told very clearly, “You vote Conservative in that original general election; we will give you the chance.” They were told during the referendum campaign, “You vote to leave; it will be delivered.” They were told by the two main parties that they would honour the result, but here we are, three years on, and this has not been delivered.

There are Members chuntering about no deal, but this is all a bit of a shibboleth. We are talking about leaving a customs union to which 8% of our businesses send goods. Our sales of goods to this organisation represent 8.2% of GDP and our sales of services 5.5%. This will not bring the roof down.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he share with me the frustration and anger that I hear every day in my constituency? People say to me, “You asked for our opinion. We gave you our opinion. Why have you not left yet and what are you still talking about?”

Mr Paterson: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend says. People come up to me the whole time. The words that I get so frequently are, “Just get on with it.” Let us take up an earlier intervention. We are talking about normalisation. Our sales of goods and services are a bit over 13%. It is inconceivable that, even if we did have no deal—do not forget that on page 36 of our manifesto, we said that, “No deal is better than a bad deal”—we have agreements on aviation, we have heard from Calais and we have heard from Dover. All this stuff about no deal is a shield, and it is a shield for Members who do not want us to leave. My proposition is that if we do not deliver on the referendum, that will be far more damaging to this country. The damage to the integrity of all our institutions will be absolutely shattering, compared with just a little bit of interruption, which can be sorted out at our borders and which all those bodies who run the borders say do not represent a problem.

We may never ever have another referendum. We may go back to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) describes—he dismisses this as an opinion poll. He is a strong believer in parliamentary democracy. I am as well, but we gave people the choice. We cannot put that back in the bottle. I appeal to all Members, particularly those on the Opposition Benches, to recognise that we have only a few short weeks in which to deliver what the people voted for, and they really must consider the extraordinary anger that could result. British people are very patient, but as my hon. Friend has just said, they are getting really angry. They have been thwarted and they know perfectly well that the establishment has thwarted them. The establishment was very happy with the results of those previous 11 referendums. For the first time, the vote went against them. What we have to do now is to deliver so that we can remove that anger and leave the European Union on 31 October.

4.13 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): That felt very much like a very personal discussion between the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) and me, as his eyes seemed to be on me all the time.

I want to look at the wider nature of this debate. I received an email this morning from someone who says that they are a Bridgend constituent. They say that there is a debate warming up on Facebook in a closed Bridgend debate group regarding my participation in Parliament. Indeed, many constituents currently believe that I am not present and committed to Parliament as much as I may need to be in these difficult times in UK

politics. Many feel that I have additional responsibilities that take precedence, so they want me to confirm my calendar leading up to Brexit and how much time I will be dedicating to London and spending in the Chamber.

Apparently, there is a lack of information online about my whereabouts in general as an elected representative and about my availability, so I need to log in and tell people more often where I am. There is concern about my surgeries and my availability, and I am asked whether I can confirm whether, and in what capacity, I am conducting surgeries in the coming months, as constituents have concerns about Brexit and require my availability on many issues. There have also been rumours that my surgeries have been put on hold for reasons relating to security issues. I am asked whether I can confirm that those issues are being resolved immediately, because many MPs are having security issues—one had been attacked that day—but can still conduct their surgeries safely by putting processes in place, so those issues may not be a viable excuse for cancelling surgeries.

I have two additional responsibilities in this House: I am a member of the Speaker's Panel and I am president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Many Members are elected to institutions outside this House, such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Those are critical democratic institutions, and we take an active role in them in spreading democracy, spreading information and, in my case in particular, dealing with the defence and security of the United Kingdom.

TheyWorkForYou says that I have above-average commitments in terms of debates, I ask above-average numbers of questions and I have an above-average response to my electorate when I have letters, although I admit that it also indicates that my voting record is lower than some. Therefore, as the president of the NATO Parliament—I have to say I had total endorsement and written communication from the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) when I put my name forward—I am deeply concerned that I am being challenged on my commitment to democracy, and to Brexit in particular, and that that is how we define a Member of Parliament's commitment to this democratic institution and to defence and security.

I have been advised by the police not to give advance notice of where I am going. It is fine to tweet and to post on Facebook after, but certainly not before. I am concerned that I will not be available over the next two weekends because of commitments I have on behalf of this Parliament and on behalf of institutions that we respect and see as critical to democracy. I hope we never lose a sense of the right of democracy to be wider than one issue.

4.18 pm

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I have to say that it has been a pretty bad-natured 24 hours and, as far as I can see, a fairly bad-natured two years, so I will try to make some fairly blunt points, but I will do so in moderated and moderate language.

I do not think I am above anybody, and I am happy to be criticised; actually, I try to judge my own party more harshly and to have higher standards than others, because I think that is a good way to conduct oneself.

I am a big fan of democracy, because my parents' lives were shaped by tyranny. My British granddad was burned alive in his tank in 1942, killed at the hands of the Nazis, and my German grandmum was killed by the Soviets, so the Nazis killed one of my grandparents and the Soviets killed another. I am lucky that I live in a democracy, and I hope I always respect and appreciate that.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) talked about threats. I say just for the record—this is not a competition with anybody—that the last threat to my health and safety that had to be reported to the police was last week. I do not make out that I am a victim. I do not use it for political capital. I make sure my staff are okay; we report it to the police; and we crack on. I take it as part of the job, but I do not become a diva about it. At various points in my life—as a foreign correspondent, as a soldier, as a Member of Parliament—I have had people try to kill or harm me, or tell me they are going to kill me or harm me. I am delighted to say that so far they have been unsuccessful, and I am content for that to continue.

As to rules of public debate, I think that public debate should be conducted in good faith. A critical element of that is that those who lose elections and referendums need to respect the results. This Parliament is trying to worm its way out of that fundamental issue of respecting the 2016 mandate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) on her speech, but for me it was simply more of the same: "The European Union vote was not about the European Union." I think that it was. There is one thing that is worse than that vote for remainers—I am a Brexiteer and am happy to leave—and that is not respecting that vote, because the contempt of the British people for the political classes will simply grow.

I believe that the language of this place needs to be temperate. We have seen, I am afraid to say, months of poisonous and hysterical language—often from the left, but not always—about coups and dictatorships, and a level of personal abuse aimed at this Prime Minister unseen since the days of Mrs Thatcher. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) if he would like. I have found that language to be entirely corrosive to the public debate.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), whom I admire and think is a decent representative, has talked about knifing her own leader in the front. That is violent imagery. Today, the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) tweeted to Piers Morgan:

"It's early doors Piers but I say this hand on heart: go"—
eff—

"yourself. You're a waste of space, air and skin. Trying to use Jo against us whilst encouraging the fascists is shocking even for a scrote like you. You make me sick."

That is an MP engaging in political debate now. I have seen a lot of the literature that came out of the Labour party conference. There was, "How to get rid of Tom Watson", who is a "treacherous incumbent". I will not even begin to talk about the debate on antisemitism.

[Mr Bob Seely]

There is a problem with the left in this country. There is a problem with the hard-Brexit right—not in Parliament, but on the fringes UKIP for sure—but there is a problem with the left about moral purity. Some Opposition Members are seeing that in the deselection campaigns that are being fought against them. We make no such claim of moral purity. For us, politics is not about moral purity; it is about doing the best job we can. Personally, I think people on the other side of the House are generally wrong, but I do not subscribe to them a moral motive; I do not believe they are immoral.

