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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 7 October 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Terminally Ill People

1. **Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on its review of how the benefits system supports terminally ill people. [912558]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): I understand how important it is to support those nearing the end of their life, and I am taking the evaluation forward as a priority. We have made progress on all areas of the work announced by the previous Secretary of State on 11 July. As a next step, we will be holding a workshop event on 29 October to gather key stakeholder views.

Mrs Moon: The Scottish Government have already done this work. They have talked to the medical profession, the third sector and patients. My Bill to implement a system in England and Wales is ready to go. Why are we not pushing ahead? Is this not just delaying the terminally ill from being able to access terminal illness benefits?

Justin Tomlinson: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady, who has been a tireless campaigner in this area, building on her personal and professional experience. I have met with her on several occasions, including as part of this work. We want to get things right. We understand the importance of the issue, and we are doing internal research with clinicians and external research with claimants and stakeholders. We are also looking at international research, which will include what the Scottish Government are doing, and we will be concentrating on the process to ensure that it is improved. This is an important area.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Given that the hon. Gentleman chairs the all-party parliamentary group for terminal illness, I call Drew Hendry.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This Government are stringing terminally ill people and their families along. They already have the evidence from stakeholders and from what is happening in Scotland. When will they do what they should for these people and their families and scrap the six-month rule, get implicit consent in place, and make the situation one of fairness and dignity for people who are dying?

Justin Tomlinson: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work as chairman of the APPG. We do take things seriously, which is why we are doing this thorough evaluation. We are already working with organisations such as Marie Curie, the MND Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association, Hospice UK, the Association for Palliative Medicine, Macmillan, the Queen's Nursing Institute and Sue Ryder. We must get the balance right so that those who should be getting fast-track access to support are always prioritised, and we will be doing a thorough evaluation to ensure that we get that right.

17. [912576] **Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): Is the Minister aware that there can be severe financial stress for the carer when a terminally ill person dies? One of my constituents was forced into serious debt as a result of missing payments after trying to migrate from the carer's allowance and premium to universal credit. Where is the promised ministerial guidance on this sensitive subject?

Justin Tomlinson: Part of the evaluation is about looking at the whole process, including not only the six-month rule but the process before and after. I believe that there has been a case in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, so it would be helpful to have further information on that as part of the evaluation.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris); I am very grateful to him for proffering me a very effective throat remedy on Thursday.

Contracted-out Health Assessments

2. **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) efficiency of contracted-out health assessments for (i) employment and support allowance and (ii) personal independence payments. [912559]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): We are committed to ensuring that individuals receive high-quality assessments as part of the suite of evidence that decision makers can use to decide entitlement. Providers are closely monitored against a range of measures, including through independent audit, to improve the accuracy of the advice they provide to decision makers. We continually look to improve the efficiency of the assessment process by working closely with providers.

Grahame Morris: I listened intently to the Minister's response, but my constituent has a series of complex and debilitating medical conditions and had been in receipt of disability benefit since 1994. At 60, when she had expected to retire, the Department for Work and

Pensions declared her fit for work. Given that 74% of fit-for-work decisions were overturned on appeal in 2018-19, what confidence can the Minister give my constituent that there is equality and consistency of decisions on work capability assessments and, indeed, that the decision-making process is correct?

Justin Tomlinson: We strive to get the right decision first time, but we have to do much more to speed up the appeal process in the minority of cases where that does not happen. That is why we launched a series of pilots in the spring of mandatory reconsideration centres for both personal independent payment and work capability assessment, to ensure that we proactively gather the additional written and oral evidence that is often presented at the end of the independent appeal process, speeding up the process of ensuring that people get the right decision quickly.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I know the Minister is determined to see improvements in how decisions are made. Will he kindly update the House on the progress on introducing a single assessment service, which will greatly help the situation?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that. She works tirelessly in this area and is held in great respect by all Members on both sides of the House.

The integrated assessment is looking at how, with the claimant's permission, we can share the evidence they have already gathered. We know that the majority of successful appeals contain additional written and oral evidence, often because the claimant had previously struggled to get that evidence. If the evidence is already in the system, we should be making it as easy as possible for the claimant to use it a second time.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Might I meet the Minister immediately after questions to give him a file of photographs of constituents who have failed to get any mobility component, even when they have foot bones coming through their flesh like in the photo I have here, so that we can have an urgent meeting to discuss how the procedure that we all wish to see is not currently operating?