Fundamentally, too much politics in the modern day is about moral purity and finding moral benefit over other people, which I think is profoundly wrong. Respecting each other but thinking that we can do a better job than those on the other side of the House is the way to make progress in a democracy. There is a corrosive debate in the Labour party, which is affecting not only the futures of Opposition Members but politics in general, and it needs to end.

4.23 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): In Dulwich and West Norwood, 77% of people voted to remain in the EU—the seventh highest pro-remain vote in the country. My constituents are not remoaners; they are not anti-democratic. They are citizens with deeply held and sincere convictions. Yet since June 2016, 77% of my constituents and 48% of voters across the country have been told that we must be quiet and that our views no longer count. We have been told to be silent in the face of the Government's own evidence that Brexit will harm the UK economy. We have been told to be silent as we raise important questions about the future of scientific research, the supply of medicines, the regulation of chemicals and the future of trade. We have been told to be silent as we raise grave concerns—not discussed at all during the referendum campaign—about the impact of Brexit on the Good Friday agreement and peace in Northern Ireland. We have been told to be silent as we have raised concerns about the increase in hate crime and the anxiety of EU nationals living in our communities.

The continual dismissal and denigration of the views of 48% of UK voters—77% of my constituents—has been extraordinary. It is not how Governments should, or usually do, behave in a democracy.

In 2016, faced with a very narrow result, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) had the opportunity to define Brexit in a way that reached across the divide—in a way that took seriously both the result of the advisory referendum and the concerns of almost half of those who voted about the impact of Brexit on our economy, security, rights and access to medicines. Instead she spent six months saying nothing but “Brexit means Brexit”, while the right of the Tory party, and Nigel Farage, moved into the vacuum and defined Brexit as the hardest, most extreme Brexit possible.

It is a principle of democracy that we all seek to win the argument—that we seek to provide evidence to justify a position, to reassure and persuade those who disagree with us, and ultimately to achieve a mandate to proceed. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead put her Tory-party-facing version of Brexit to the people in 2017, and they took away her majority and her mandate.

In this context, it is no surprise that my constituents' pro-remain views and their deep fears about what Brexit will mean for them, and for our country as a whole, have only grown and strengthened, these past three years. The Government have done nothing to reassure them; nothing to provide evidence that their concerns are unfounded; nothing to prove that they respect and take seriously their values and their views. Instead we have a Prime Minister who is facing down his opponents with the language of hate, a Government who have failed to provide any assurance that our communities—

Mr Seely: I do not quite understand how the hon. Lady can keep talking about the language of hate when I have just given her examples of the abuse that Labour MPs are putting out there about their opponents, and also material from the Labour party conference, which I presume that she may have been at, where she sees the abuse from extremists aimed at moderate Labour party MPs. The abuse is coming from the left.

Helen Hayes: To be absolutely clear, the reference to a surrender Bill—the language of “traitors”, the language of “surrender”—is the language of war, and that is being used by our Prime Minister, in an utterly irresponsible and reckless way.

As I was saying, the Government have done nothing to prove that they respect and take seriously the values and views of my constituents. We have a Government who have failed to provide assurance that communities will not face job losses, shortages of food and medicine, and lower environmental standards; and a Government who are prepared to put at risk peace in Northern Ireland, casting aside the Good Friday agreement.

Democracy is a process of governance, not a moment in time. In a context where the Government have failed to reach out, failed to engage and reassure and failed to provide evidence and win the argument, the only option is to allow that process to continue—to hold another vote, not on the same proposition as the first, but on what we now know, to allow people to vote again on whether they have confidence that the Government have been able to negotiate a deal that can secure their future, protecting their jobs and security.

I say this again: my constituents are not remoaners; they are engaged citizens—internationalist and outward-looking in their views and values, worried about their families, their communities and their future, and this Government have ignored, denigrated and failed to reassure and convince them. They deserve better than this failing Government and our reckless, irresponsible Prime Minister. They deserve more democracy, not less. They deserve a people's vote.

4.28 pm

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I would like to start by rebutting some of the points made by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), although she is not in her place just now. She made some pretty clear points. She said that a horse and cart had been driven through the Sewel convention. That was not true; Lord Sewel himself said that the convention was respected. There was also a bizarre revisionist history moment when she talked about a Union between England and Ireland that never happened;

it was a Union between Ireland and Great Britain, which of course included Scotland. Finally, the hon. and learned Lady said that the vast majority of people in Scotland wanted separation. Unfortunately, according to the polls since 2015, 78%, versus 8%, would vote to maintain the United Kingdom.

I have returned to those points because facts matter. The picking and choosing of results—and history, as was evidenced in the House earlier today—makes for terrible politics. I have a lot of respect for some Scottish National party Members, not least because of some of the legal actions that have been taken in the last week or so. They champion the rule of law, which I always respect. However, we get into a very difficult situation when politicians take results, especially results of referendums, and try to cut them one way or the other. In 2014, for example, it was clear that the Union had won. People wanted Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The result was 55:45. That was a 10-point margin, which is a huge margin. If it happened in a general election, it would be described as a landslide. Yet SNP Members continue to champion the 45%—which is fair enough; they are elected, and I respect that.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I agree with what my hon. Friend is saying. As he says, following the referendum, the division—particularly in terms of language—is still there. It is unhelpful when people who serve in government, such as Mike Russell, describe the 13 Scottish Conservative MPs as traitors by referring to the Ragman Rolls. This is the nationalist perspective in Scotland now. It is yet another example of how people are seeking to demonise those who hold different opinions, or treating them as “other”. That is what comes of nationalism.

Luke Graham: My hon. Friend is right. SNP MPs and MSPs are on record as calling Scottish Conservatives traitors because they do not back SNP lines, and as saying that if we do not vote with the SNP we are somehow betraying Scotland. I do not think that that is true, and it is certainly not the rhetoric that we would choose to use on this side of the House. As I look across the Chamber, I see several SNP Members for whom I have the utmost respect, and I know that they do not use that language; but some others do. Indeed, there are Members in all parts of the House who probably need to review their use of language, both in this place and online.

I was making a point about proportions and how they are represented. Why should that 45% figure be presented to us, while the 42% who voted in Clackmannanshire, in my constituency, to leave the European Union are completely disregarded? Why is the 45 threshold so much higher than 42? It is completely arbitrary. It is the choice of a political party, the whim of a politician, to choose one percentage over another, and I do not think that that is good enough in a modern democracy. We need to respect the individual vote as much as we respect an individual life and an individual himself or herself. Their vote is worth just as much in Clackmannanshire as it is in Bristol, Cheltenham, Cardiff, or anywhere else in the United Kingdom, and we need to respect that.

Let me finally deal with my greatest concern and what is, I think, the greatest challenge to liberal democracies: nationalism. It can be of any hue, whether it is Scottish

nationalism, English nationalism, Irish nationalism or American nationalism. Whatever guise it decides to take, nationalism is one of the most regressive political forces in modern politics and in the 21st century. The First Minister of Scotland experienced that when she went to Germany to receive an award. Elif Shafak said to her that, despite the different connotations, nationalism could never really be benign.

I was lucky enough to attend a meeting of European young leaders. Among them was the inspirational leader of the Liberal party, which had just won the elections in Catalonia on a unionist ticket, conveying a message of trying to unite Catalonia and unite Spain and take people forward. I think that that is an incredibly positive message. Something very clear came out of that meeting, and it stands for Donald Trump as it stands for any other politician. Nationalism is simply a manifestation of a set of ideas that are intended to divide people into “us” and “them”. It is a presentation of simple answers to incredibly complicated questions. It is not good enough for our constituents, and it certainly not good enough for the United Kingdom in the 21st century.

This issue is also important because what is said in the House, what is said online on Twitter and Facebook and what is said in print overlaps and spills over into everyday life. I had to raise a point of order in the House once because a member of my staff who was alone in my constituency office was threatened by two people claiming to be nationalist supporters, saying that if Scotland became separate, she would be hanged. Furthermore, that same staff member, when she was in her local Co-Op buying her almond milk, was told to go back to England. The person in question who challenged my staff member was very surprised when my staff member was able to inform him that she had been born in Namibia but raised in Stirling.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): On the hon. Gentleman’s point about nationalism, is he seriously trying to suggest that the Scottish National party can in any way be equated with the other types of nationalism that he is referring to? I am an Australian with an English father, but I have never felt anything other than welcome in the Scottish National party, of which I have been a member for 20 years. Will he explain that to us?

Luke Graham: The point I am making is about nationalism as a whole. Nationalism of any kind, regardless of the connotations, can rarely be benign because it divides people, and yes, the SNP—in its rhetoric and what it does—seeks to divide the United Kingdom. That is the *raison d’être* of the SNP; it wants to break up the country—

Deidre Brock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Luke Graham: No. The hon. Lady says independence; I say separation. That is the purpose of this debate. I am quite happy to debate this robustly and to use facts and figures, but it is clear that nationalism and the SNP want to divide our nation on the lines of geographical boundaries. This is not about dividing the country on principles or ideas; if it were, we would be asking for a union with London, Bristol, Manchester and, I believe, Cardiff, who all voted remain in the European Union referendum.

Deidre Brock: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it is a Union of two countries? He is suggesting that Scotland is the same as Birmingham or any city—well respected as they are—within England, but that is not the same thing. We are talking about a Union supposedly of equals, that is anything but. I would suggest that the people of Scotland have every right to make a decision against—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order.

Luke Graham: The hon. Lady wants to look at *Hansard* and actually listen to what I said. I said that the SNP was about dividing our country along geographical lines and that if we want to talk about principles, we can find alliances, challenges and opportunities right across these isles, as we have done for over three centuries in the most successful political union the Earth has ever seen. I fear that I am not going to agree with SNP colleagues today.

The bottom line is that people are angry and concerned, as they should be the 21st century, as we face challenges from climate change, from technological innovation and from abroad. When people are angry, MPs need to step up and listen to that anger. They need to channel the anger and use it to make constructive, progressive suggestions to bring this country forward together.

4.37 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham). I agree that nationalism is a real problem. That is why it is such a shame that some Members in his party—maybe not him—seem to be pursuing an English nationalist policy that is likely to lead to the break-up of our Union. If it is done badly, that policy could lead to a hard border in Northern Ireland, to the departure of Northern Ireland and to further fragmentation. It is based on the view that the English nation should rule over other nations and that those nations' views of the Union should be disregarded because English nationalism is the most important. I believe that is what some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues are pursuing in their hard Brexit view. That is very worrying, and we should reflect on it across the House.

I also agree with the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). She described the importance of hearing all the voices in a debate. For me, the principle of democracy is that the losing side should be able to keep making its argument. As soon as that principle is removed, democracy has ended. If we say that a moment in time that will quickly vanish into the history books over the next three or four years should hold and bind all peoples and that alternatives should not be pursued, that will have a chilling effect on our wider democracy. Why not say that we will cancel all future elections? Why not say that the Opposition should not be allowed into the Chamber this week because the Government won the last election and only the Government should rule? I respect the result of the last general election, and not only because I was elected in it and defeated a Conservative. However, the first thing I did was vote against the Queen's Speech. The first vote I cast was to defeat the manifesto that had just won and to attempt to bring down the Government and

force a new election. That is the Opposition's right in a democracy—to keep opposing. It is not the duty of Oppositions to implement the winning side's programme; that is the duty of the winning side. That is true in a general election and in a referendum.

We talk about respecting different sides. I come from a remain area, but there are some leave areas that are sceptical about how things are playing out. Those views must be respected. I fear that the way in which some of the Conservative hardcore Brexiteers disrespect Opposition views is a symbol of how they treat democracy more broadly.

Let us consider electoral registration and the boundary changes. Rather than choosing a high moment to draw boundary lines—for example, at the time of the referendum or a general election—it was deliberately done at a time when the number of people on the electoral register was at its lowest. It happened just after we had changed to individual registration, but before any public vote had taken place. We know many people who choose or remember—it is not a choice; everyone should do it—to register when an election comes round. Why on earth do we not draw the boundaries according to the census? Why not include everyone in the debate? What happened with registration is a sign that the Government are disingenuous about including all voices.

Rather than trying to set up citizens' assemblies, open up a national discussion about how our country goes forward or open up the register, perhaps allowing, for example, schools to register people to vote, the Government close down the debate. They say that we surrender if we question a way forward, that people cannot register to vote unless they fit into small parameters and that they will redraw boundaries to exclude people disproportionately. That is the nature of our democracy: fragile. I hope that we regain it.

4.42 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It turns out that a week is indeed a long time in politics. Let us remember that this time last week, Parliament had been shut down by the Prime Minister, who had forced through an unlawful Prorogation. Then, following a resounding defeat in the Supreme Court, Parliament was ordered to return this week, and the British Government have the brass neck today to table a motion on the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate—just days after they shut down the electorate's ability to be represented in this place by their elected representatives.

We should not really be surprised by that hypocrisy because the British Parliament is a place of limited and diminishing democracy. If the Government want a debate on the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate, let us start with the House of Lords, which is second in size only to the People's Congress of China, and is bloated with more than 800 Members who are eligible to vote on legislation. Let us not forget that the majority of those along the corridor are life peers and have never been voted in by our electorate. Others include 26 archbishops and bishops and 92 hereditary peers. Other than Iran and the Isle of Man, we are the only country in the world in which clerics have the right to legislate. Other than Lesotho, we are the only country in which 92 hereditary chieftains have the birthright to make law.

The stymieing of British democracy is not confined to our neighbours in ermine. Even in this Chamber, democracy is suppressed and stymied at every turn. We have a Government who refuse to respect Opposition day votes. In my party's case, the Government have even failed to allocate the requisite number of Opposition days for a two-year Session in accordance with the House's Standing Orders.

We have a British Government who are trying to cut the number of MPs in this House. Not content with that, and despite the House's voting for it on Second Reading, the Government are withholding a money resolution for the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, which was passed by democratic majority on the Floor of this Chamber almost two years ago, but is still stuck in purgatory on the Committee corridor. We have a Prime Minister who plays Russian roulette with the constitution and judiciary and openly casts doubt on his willingness to comply with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019. In short, we have a Government who have, at best, a questionable record on honouring democracy and respecting the rights of the electorate. Perhaps that is best demonstrated by their appalling attitude to the Scottish Government, who in 2016 got a mandate from the people to hold an independence referendum, yet the British Government say no. One thing is clear: this Government cannot keep saying no. Very soon the people of Scotland will have the opportunity to reject the British stymieing of democracy and, instead, embrace the normal status of an independent state within the family of European nations.