Justin Tomlinson: I would be very happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman, who has a huge amount of expertise in this area. Of those who have transferred from disability living allowance to PIP, there are 144,000 claimants who were not on enhanced mobility under DLA but who now are under PIP.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If a 16-year-old's DLA stops before PIP starts, should not the contractor be made liable for the maintenance of that child until the PIP settlement is determined?

Justin Tomlinson: The two benefits link through together. It is set at 16 to allow time for adaptation, and we continue to work with stakeholders to make sure the process is as straightforward as possible.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Figures recently published by the Department reveal that disabled people are being forced to wait up to 69 days for their mandatory reconsideration for PIP. This process is a barrier to

accessing vital social security and, for many, is a deliberate delay to the appeal process. As 85% of MR decisions are upheld, almost three quarters of PIP assessments are overturned on appeal. Will the Minister lay out his plans to improve this failing process, or will he follow Labour's lead and scrap this unfit-for-purpose assessment?

Justin Tomlinson: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the need to improve mandatory reconsiderations, which is why we brought forward the pilots in the spring. The pilots are proactively gathering the additional written and oral evidence that was often presented at the end of the independent appeal process, which would sometimes take a year or even longer—that was not acceptable. We have been doing this over the summer, and we are now doing it for all PIP and work capability assessments. I attended a PIP mandatory reconsideration in Cardiff over the summer, and we are seeing some fantastic results because, rightly, we are speaking directly to claimants to ask them why they are challenging a decision. That will make a big difference, and stakeholders warmly welcome it.

Universal Credit: Disabled Claimants

3. **Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the introduction of universal credit on the financial circumstances of disabled claimants. [912560]

18. **Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):** What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the introduction of universal credit on the financial circumstances of disabled claimants. [912577]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): Universal credit targets additional support at a wider group than the system it replaces, with a much higher rate for severely disabled people than the employment and support allowance equivalent. Around 1 million disabled households will gain, on average, £100 a month on universal credit compared with legacy benefits.

Jessica Morden: It is shameful that it took the Government 15 months and a High Court ruling to sort out payments for those with severe disabilities, but it goes on. Why does a young constituent with Down's syndrome who is making a new claim have to wait more than three months for a full payment?

Justin Tomlinson: We continue to work with stakeholders and claimants to make sure the system is improved and can operate as quickly as possible. I encourage Opposition Members to support the £600 million of additional support for the severe disability premium and not pray against those regulations.

Debbie Abrahams: Despite what the Minister says, the reality is that a new claimant on universal credit will be £180 a month worse off as a result of disability premiums not being available. That is in addition to the increasing number of disabled people who are dying after being found fit for work or being refused PIP. When will the Government ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against and are adequately resourced, as they would be under the Labour party's policy?

Justin Tomlinson: This Government are spending an additional £9 billion per year—a record high of £55 billion—supporting those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. The universal credit rate for the most severely disabled is more than double the equivalent employment and support allowance group rate, at £336.20, compared with a legacy payment of just £167.05.

Universal Credit: Financial Resilience

4. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the effect of transferring to universal credit on households' levels of financial resilience. [912561]

14. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the effect of transferring to universal credit on households' levels of financial resilience. [912573]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): Universal credit ensures that support goes to those who need it, allowing 700,000 more people to receive benefits than did previously—this is worth approximately an extra £2.4 billion. Those who move to UC from legacy benefits and whose circumstances remain the same will be eligible for protection of their entitlement at the point of transition.

Patrick Grady: This is Challenge Poverty Week, and plenty of people are challenged by UC. They face what Citizens Advice Scotland describes as an “acute dilemma” between enforced hardship for five weeks, while there is no income whatsoever, and ongoing hardship if they choose to take out a loan and have to face reduced monthly payments while they pay back that loan for the first five weeks.

Guy Opperman: The situation is that this is an assessment period and no one has to wait to receive a UC payment; an advance of up to 100% is available to those in need, and significant funding has gone to Citizens Advice Scotland.

Martyn Day: Some 700,000 households yet to move to UC have insufficient savings to cover that five-week wait, which clearly proves that UC is not working. Will the Minister consider making that advance payment to claimants a non-refundable first UC payment?

Guy Opperman: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there is a managed migration pilot in Harrogate, where we are learning lessons, and I take on board the points he makes. That completes at the end of 2020 and, obviously, everyone not in the pilot stays on the legacy system as it currently runs.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): One important way for people on UC to build their financial resilience is through regular saving, although that can feel incredibly difficult for those on lower incomes. Does the Minister agree that the Government's Help to Save scheme, which is precisely for people on tax credits and UC and which provides a 50% bonus on their savings, is a really important tool?