4.45 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I thank all hon. Members for taking part in this all too brief debate, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle). It is an honour that the president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend, is a Member of this House and sits on the same Benches as I do.

The issues discussed in today's debate could not be more important, and I welcome Mr Speaker's guidance today that we should moderate our behaviour, although civility should never be used as a mask to prevent the seeking of the truth or the holding of the Government to account. At a time when the country and the House are deeply divided and the spotlight shines on politicians like never before, it is vital that we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of democracy and remind ourselves of the rights of the electorate and our duties to them as their representatives.

I only ever feel great pride in representing the people of the City of Chester in this place, and the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) is right to say that most hon. Members—in fact, I would say almost all hon. Members—are here with the best of motives for their constituents.

Why have the Government chosen today to discuss the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate? Is it because they respect these crucial principles and rights? I think not. Democracy is not just about elections; it is about respecting the institutions that underpin our

democracy. The Attorney General's pantomime bombast in denouncing this Parliament yesterday will no doubt have the effect he intends, which is to damage people's faith in democracy, yet the Government had the nerve to call a debate today about the principles of the very democracy they seek to undermine.

Let me be clear to the Attorney General and this House: this Parliament was elected in 2017 because the Conservative party tried to cut and run by calling a snap general election. This Parliament accurately reflects the divisions in the country on Brexit, and it is doing the job it was returned to do—my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood referenced that point.

Although the Minister referred in his opening speech to the Labour and Conservative manifestos, which both mentioned respecting the result of the referendum, I remind him that neither said we would leave without a deal. That is what the Brexit fundamentalists controlling the Conservative party are now pushing for.

Democracy is about respecting the rules of the game, and we know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham said, that the leave campaign broke the rules during the referendum on such things as data transfer and spending, as well as being untruthful to the electorate. We still do not know where the money channelled to the leave campaign via the Democratic Unionist party came from.

Why is that important? As my hon. Friend reminded the House, it is because the same people who broke the rules when running the leave campaign are now in charge of this Government, whether it is Dominic Cummings, whose commitment to democracy is such that he has been found in contempt of Parliament, or the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who continues to dodge my hon. Friend's questions about what he knew and when about the Vote Leave funding misdemeanours. This does not appear to be a Government who are committed democracy. More, it is a Government who are committed to power by any means—a Government who believe that the rules of democracy do not apply to them.

My hon. Friends on the Government Benches—decent Conservatives whom I do consider to be friends—must be aghast at what has happened over the last couple of days in the name of their party. They must reel their leader back in.

The Supreme Court found that the Prorogation was unlawful because it had the effect of frustrating or preventing the ability of Parliament to carry out its constitutional functions without reasonable justification. Although the Supreme Court's judgment was utterly devastating, it provides a legal opinion on a truth with which we and the rest of the country are now already familiar. The truth is that the Prime Minister has no respect for the law, no respect for democracy and no respect for the electorate. His whole career as a journalist and as a politician has been defined by an arrogance that leads him to think he can disregard everything and get away with anything.

Like the previous Government, the current one is defined by their total lack of respect for this House and for the public. The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), speaking on behalf of the SNP, mentioned not getting enough Opposition days and how Opposition day votes are ignored. This morning, we heard the

[*Christian Matheson*]

Father of the House and others raise concerns that the Government are operating a deliberate strategy of division and inflaming tensions, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend referred to in an earlier intervention, quoting a Government spokesman.

The Government operate with a secrecy and evasion that betray utter contempt for the electorate and for democracy. They have tried to keep this House in the dark. If it were not for this House demanding that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster publish the now notorious Yellowhammer papers, we would still be relying on leaked excerpts in the press and rumours around Whitehall. At least now we know, in the Government's own words, just how disastrous a no-deal Brexit would be for this country. Due to the lack of time, we will not be able to go into the detail of the Yellowhammer papers, but it is enough to say that there are few more disgraceful episodes in our country's recent history than a Tory Government willing to countenance food, fuel and medicine shortages just to appease a few no-deal obsessives in their own party and the Brexit party.

I suspect that the details of the Yellowhammer papers will not be mentioned in the Government's Get Ready for Brexit scheme, which appears to me and many others to be the most expensive party political advertising scheme this country has ever seen. I have written to the Cabinet Secretary to see if he shares my opinion and to seek clarification whether the campaign has breached the rules that prohibit the Government from using public funds for party political purposes.

We will not allow a no-deal Brexit to go through, but let me be clear: once no deal is off the table, we will use every power at our disposal to secure a general election, and when it comes we will be ready for it. The public will be ready for it, too: after a decade of Tory austerity, the electorate is crying out for real change and we are ready to deliver it. We will not, however, fall into the trap that the Conservatives are setting us of giving them the opportunity to force through a no-deal Brexit against the wishes of this House and in the face of the democracy that this House has decided.

4.51 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. This has been a fascinating debate and we have heard a range of contributions. In the spirit of civility, I say that I always enjoy my conversations with my two shadows, the hon. Members for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). I hope they agree that we treat each other with respect and that although we may disagree at times, we are still able to find common ground in the mutual interest of those we represent.

I will start by responding to some of the issues raised. Contrary to some of the comments we have heard, the individual electoral registration reforms produced the biggest electoral roll ever at the last general election, with more people registering to vote than ever before. Online registration is one of the easiest methods for younger voters in particular to get themselves on the electoral roll. That is a sign of commitment. It is now literally possible to register online. People can do it in a few minutes. They no longer have to get a form and send it to their local council. Obviously, the arrangements

in Northern Ireland are slightly different. Many of us know the reasons for that, and it has a more devolved structure.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the Minister give way?

Kevin Foster: I will not take interventions, given that I have given up time to allow more Members to contribute to the debate.

We are also looking at reforming the annual canvass and are working constructively with the Scottish and Welsh Governments. The system is great at identifying people who have lived in one location for a long time, but we want to reform it, through the use of databases and other information, so that it targets other communities that we also want on the electoral register. We want a modern system. Fundamentally, the system originated in the 19th century, when heads of household would register to vote on behalf of the whole household, but that does not reflect modern lifestyles. It also means that resources are not targeted to getting the most vulnerable on the roll.

It has been good to hear some of the other speeches. I cannot go through them in detail, but I certainly enjoyed the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) and for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), especially when they talked about picking and choosing results. It is interesting to see how referendums described as once in a generation or once in a lifetime, with people told, "You have the power in your hands to make a sovereign choice," suddenly, a couple of years later, become a matter of, "Actually, we'd like to have a rethink, please, and it was only an opinion poll." In fact, referendums are different: people are told that they will make the decision and it will be binding.

People know my views on the separation of the Union; I think it would be a hugely retrograde step. However, had that been the decision of the Scottish people in 2014, we would have had to vote through the legislation. We cannot pick and choose which result we respect.

David Linden: Is it not true that the Cabinet Office has done polling on Scottish independence? If it has, will it release it?

Kevin Foster: The Cabinet Office conducts polling on a range of issues. There is no shortage of opinion polls on Scottish independence. I enjoyed seeing the separatists' response to a recent poll: they complained that the poll was unfair because the question was about whether people wanted to remain in the United Kingdom. They thought that people being asked to remain in something was unfair, which is interesting, given their views on other topics. It was the Scottish National party itself that described the Scottish independence referendum as a once-in-a-generation event; now, only a few years later, the duration of a generation appears to have become extremely brief.

The key principle of our democracy is to give voters a choice. Just over three years ago, this Parliament gave voters a choice on whether this country would remain a member of the European Union. We had a strong debate and campaigns up and down the country. Not one person said, "Well, if you feel like voting, it's next week, but it won't make much of a difference." No one said that; everyone said that whatever the decision, it

would be implemented. Here we are, a few years later, having had a general election in which, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office pointed out, more than 80% of voters voted for a party that said it would respect the referendum result, and it still has not been implemented. That is where we see the principle: we cannot pick and choose which votes we respect. That is especially true of those who voted for the legislation to hold a referendum, took part in the campaign, argued their case and then, almost from the day after, decided that respecting the result was an optional extra.

This Government will remain focused on our programme not just to deliver Brexit, but to defend our democracy overall. In part, that involves making sure that we protect the ballot by bringing in the long-recommended system of voter identification, replacing an identity check that dates from the 19th century, when only a very small percentage of men could vote, with a modern system similar to ones used in many other democracies, and remarkably similar to the system used in Northern Ireland introduced by the Labour party. We will also seek to improve accessibility and make sure that more people can get to the polling station and cast their vote.

It is welcome that the Government tabled the motion. I expected that those who have spent most of the past two days attacking the Government and running down the Prime Minister, saying they had no great confidence in the Government, would try to test that confidence, but sadly they decided they did not want to do that. Normally in our democracy, the Opposition are itching to replace the Government. This must be one of the first times in history that the main Opposition have not tabled a motion of no confidence in the Government because they think they might win. It has been remarkable to see.

When a general election does come—an election we have already offered, which makes it interesting to hear about constituents being gagged when it is the other side who are blocking the election and we are the ones offering it—people had better consider who reflects their principles and their choices. When they do that, they will inevitably conclude that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is far more likely to deliver what they want than the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the principles of democracy and the rights of the electorate.

PETITIONS

Morrisons Supermarket Shirley

5 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): After two days of verbal perambulations in this place, we have finally come to the main event. I rise to register my constituents'

deep concerns about the proposals to close the Morrisons store in Shirley. The Shirley store has served our community for over 14 years. It employs almost 100 people and is relied upon by many in the surrounding area. I thank our local Shirley councillors, Mark Parker, Annette Mackenzie and Karen Grinsell, for organising an online petition urging Morrisons to keep open this store, which has been such a focal point for our community for so many years. It has collected 1,299 signatures, which clearly shows the extent of public concern about these proposals. It is not right that Shirley should face the closure of a business that plays such a vital role in the community, and it is a privilege to put the concerns of my constituents directly to the House today.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Solihull,

Declares that local residents have great concern over the proposals to close Morrison's Store, in Shirley.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage WM Morrisons PLC to reconsider proposals to close Morrisons in Shirley.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002523]

Kashmir

5.2 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I rise to present my constituents' second petition on the issue of Kashmir. Not only did they provide a huge number of signatures for the first petition, but they have gone off and collected more, such is the depth of feeling in the people of Glasgow about the ongoing dispute in Kashmir. There was a demonstration on Sunday through the streets of Glasgow in the pouring rain. I particularly thank Dr Javed Gill and all who organised that demonstration, showing the strength of feeling and taking that message out to the people of Glasgow.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of the City of Glasgow,

Declares that the dispute in Kashmir should be resolved peacefully.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the UK Government to use its international standing to encourage India to engage in a comprehensive and sustained dialogue with its neighbour Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute, and urge the international community to play its role in securing a just and peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002524]

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Rutley.)

5.3 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 26 September 2019

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Brexit: Reciprocal Healthcare Arrangements

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): Today I am notifying the House about an announcement that the Government have made about transitional healthcare arrangements across the EU if we are unable to secure a deal.

The UK is leaving the European Union (EU) on 31 October 2019, with or without a deal. The UK Government are working hard to secure a deal that covers healthcare arrangements, but it is important that people understand what will happen if the UK leaves without a deal and what support the Government have put in place for that scenario.

Our priority is to maintain reciprocal healthcare arrangements with member states (MS) when we leave the EU. That is why the UK Government have proposed consistently to all MS that existing reciprocal healthcare arrangements (under regulation 883) continue until 31 December 2020 in a no-deal scenario. These arrangements safeguard healthcare for the hundreds of thousands of UK-insured persons who live in Europe or require medical treatment while holidaying in Europe. They also ensure that EU citizens can receive healthcare in UK, whether they are here on holiday, or to live and work.

Regulation 883

Current EU reciprocal healthcare arrangements (Reg (EC) No 883/2004) support large numbers of UK nationals living in, working in, or visiting the EEA or Switzerland to access healthcare. The arrangements require equal treatment between EU/EFTA citizens when accessing healthcare in other MS. Any EU citizen (or economically active third country national) resident in the UK who moves to the EEA or Switzerland can access state-provided healthcare by paying the same taxes as nationals of that country or people who are eligible for state healthcare.

In addition, the UK reimburses other MS for the state-funded element of healthcare for certain groups known as “UK-insured” who do not need to pay local taxes:

- (a) S1—the UK covers the healthcare costs of S1 holders, which include state pensioners, people with disability benefits, certain workers and their dependents living in the EU.
- (b) European health insurance card (EHIC)—the UK funds “needs-arising” healthcare when UK residents visit the EU temporarily (for tourism, study or work).
- (c) S2—the UK Government fund UK-insured individuals who travel to receive pre-authorised planned treatment in the EU (e.g. maternity).

The UK administers reciprocal healthcare, including paying for overseas medical costs, on behalf of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar.

Arrangements with member states

Arrangements are already in place with a number of MS, and the UK Government are still seeking further reciprocal agreements ahead of leaving the EU on 31 October. The Government are currently undertaking

technical discussions with countries such as Belgium who have already passed domestic legislation that will support reciprocal healthcare with the UK after Brexit.

The UK Government stand ready to reciprocate all arrangements with MS, and have the necessary legislation in place, under the Healthcare (European Economic Area and Switzerland Arrangements) Act 2019 and the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Ireland

Under the common travel area (CTA), British citizens living in Ireland will be able to access healthcare in Ireland on the same basis as Irish citizens which means that they may need to make a financial contribution. The UK Government are in detailed discussions with the Irish Government to reach an arrangement which would enable current reciprocal healthcare arrangements to continue. British and Irish citizens who live in Ireland will also continue to have access to free-of-charge healthcare while visiting the UK. This is regardless of the circumstances in which the UK leaves the EU.