Guy Opperman: Just today, I met Toynbee Hall and other organisations that are championing the idea of Help to Save. It is making a massive difference, and it is linked to automatic enrolment and to various other schemes we are trying to pioneer in order to ensure that people have savings as well as UC.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I visited my local jobcentre, and it is very positive about the effects of UC. Specifically on financial resilience, how many people have been helped into work and the security of a regular pay packet as a result of UC?

Guy Opperman: My hon. Friend makes the good point that hundreds of thousands of people have been helped into work, but more particularly this is about the difference between the current system and the legacy system: we now have a dedicated work coach and personalised support; we have scrapped the 16-hour cliff edge; there is more help with childcare; and we have given additional support that was never there under the legacy system.

20. [912579] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): A young constituent of mine could not afford to go to his UC appointment, was sanctioned and then lost his home in York's resettlement project and ended up on the streets. We were told that the Government would fix the problems with UC as it was being rolled out. Why have the Government not stuck to that commitment?

Guy Opperman: If the individual case is sent to the Minister with responsibility for UC, they will take that up and respond accordingly.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): If people are paid on a four-week cycle, once a year they get paid twice in the same month, which disrupts the UC payment for two months. Will the Minister meet me to see what we can do to prevent these cash flow issues?

Guy Opperman: I take the point that my hon. Friend makes, in his usual astute way, and I know that the Minister concerned will be happy to have a meeting with him.

21. [912580] **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): Several of my constituents have been victims of UC fraudsters, and I have written to Ministers about this on several occasions. I have now received a response to say that only

“where there is clear evidence that the claimant had no involvement in that claim”

will the Department “consider re-instating legacy benefits” and consider repaying the advance that was made to them. The claimants are being asked to an interview under caution, which is incredibly intimidating, and they have no access to legal advice and support for that. What is the Department going to do to stop intimidating such victims?

Guy Opperman: As we discussed before the start of questions, the hon. Lady knows that I will soon write to her in great detail on those particular points. The individual issue is being addressed so that there is a much gentler way forward. We are reforming the way that advances are made so that there is no fraud involved in the process.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): I hope the Minister will forgive me, but I was hoping to address my question to the new Secretary of State. I am interested to know what she has learned so far about the five-week wait and the damage it does. People have more debt when they come on to universal credit than they had on legacy benefits, and the advance payment is another debt that must be repaid from a meagre amount of benefit, frozen for three years. When is the Secretary of State going to look into getting rid of the five-week wait so that people get non-repayable money into their pockets more swiftly? They cannot wait for five weeks.

Guy Opperman: I am sure the Secretary of State looks forward to appearing before the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, of which the hon. Lady is a member, next week.

An advance is available to people in the usual way. Supported by the Treasury Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee, we have brought in the Money and Pensions Service to provide debt advice and budgeting support for claimants. There is no doubt that the extra money for Help to Claim, which is administered by trusted providers—whether that is the citizens advice bureaux or Citizens Advice Scotland—is very much helping the process.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said, it is Challenge Poverty Week in Scotland, and 400 events will take place to highlight the reality of living in poverty. One of the most significant push factors that take people into poverty has been the five-week waiting time between applying for universal credit and receiving it. Today, three quarters of a million households are unable to cover their outgoings during those five weeks and are trying to repay their universal credit advance. We know it, the public know it and I suspect the Department knows it; when will the Minister do something about it?

Guy Opperman: The hon. Gentleman will understand that it is an assessment period and no one has to wait to receive a UC payment. On migration, there will be a two-week run-on for both housing benefit and employment support benefits.

Brendan O'Hara: As part of Scotland's Challenge Poverty Week, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a report that shows that the Scottish Government's actions—such as the building of 87,000 affordable homes and the introduction of specific child poverty legislation—are making a real difference in tackling poverty. Given the fact that there is at least one Government on these islands who are determined to tackle the scourge of poverty in our society, is it not time for social security to be devolved fully to the Scottish Parliament?

Guy Opperman: There is much that I could say about the Scottish Government and their approach to welfare, but I will pass on that. The point is surely that this Government have introduced childcare changes, more employment and support on an ongoing basis, including through lower taxes. It is obvious that there is a benefit from the changes and advances we have made.

In-work Poverty

5. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of in-work poverty. [912562]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Since 2010, there are over 3.7 million more people in work and 730,000 fewer children growing up in workless households. About three quarters of employment growth has been in full-time work, which has been proven to substantially reduce the risk of poverty. But it is not enough to have any job; we want people to have good jobs.

Mr Dhesi: With regard to in-work poverty, 20% of people in relative poverty in 2016-17 were single people without children and 11% were couples without children. The Government have done absolutely nothing to reverse cuts to work allowances for people without children who do not have a disability. What action is the Minister going to take to tackle in-work poverty among those people?

Will Quince: I totally disagree with the hon. Gentleman's comments. We are committed to helping lone parents into a job that fits around their caring responsibilities. There are now more than 1.2 million lone parents in work. To support parents into work, the Government spend £6 billion on childcare each and every year.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Has the Minister read the report from the Resolution Foundation that stated:

“Low pay is falling for the first time in four decades”

and that women were the biggest beneficiaries? It pointed out that since the national living wage was introduced in 2016 the percentage of employees on low pay has fallen from 20.7% to 17.1% last year.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I have not seen the report, so I will go away and dig it out. We have invested £8 million to develop the evidence on what works to support people to progress in work, including enhancing our operational capability to support claimants to make good decisions on job switching.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The thing is, it is really difficult for many families in my constituency on the minimum wage, as they may have to travel quite substantial distances to be able to work, while having to meet family responsibilities at the same time. They end up not being able to do enough hours to make the whole package add up at the end of the week. How are the Government going to make sure that such families have a chance to provide for themselves? That is all they are trying to do.

Will Quince: The statistics show that full-time work reduces substantially the chances of poverty. The absolute poverty rate for children where both parents work full-time is only 4%, compared with 44% where one or more parents are in work, so we need to support more people into work, and we are doing so, for example, by offering 30 hours of free childcare to parents of three and

four-year-olds. The national living wage is £8.21, increasing to £10.50 by 2024, and we have taken millions out of paying tax altogether.

Employment: Young People

6. **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): What recent steps the Government have taken to help young people into employment. [912563]

15. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What recent steps the Government have taken to help young people into employment. [912574]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): This Government are committed to providing targeted support for all our young people, to give them the best chance of getting into work. That includes the youth obligation support programme, Jobcentre Plus support for schools, and the recently introduced mentoring circles.

Eddie Hughes: I thank the Minister for that answer. I welcome the Government funding given to Go Train, which provides recruitment and training services to businesses at no cost to business. Will she visit Walsall North in November, when a course will be provided specific to the Birchills area of my constituency?

Mims Davies: I was recently nearby, at one of our universal credit service centres, with my hon. Friend. It was absolutely clear that opportunities for young people in his constituency and the surrounding area are vital. The Department for Work and Pensions is working with the West Midlands Combined Authority to bring together local skills, employment support and Jobcentre Plus services. We are investing £1.2 million in the west midlands for extra resources, including helping young people to tackle the biggest hurdles to finding employment.

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, I shall be having a cup of tea or coffee with the mum of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) this week, so doubtless we shall compare notes on his inquiry. Huw Merriman.

Huw Merriman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Speaking of young people, they will welcome the decision to grant the living wage to people aged 21 to 25 at £10.50 an hour, but are the Government satisfied that there will not be any impact on young people and their job opportunities as a result of their being paid the same rate as those who have more experience in the workplace?

Mims Davies: I welcome the Chancellor's announcement to bring more people, including younger people, into the scope of the national living wage over the next five years. Employers will continue to select the best person for the job, based on multiple factors. Like me, they will take confidence from the fact that young people will have a chance to take advantage of the support offered to make sure that they are ready to meet those challenges and be the best person for the job. So local labour markets will still be strong.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): When are we going to see a glimmer of passion from this Front Bench about young people who do not have any employment opportunities? Has the Minister looked at the report from the Children's Commissioner that showed that 20% of kids come out of schools at this time with

no qualifications? A lot of them are already on the skills journey in further education colleges, waiting to get an apprenticeship. What is she going to do about it?

Mims Davies: Wonderful passion—that is very much appreciated. And I make no apology for bringing passion to this new role when it comes to youth unemployment. In fact, I explicitly asked the Secretary of State if I could continue with my focus on young people in this role. Please do not forget that youth unemployment has almost halved since 2010 under this Government.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Minister may be aware of the talent match programme that was run in Greater Manchester in order to reach young people not in education, employment or training. We have learnt a great deal about how to ally industrial education and skills, and employment strategies, for that group as a result of that programme. Will the Minister look at devolving some of the initiatives that she has described to Greater Manchester, along with providing funding, so that we can do more to work at a sub-regional and city-regional level to support our young people effectively into employment?