Spain

Healthcare access in Spain will remain the same after exit day, whatever the Brexit scenario. This is because the UK and Spain have each taken steps to ensure that people living in each country can continue to access healthcare as they do now until at least 31 December 2020, using their S1 forms. UK EHIC holders in Spain, and those who have planned treatment in Spain using an S2 form will also be able to continue to access healthcare in the same way when they are in Spain until at least 31 December 2020. The UK Government are now seeking to work closely with Spain to agree how this will work in practice. The Spanish Government’s guidance on access to Spanish healthcare and Brexit can be found here:

www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/brexit/Paginas/index.aspx

Switzerland

The UK has reached an agreement with the Swiss Confederation to ensure that the rights of UK nationals living in Switzerland and Swiss nationals living in the UK are preserved in a no-deal scenario after the UK leaves the EU on 31 October. This means that UK-insured individuals who reside in Switzerland at the time of Brexit will still be able to access healthcare using their S1 form, as they do now.

Moreover, UK nationals travelling to Switzerland, before the UK leaves the EU will continue to be covered by their UK issued EHIC for the duration of their stay. This includes visits which started before Brexit and end after the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. If a visit starts after the UK leaves the EU, EHIC may no longer be valid.

Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein

The UK has reached an agreement with the EEA-EFTA states (Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the kingdom of Norway) to ensure the rights of UK nationals living in these countries, and that nationals of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway living in the UK, by 1 November are preserved after the UK leaves the EU on 31 October 2019. This means that UK-insured individuals in these countries at the time of the UK’s exit will be able to access healthcare using their S1 form, as they do now, after 31 October.

Moreover, UK nationals travelling to Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway before the UK leaves the EU will continue to be able to rely on their UK issued EHIC for the duration of their stay. This includes visits which started before Brexit but end after the UK has left the EU. If a visit starts after the UK has left the EU, EHIC may no longer be valid.

Other EU countries

Updated information has been published on gov.uk and nhs.uk on the situation for each MS, including what arrangements have been put in place. These pages will be kept updated as further assurances from MS are received.

Those living in the EU whose healthcare is funded by the UK should not delay in reviewing their circumstances in order to secure their future healthcare needs. It is important that people review their own needs now and consider options carefully by checking the guide for the country they live in. People can also sign up to email alerts to check these country guides regularly as the situation may change as the UK gets closer to leaving the EU.

Preparing for leaving the EU

The UK's offer to EU citizens resident in the UK is clear. We offer complete assurance to EU citizens who are living in the UK on or before 31 October 2019, that they will be able to access free healthcare on the NHS after we leave the EU on 31 October. Should EU countries not agree to our offer to continue the existing reciprocal healthcare arrangements until December 2020, visitors from those EU countries will be charged for NHS care.

Beyond the bilateral arrangements, it is difficult to predict what exact arrangements will be in place for UK nationals in other MS as we continue to hold our technical discussions with them. This is because of the varying nature of each country's healthcare system. In view of this uncertainty, UK-insured individuals living in the EU should be ready for possible permanent changes to how they access healthcare.

Everyone living in the EU is strongly encouraged to think about their own healthcare needs and circumstances and consider the steps they need to take to be assured of continuing healthcare coverage. The Government have produced detailed advice for each country which can be accessed here: www.gov.uk/uk-nationals-living-in-eu

Specifically, individuals should consider: whether they need to register as a resident under local rules; the documentation they need to have in place; taking steps to understand how the local healthcare system operates and how their healthcare cover may change; and, if appropriate, purchasing private insurance.

Contingency arrangements

While we continue to promote our offer to all MS to continue existing reciprocal healthcare arrangements until at least 31 December 2020, the Government recognise that as we leave the EU, arrangements may not be straightforward and people may experience some challenges. As such, while countries and individuals put arrangements in place, we have taken a number of steps to support and protect UK-insured individuals living in the EU.

Not all UK-insured individuals will need to access these UK arrangements, as we may negotiate some further arrangements and many countries have put in

place comprehensive arrangements already for UK-insured individuals and others may follow suit. However, coverage does vary, and the UK Government want to ensure that all UK-insured individuals are in a good position to assess their options and prepare for what comes next.

Specifically:

(1) We have provided information online and are sending a letter to S1 holders living in EU and EFTA MS, encouraging individuals to consider their circumstances and options and to take the necessary steps to ensure they have appropriate coverage in place. The steps necessary will vary depending on individual's circumstances and by country.

(2) For UK-insured individuals who may find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation because they fall ill before the UK leaves and require treatment that spans exit day, we have made specific transitional provisions. If an individual requires healthcare treatment before the UK leaves the EU and the treatment will continue until after Brexit, the UK Government will pay for this course of treatment for up to one year (or the authorised period in relation to an S2) or the period of treatment if shorter. This will apply for those receiving healthcare as an S1, S2 or as an EHIC holder.

(3) The UK Government will fund the healthcare of existing UK-insured individuals living or working in the EU, on the same basis as now, for a further six months from the point of Brexit. This provision is aimed at providing individuals time to make alternative arrangements for their future healthcare cover, including registering for healthcare in their country of residence.

The UK-funded protection may be required if the EU or MS refuse to enter into arrangements with the UK or refuse to offer comprehensive protections to UK-insured through domestic legislation.

In addition, some MS do not fund healthcare for those who are going through the healthcare registration process. To give as much protection as possible to UK-insured individuals, after the six months is over, the UK Government will continue to fund healthcare for the length of the registration period if that MS does not fund healthcare for that period (up to one year) and the individual has taken steps to register in-line with local timeframes and no later than six months from exit day. This will ensure there is appropriate coverage should there be delays or overly lengthy registration processes. If a UK-insured individual leaves their country of residence to travel to another country, they will have to take out full travel insurance as their EHIC will not be valid.

(4) The UK will also continue to cover those travelling to the EU, whose visits commenced prior to Brexit day until they return to the UK, up to a period of six months.

(5) Students may find themselves in a particularly challenging position if they are already studying abroad. All students are encouraged to take out comprehensive travel insurance and to investigate local healthcare schemes that they may be eligible for. However, given the circumstances, the UK Government have agreed to continue existing cover of healthcare costs for students for the duration of their course, should they be already studying in a MS at the point that the UK leaves the EU and on the basis of evidence from their Institution. More information on support for students can be found here: www.gov.uk/guidance/studying-in-the-european-union-after-brexit.

(6) In exceptional circumstances, the UK Government have put in place provisions to provide bespoke support to people who find themselves in a challenging position due to a change in their healthcare cover after Brexit. This scheme will run from 1 November 2019 for at least a year with strict criteria and will only support those with very limited financial means.

The overall contingency package will be most relevant in MS whose domestic legislation does not protect UK-insured individuals during the registration period, exposing them to gaps in healthcare coverage and potentially

high costs. We are seeking to agree with MS that they will accept our payments for healthcare cover if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. Where a MS does accept these payments, this would mean UK-insured individuals could continue accessing healthcare as now, beyond deciding whether to register with the local scheme or return to the UK within six months of Brexit. If a MS does not agree to this, then the UK Government will step in to pay healthcare costs directly. To access this support after the UK leaves the EU, UK-insured individuals will need to contact the NHS business services authority (NHS-BSA) to provide them with the healthcare provider's details, so that the BSA can arrange for the healthcare provider to invoice the UK Government directly.