Mims Davies: Place-based support and understanding is really important in devolving down and making changes on the ground. There is a great opportunity in the coming changes to the European social fund, in the shared prosperity fund and in the ability to work with local enterprise partnerships and local mayors, because young people may have fantastic employers around them, but never know that those opportunities exist.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments about the national living wage and young people. On what evidence has she based the decision not to extend that down to 18, or is she perhaps considering providing the national living wage to those who are younger but still able to provide a great deal to employers in the workplace?

Mims Davies: My right hon. Friend knows that, if it were up to me, I would love to extend the national living wage down to 18, but sadly this is down to the Treasury; I will question the relevant Ministers accordingly.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Well-paid, secure work is a good route out of poverty, yet far too many young people—11%—are not in education, employment and training under this Government; or they are in low-paid jobs and on zero-hours contracts. Will the Minister press the Chancellor to set the national living wage at the same rate for all young people in work, as Labour has committed to do—£10 an hour in 2020?

Mims Davies: Everybody in this Chamber speaking up for our young people does all our communities a great service. We need a mixture of chances and opportunities for young people, including through mentoring. I am particularly interested in the work that we do with schools around engagement with jobcentres. *[Interruption.]* It is not all about money; it is also about skills and opportunities. I hear the hon. Gentleman, as do many colleagues, and I hope the Treasury will too.

State Pension: Women

7. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What support her Department is providing to women working for longer before reaching state pension age. [912564]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): We have extended the right to request flexible working, abolished the default retirement age, and introduced and financed the returner programme. I have seen the success of the returner programme through the company Release Potential, which is based in my Hexham constituency and which I have seen help many people back into work.

Maria Caulfield: If WASPI women were successful in appealing last week's Court ruling, would the Government abide by that judgment and compensate women accordingly?

Guy Opperman: I spent 20 years as a lawyer, and my last client was a Mr Ed Balls, when he was Secretary of State for Education. I can assure my hon. Friend that this Government will abide by court decisions and follow the law. If there are any changes—two independent High Court judges heard the case and made the decision—clearly the Government will obey that decision.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I have been contacted by my constituent, who said:

“I have to work as a cleaner and it is hard physical work. I am nearly 63 and getting health problems. Our retirement age has been changed and we have had little time to plan for this so have little alternative but to keep working.”

Does the Minister not get that the real injustice here is that so many women have had no time to plan their pensions, no time to plan their savings and no time to plan for their families, and were told in their late 50s that they would have to work for so much longer? The WASPI women are not going to go away, so when will the Minister give them a fair deal?

Guy Opperman: I say with great respect and gentleness that the right hon. Lady, I believe, served in the Department for Work and Pensions as a Minister during the period when the state pension age was raised by successive Labour Governments. The Court in the judgment last Thursday—[*Interruption.*] She asked me a question, and she should let me finish. The Court in the judgment last Thursday indicated that the state, including the Labour Government of 13 years, acted appropriately by giving due notification in the way that it did.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, the good doctor—Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I accept everything that the Minister just said, but does he accept that successive Governments, despite their best efforts, failed to get the message across to enough people that the retirement age for women was rising exponentially? Will the Government try to look at some of the proposals from people such as Baroness Altmann for ways in which alternative schemes could mitigate the problems that have resulted?

Guy Opperman: With great respect to my right hon. Friend, I refer him to the judgment in last Thursday's case, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House of Commons—in particular, paragraph 118 and the successive paragraphs in which the High Court outlines the exact work that was done in copious detail.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Some 3.8 million women born in the 1950s who built Britain face hardship as a consequence of pension changes by this Government. Before the Court, they were told with cavalier disregard that they had no right to be consulted on the change of retirement age. Labour has already committed to some preliminary measures—early retirement and pension credit—and we will now consult with the women concerned about how much further we can go to bring justice to them. Thus far, the Government have committed to nothing. However, the Prime Minister said during the Conservative leadership contest that he is committed to doing “everything” he can to bring justice to the 1950s women. Can the Minister update the House on progress, or will this be another cynical broken promise on the part of the Prime Minister?

Guy Opperman: This is the matter of a court case which may be the subject of appeal. With great respect to the hon. Gentleman—who is, to his discredit, a friend of mine—the honest truth is that he should be consulting with a 1950s-born woman who was Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions: the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who is also his wife and who was responsible for the continuation of the self-same policy that he now objects to. For 13 years, the Labour party did the perfectly proper thing of taking due account of equality and the rises in life expectancy, and it should stick to that, having made those decisions for 13 years.

Universal Credit: Wages

8. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that universal credit claimants who receive two regular wage payments in the same review period are not penalised. [912565]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Universal credit takes earnings into account in a way that is fair and transparent. The amount of universal credit paid reflects as closely as possible the actual circumstances of a household during each monthly assessment period, including any earnings reported by the employer during the assessment period, regardless of when they were paid.

Jack Lopresti: Does my hon. Friend have any plans to introduce a mechanism to universal credit that allows claimants to move their review date?

Will Quince: As I said, monthly assessment periods align with the way that the majority of employees are paid and allow universal credit to be adjusted each month, which means that, if a claimant's income falls, they will not have to wait several months for a rise in their UC. We have produced guidance to help to ensure that claimants, staff and representatives are aware of the importance of reporting accurate dates and the

impact on payment cycles. I am conscious that my hon. Friend has written to me. I would be happy to meet him and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who also raised that issue.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have received unexpected pay—for example, holiday pay—during the assessment period. Because that pay is unexpected, it impacts on the amount of universal credit that they are awarded. What work is the Minister doing to ensure that unexpected pay, like holiday pay, will not severely impact their award?

Will Quince: As I have said, the amount of UC paid to claimants reflects as closely as possible the actual circumstances of a household during each monthly assessment period, and those periods align to the way that the majority of employees are paid. I recognise the issue. I have said that I am happy to meet two other colleagues, and I would be happy to also meet the hon. Lady.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): I raised this issue with the Secretary of State's predecessor in the run-up to Christmas last year because many enlightened employers will pay their staff early in December so they can afford Christmas. She told me it was fixed. However, I was phoned last week on my 24-hour helpline by a constituent who, because her partner was paid on the 28th of the month the previous month and on the 27th of the month subsequently, it appeared—to the computer at least—that they had had a 100% pay rise, and her benefit was cut to £11. Can we fix this, particularly before Christmas this year?

Will Quince: The simple answer to my right hon. Friend is yes, I am looking at ways in which we can do this. It is important to put this in context: UC replaces the outdated and complex benefits system, which too often stifled people's potential, creating cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours and punitive effective tax rates, of over 90% for some, punishing people for doing the right thing. UC seeks to take earnings into account in a way that is fair and transparent, and we want to preserve this simplicity as far as is possible.

Universal Credit: First Payments

9. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What steps she is taking to reduce the time taken for universal credit claimants to receive their first payment. [912566]

23. **Lisa Forbes** (Peterborough) (Lab): What progress her Department is making on improving the timeliness of initial payments of universal credit. [912582]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Universal credit payment timeliness continues to improve and is near a record high, with the most recent data showing we paid 83% of new claims in full and on time.

Tom Brake: Can I thank the Secretary of State for saving herself to answer my question? I welcome that. She will know that the five-week delay is still causing

huge harm, so could I ask her what effort the DWP is making to ensure that UC recipients are not penalised by other organisations for the five-week gap in their incomes, and what extra support can the Government give to organisations that support universal credit recipients with financial management during this very difficult period?

Dr Coffey: It is important to recognise the help to claim—I think it is £39 million of support—that has been given through the citizens advice bureaux to try to help people who may not always be there with the paperwork that is required, so we are making best efforts so that people can make the right claims so they can be paid on time. As regards other elements, of course the advance is available, which can then be repaid over a 12-month period.

Lisa Forbes: With former Thomas Cook employees being offered food bank vouchers by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Trussell Trust in Peterborough reporting a 50% increase in the number of food parcels given to my constituents in the last year alone, can the Secretary of State tell us what impact she thinks the collapse of Thomas Cook will have on these figures?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady was at our first taskforce, and I am sure she will be impressed with the work that we have already been doing together, including the jobs fair that happened last Thursday. It is important, and we have seen this with Thomas Cook ex-employees, that they make a universal credit claim quickly—some of them have—so they can get the support that they need. I welcome, actually, the support that is given through the Trussell Trust in order to help people in this difficult time, but the sooner people come into Jobcentre Plus and start claiming universal credit, the sooner we can help.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Without giving this House a debate or a vote, as they had promised, the Government have pushed through regulations for the pilot of universal credit managed migration and payments to severely disabled people who lost out in being forced to transfer to universal credit. Will the Government explain why those payments still do not fully reflect the financial loss those disabled people have suffered?

Dr Coffey: There is an extra £600 million of support going to the most vulnerable. I really do want to encourage the Opposition to withdraw their early-day motion, because if they succeed in praying against this, they are hitting the most vulnerable people, and I am sure that is not something that they wish to be remembered for.