Individuals should not delay taking action to put appropriate permanent arrangements in place for when the UK leaves the EU on account of this additional support, particularly as for some EU countries the timeframe for UK-insured individuals to register with their domestic health system is far shorter than six months.

Planned treatment

The UK Government will fund planned treatment within MS (S2 scheme) if authorisation for that treatment has been applied for before Brexit and later granted or authorised before Brexit, even if that treatment is scheduled to start after Brexit. The UK Government will pay for these treatments if the provider agrees to honour their commitment.

Returning to the UK

After the UK leaves the EU some people may decide to return to the UK. UK nationals living in the EU whose healthcare is currently funded by the UK will be able to access free NHS care when temporarily visiting England, Scotland and Wales. UK nationals living in the EU will be eligible for NHS care if they move permanently back to the UK (including Northern Ireland) and meet the ordinarily resident test. Accident and emergency services and services that are deemed urgent or immediately necessary will always be provided free at the point of delivery first in the UK, with entitlement to NHS care determined afterwards. More information can be found here: www.gov.uk/guidance/using-the-nhs-when-you-return-to-live-in-the-uk.

[HCWS1832]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Arms and Military Equipment Exports to Saudi Arabia: Yemen Conflict

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Statement on breaches of the undertaking given to the Court of Appeal not to grant new licences for export to Saudi Arabia of arms and military equipment for possible use in the conflict in Yemen.

I want to update Parliament on matters relating to the two breaches of the undertaking given to the Court of Appeal on 20 June by the then Secretary of State that we would not grant new licences for export to Saudi Arabia of arms and military equipment for possible use in the conflict in Yemen, and the further breach of the commitment given to Parliament, also on 20 June, that

we would not grant new licences for exports to Saudi Arabia or its coalition partners which might be used in the conflict in Yemen.

As the Government informed the Court on 16 September and followed up with an affidavit today, my Department identified errors that had taken place in the export licensing procedure in relation to the Saudi coalition's activities in the conflict in Yemen.

As I stated publicly on 16 September, I unreservedly apologise for the export licences that my Department issued in error. I have also given my unreserved apologies to the Court.

A procedure to ensure that export licences were not granted for goods for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners for possible use in the conflict in Yemen was put in place on 20 June 2019. This followed the Court order and the then Secretary of State's statement to Parliament.

The export control joint unit subsequently issued export licences to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners and, in line with the agreed procedure, these were signed off at official rather than ministerial level.

It subsequently came to light that two licences were in breach of the Court undertaking, and one licence was granted contrary to the statement in Parliament as these licences were for goods that could possibly be used in the conflict in Yemen. The first licence identified as raising this issue (Licence No. GBSIE2019/06449) was for the export of a single Wirewound Air Cooler, valued at £200, for incorporation by a French company, Arqus Defense SAS, in a Renault Sherpa Light Scout. Officials in ECJU have informed me that the licence application stated that the vehicle would be used by the Royal Saudi Land Forces in Saudi Arabia and they have provided me with the following information about this licence. This is in line with the formal role of the FCO and the MOD in providing advice on the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the "Consolidated Criteria") to the DIT.

Thereafter the sequence of events was as follows:

On 3 June 2019, the FCO recommended approval on the basis that the RSLF were not operating in Yemen.

On 4 June 2019, the MOD provided its advice recommending approval on the basis that the goods would not be used against the security or capability of the United Kingdom and that the equipment would not be diverted to an undesirable end-user.

On 4 June 2019, the case was recirculated to the FCO who again, on 6 June 2019, provided its formal advice, recommending issue.

On 18 June 2019, the FCO received information from the British Embassy in Riyadh that some RSLF troops were deployed in Yemen. Consequently, there was a risk that equipment destined for the RSLF might be used in the conflict in Yemen. The FCO was unaware that the licence had not already been issued and did not pass this information on to the DIT. We are investigating exactly how and when information was shared between FCO and DIT. In any event, it is plain that the DIT was not aware of the deployment of RSLF when the licence was formally countersigned and issued on 26 June 2019.

The item was shipped and this licence is therefore now spent.

Licence No. GBSIE2019/07556.

This licence was for the export of 260 items of various radio spares for the RSLF Signal Corps, valued at £435,450.

Thereafter the sequence of events was:

The application was circulated to the FCO and MOD on 31 May 2019.

The FCO provided its advice recommending approval on 6 June 2019.

The MOD advised approval on 26 July 2019.

The licence was formally countersigned and issued on 29 July 2019.

Given the fact that RSLF troops were being deployed in Yemen at the time the licence was issued, this licence should not have been granted.

DIT officials have checked with the exporter: 180 items have been shipped, with a value of £261,450, leaving 80 items licensed but unshipped with a value of £174,000. DIT officials revoked this licence on 16 September 2019.

Licence No. GBSIE2019/08983.

This is a licence for the temporary export for demonstration purposes of dual-use counter-improvised explosive device equipment. These goods remain under the exporter's control at all times and so there is consequently no possibility that the equipment could be used in the conflict in Yemen. Consequently the licence is not within the scope of the undertaking.

Although not a breach of the undertaking, one further licence was identified (Licence No. GBSIE2019/06671) that was granted for the export of equipment for which the end user was the UAE Navy, contrary to the statement to Parliament. Export control joint unit officials cannot be sure that the relevant class of ship will be used solely for maritime security operations rather than in the conflict in Yemen. DIT officials revoked this licence on 16 September 2019 on the grounds that it was granted contrary to the parliamentary statement. Other licences have been issued to the UAE Navy that do not fall within the scope of the parliamentary statement.

Without seeking to prejudice the independent investigation, it appears that information pertaining to the conflict had not been fully shared across Government.

As soon as the issue was brought to my attention on 12 September, I took immediate action:

Taking immediate steps to inform the Court and Parliament;

Putting in place immediate, interim procedures to make sure the errors could not happen again;

Instigating a complete and full internal review of all licences granted for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners since 20 June;

The Permanent Secretary commissioned, on my behalf, a full independent investigation.

The additional compliance processes comprise the following steps (in addition to the existing licensing processes):

A checklist has been drawn up for licence applications for arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners. This will be used by FCO and DIT officials when an export licence application is received for Saudi Arabia and/or any of the coalition partners. It is intended to ensure that staff remain vigilant in considering the available information and in assessing whether the application potentially falls within the scope of the undertaking and the parliamentary statement. A copy of this checklist is attached;

Licence applications for arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners will be referred to a new weekly meeting of senior officials from DIT, FCO and MOD. Some applications will have been refused by this point, for example where they fail to meet one or more of the Consolidated Criteria. This meeting will reach a recommendation for Ministers as to whether applications are within the scope of the undertaking and the parliamentary statement, applying a further checklist of questions which are designed to ensure

that: (i) current and full information is available to enable an assessment of whether the items in question are for possible use in the conflict in Yemen; and (ii) if there has been any change in circumstances in the conflict in Yemen, this is properly included in the assessment. A copy of this secondary checklist is attached;

All recommendations to grant licences for the export of items to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners will be referred to Ministers.

These additional compliance measures will be reviewed by the independent investigation, as well as kept under review by DIT to ensure that they are robust and appropriate.

The full review of licences for Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners is currently being undertaken. This internal review is still ongoing.