Spending Round 2019

10. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the implications for her Department's policies of the spending round 2019. [912567]

12. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the implications for her Department's policies of the spending round 2019. [912571]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The Department's resource budget will increase by 1.9% ahead of inflation for the first time since 2011, enabling us to provide excellent customer service, help people move into and progress in work, and provide financial security through timely benefit payments. As part of this, the DWP has been allocated £106 million to support vulnerable people and help to tackle private rented sector housing affordability through additional funding for discretionary housing payments.

Alan Brown: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has highlighted that, with more social housing and lower housing costs, Scotland's poverty figures are lower than the rest of the UK. The reality is that the biggest poverty factor is still Tory austerity. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that recent announcements will only mitigate a quarter of the cuts implemented since 2010. It is clear from the Secretary of State's answer that a 1.9% increase is not enough. If austerity is really ending, when will the other three quarters of the cuts that have been implemented be reversed?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have lifted 400,000 people out of absolute poverty since 2010 and that income inequality has fallen. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to go back to the Scottish Government and see what more they are doing to increase the number of higher paid jobs, because we all know that the best way out of poverty is to work.

Marion Fellows: On this subject yet again, the spending round did nothing to address the cuts to the local housing allowance and the pressures on private renters, who are £38.49 a week worse off due to the UK Government's benefits freeze. To ensure affordability and prevent evictions and hardship, will the Secretary of State immediately increase the LHA to the pre-2010 level, and uprate it in line with inflation and rent increases?

Dr Coffey: I have just laid out that we increased the amount of money for discretionary housing payments. I have spoken to Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Scottish Minister, and it is my intention to see her soon, but the hon. Lady knows there are things the Scottish Government can do with the funding they have.

Disabled People

11. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase support for disabled people. [912569]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): We have made significant progress to improve support and have seen the number of working age disabled people in employment increased by over 1 million in the last six years. However, we continue to focus on improving our services for those who use them. This includes the current consultation on measures aimed at reducing ill health-related job losses.

Steve Double: I thank the Minister for that answer. What specific help is available to young people with disabilities to support them into work?

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this very important area and I am very proud that I helped to champion disability apprenticeships. Through the Access to Work scheme, which is now seeing record numbers benefiting, we saw a 34% increase in 16 to 24-year-olds using it, opening up more opportunities for employment.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The catalogue of the Department for Work and Pensions' own failings has created a hostile environment for disabled people. Figures released this year show that almost 6,000 people died within six months of being found fit for work. The announcement of the new independent serious case panel lacks any meaningful detail, terms of reference or purpose. Will the Minister confirm whether the new panel will review previous social security benefit deaths, and will he set out what the statement of purpose is for the new independent panel?

Justin Tomlinson: We work all year round with claimants, stakeholders and charities—organisations with real-life experience—to help to improve not only the training but the understanding of all areas of disability and health conditions. We back that with genuine financial support. The Government now spend £55 billion a year, 2.5% of all Government spending and 6% of GDP—a record high, at £9 billion in real terms, to support people with disabilities.

Universal Credit: Identity Verification

13. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): How her Department verifies the identity of universal credit claimants who do not have a (a) home, (b) bank account, (c) driving licence and (d) passport. [912572]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): It is a priority for this Government to provide swift access to support those who need it, while protecting those same people from potentially fraudulent behaviour. If a claimant does not have the documentary evidence we need, we can verify by using: biographical tests and checks, and information held on the Department's systems; confirmation of third-party organisations; and two members of jobcentre staff knowing and recognising the claimant as part of their work.

Chi Onwurah: This is not what is happening in practice. Constituents are coming to me who have had their claims denied or who have just been turned away and told, "Go and find the documentation." Newcastle citizens advice bureau also reflects that. Will the Minister guarantee that no vulnerable claimant will be turned away because of not having the right documentation? Will she write to me with the number of those who have had their claims denied because of a lack of documentation, so we can see the size of the problem?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I know she is passionate about her constituency. It is absolutely right that there is a balance, but to get a universal credit claim right we need to ensure we verify the identities of all vulnerable people. We heard earlier about the challenge if a claim is made fraudulently. We must be able to understand when there is a particular need to intervene. As we heard earlier, home visits are

possible in relation to Help to Claim. If she would like to give me the details, I am very happy to look into this matter further.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) can legitimately shoehorn his Question 19 into this exchange.