As a result of this internal review, we have identified one further licence that has been granted in breach of the undertaking given to the Court of Appeal. Licence No GBOIE2019/00197 allowed the exporter to return and repair electronic countermeasure improvised explosive device equipment licensed previously under three licences issued in 2014 (Licence Nos. GBSIE2014/010932; GBSIE2014/013148 and GBSIE2014/000512) to Saudi Eraad Defence Systems in Saudi Arabia (an agent of the RSLF). There are no new items being shipped under this licence. The equipment is deployed as an electronic countermeasure to prevent the triggering of a remotely controlled improvised explosive device.

The process of approval for this licence was as follows:

The application was received by DIT on 14 February 2019 and was circulated to the FCO, the National Cyber Security Centre at GCHQ ("GCHQ-NCSC") and the MOD on 12 March 2019. It was circulated to GCHQ-NCSC for an assessment of whether the use of cryptography gave rise to any concerns.

On 19 March 2019, GCHQ-NCSC advised that the application raised no concerns in relation to the use of cryptography.

The FCO and MOD similarly recommended issue on 2 April and 16 July 2019 respectively.

DIT countersigned the licence on 12 August and issued the licence on 13 August 2019. Given the fact that RSLF troops were being deployed in Yemen at the time the licence was issued, this licence should not have been granted.

DIT officials contacted the exporter who confirmed that this licence has not been used. DIT officials revoked this licence on 20 September 2019.

The licence has not been used and has now been revoked.

My officials are also carrying out an urgent review of the composition of the coalition. This has identified a further licence which is in breach of the parliamentary statement. Licence No. GBOIE2016/00197b permits the export of fuel gauges for F-16 military aircraft to a number of countries which operate the F-16. The licence was originally granted on 5 August 2016 with an expiry date of 5 August 2019. On 28 August 2019 we extended the expiry date to 5 February 2020.

We have re-assessed this licence in light of the latest information and subsequently revoked it in so far as it applies to Jordan. At the time the licence was extended, the relevant officials in ECJU believed Jordan was not involved in military operations in the conflict in Yemen.

We have been able to confirm that none of the other recipient countries covered by this licence are coalition partners.

My officials are continuing to review all information relating to licences granted to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners since 20 June 2019 and we will be open and transparent with the Court and Parliament as to any new issues that emerge.

In addition, the Permanent Secretary has commissioned, on my behalf, a full independent investigation. This will establish the precise circumstances in which these licences were granted, establish whether any other licences have been granted in breach of the undertaking to the Court or contrary to the parliamentary statement, and confirm that procedures are in place so that no further breaches of the undertaking can occur. This investigation will be led by an independent senior official, the Director General of Policy Group in the Department for Work and Pensions.

It is possible that more cases will come to light. As I have done so far, I will keep the Court and Parliament informed as to any new information that emerges.

Checklist for case assessment involving arms or military equipment

This is to be used by DIT and FCO licensing officers when an export licence application is received for Saudi Arabia and/or any of the coalition partners (CP). This checklist is in addition to the normal assessment against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (“the Consolidated Criteria”). If the assessment against the Consolidated Criteria identifies an application that should be refused, then it will follow the usual refusal procedure.

DIT licensing officers must check to ensure that all the required information is available to enable a decision to be made as to whether Saudi Arabia and/or a CP destination is involved in the export. This will include asking the exporter for further information where they suspect that the final destination could be Saudi Arabia or a CP. This will then be recorded as a case note on SPIRE.

FCO advisers must check to ensure that they are aware of the latest position on the conflict in Yemen, including the countries involved and the military forces involved. The FCO adviser, once in possession of the latest information, will carry out an analysis against this checklist. The analysis must be recorded on SPIRE.

Which countries are currently in the coalition involved in the conflict in Yemen?

Which military or government branches from Saudi Arabia or each CP are currently operating in the conflict in Yemen, so far as HMG is reasonably aware?

If a direct export (to any of Saudi Arabia or its coalition partners):

Is the consignee or end user a private/commercial enterprise with an industrial/civil/personal or private end use?

If yes - please record analysis on SPIRE, including that it is not in scope of the undertaking to the Court or parliamentary commitment.

Is the end user the civil police forces or emergency services of Saudi Arabia and/or a CP?

If yes - please record analysis on SPIRE, including that it is not in scope of the undertaking to the Court or parliamentary commitment.

Is the consignee or end user the armed forces of Saudi Arabia and/or a CP?

If yes - please record analysis on SPIRE, including that it is potentially in scope of the undertaking to the Court or parliamentary commitment.

Is that branch of the armed forces involved in the conflict in Yemen?

If yes - please record analysis on SPIRE, including that it is potentially in scope of the undertaking to the Court or parliamentary commitment.

If an indirect export (to any destination):

Are the goods to be incorporated into equipment to be subsequently sold or delivered to the armed forces of a country whose forces are involved in the conflict in Yemen?

If yes - please record analysis on SPIRE, including that it is potentially in scope of the undertaking to the Court or parliamentary commitment.

This licence application must be referred to the weekly DIT-FCO-MOD senior officials meeting.

Checklist For DIT-FCO-Mod Senior Officials Meeting

Establishing the operating context:

Have all the licence applications for consideration in this meeting had full consideration against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (“the Consolidated Criteria”)?

Which countries are currently part of the coalition involved in the conflict in Yemen?

Has any new country joined the coalition?

Has any country left the coalition?

Has the armed forces/branch of Saudi Arabia and coalition partners involved in the conflict in Yemen changed so far as HMG is reasonably aware?

Has FCO confirmed that its advice, against the relevant criteria, is still up to date? (e.g. there is no information from posts (or other reasonably available sources) that post-dates the advice entered onto SPIRE that may call into question the recommendation)

Has MOD confirmed that its advice, against the relevant criteria, is still up to date? Assessing against the undertaking to the Court and the commitment to Parliament:

Has each application been assessed against the terms of the undertaking to the Court and the commitment to Parliament?

Is it clear that none of the applications involve arms or military equipment for possible use in the conflict in Yemen?

The discussion in each meeting should be recorded on a template which is uploaded onto each relevant case on SPIRE. This will form part of the advice provided to Ministers after the meeting.

[HCWS1833]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 26 September 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	33WS	INTERNATIONAL TRADE	37WS
Brexit: Reciprocal Healthcare Arrangements	33WS	Arms and Military Equipment Exports to Saudi Arabia: Yemen Conflict	37WS

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CONTENTS

Thursday 26 September 2019

Speaker's Statement [Col. 843]

Compliance with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019 [Col. 845]
Answer to urgent question—(James Dudderidge)

Hong Kong [Col. 863]
Answer to urgent question—(Dominic Raab)

Arms Export Licences (Saudi Arabia) [Col. 876]
Answer to urgent question—(Elizabeth Truss)

Prime Minister's Role in Creating a Safe Environment [Col. 886]
Answer to urgent question—(Kevin Foster)

International Climate Action [Col. 902]
Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

Adjournment (Conference) [Col. 915]
Motion—(Tom Pursglove)—on a Division, negatived

Business of the House [Col. 921]
Statement—(Mr Rees-Mogg)

Principles of Democracy and the Rights of the Electorate [Col. 939]
General debate

Petitions [Col. 971]

Written Statements [Col. 33WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