19. [912578] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): The Secretary of State has referred to the valuable role of citizens advice bureaux, and the Rugby CAB does fantastic work. It has told me about the challenges that clients face when they transition from employment and support allowance to universal credit. Will the Minister assure me that that transition is being sensitively and effectively managed?

Mims Davies: The Department is absolutely committed to making sure that we have the most compassionate and approachable opportunities for people to claim in every single constituency. I have met work coaches—from Scotland to Crawley to Walsall—who are dealing with this day to day, and the Help to Claim scheme backs that up.

Child Poverty

16. **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of child poverty. [912575]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): This Government take child poverty extremely seriously. The evidence shows that work is the best route out of poverty and that there are 730,000 fewer children in workless households compared with 2010, but there is more to do—one child in poverty is one too many—and this is a key priority for me and the Secretary of State. I will continue to work with colleagues from across the House, other Government Departments and stakeholders to identify and tackle the root causes of poverty.

Stephen Morgan: Children are not getting the nutrition that they need on the 170 days a year when they are not at school. Local authorities and devolved Governments are tackling this issue head on; why are this Government not doing so?

Will Quince: This is probably a question for the Department for Education, but we are supporting more than 1 million children with free school meals, investing up to £26 million in school breakfast clubs and providing approximately 2.3 million four to six-year-olds with a portion of fresh fruit or vegetables each day at school. Through the Healthy Start programme, hundreds of thousands of low-income families benefit from vouchers that can be redeemed against fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Child poverty is being driven up by the five-week delay during which people have to wait before they receive universal credit. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that what Ministers refer to as an advance is in fact a loan that has to be repaid by claimants, and will he commit to scrapping the five-week delay?

Will Quince: I think that this one has been answered several times already, but advance payments of up to 100% are available from day one of a universal credit claim and budgeting support is available for anyone who needs extra help. The repayment time for the advances has been extended to 12 months and will be further extended to 16 months from October 2021.

Mr Speaker: There was a discernible world-weariness in the Minister's reference to this question having been answered several times already. I simply remind those observing our proceedings that repetition is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons. It never has been, and I doubt that things are going to change very much.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): An article in *The BMJ* shows that researchers have highlighted a possible link between an increase in the number of babies who die before their first birthday and child poverty. They estimate that there were an additional 570 excess deaths between 2014 and 2017, with 172 attributable to an increase in child poverty, so will the Minister scrap the two-child limit and the benefit cap, which are driving up child poverty?

Will Quince: I humbly suggest that few Members in the Chamber have raised child and infant mortality more than I have. I take the issue incredibly seriously and I have read that report. No one in government wants to see poverty rising. Wages have outpaced inflation for 18 months, and there are more people in work than ever before. We know that children in households in which no one works are about five times more likely to be in poverty than those in households in which all adults work. Our welfare reforms are incentivising work and supporting working families.

Topical Questions

T1. [912583] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to be in the Chamber as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, leading a fantastic Department that serves people from the Shetlands to the Scilly Isles, with more than 20 million customers across the country. In my short time in this role, I have already witnessed at first hand the inspiring and incredible work of civil servants throughout the country, and they are benefiting as well in seeing our employment rate continuing at a joint record high and an unemployment rate at its lowest since the '70s. There is more to do, however, and I will keep focusing on improving the payment of universal credit and ensuring that we support everyone in society.

Grahame Morris: I am grateful for the Secretary of State's sunny disposition in outlining her priorities, but the retirement plans of millions of women born in the 1950s are in ruins because of a decision by the previous Conservative-Lib Dem coalition Government to accelerate the increases in the state pension age. Last week, a decision in the High Court made it clear that only a political decision could deliver a just solution for these women, so will the Government now give the WASPI

women dignity in retirement? Some 197 MPs have signed early-day motion 63 calling for justice for the WASPI women and for this historic injustice to be put right.

Dr Coffey: The High Court set out quite clearly that successive Governments had taken a measured approach in recognising the inequality in the state pension age and the need to increase the state pension age. Indeed, it was the Pensions Act 2007 that started the trigger going beyond 65. It is important to recognise that and the efforts made to communicate it, but I can assure the House that, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, there are record numbers of women in employment. We will continue to support them in fulfilling their careers.

T7. [912589] **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am privileged to have the universal credit processing centre for the south-west in my constituency. The staff there do an incredible job making sure the roll-out of universal credit is successful. They have done so well they have been asked to take on processing for several London boroughs, but they are currently experiencing very high case loads because of the transfer of employment and support allowance to universal credit. Will the Secretary of State make sure they get all the resources they need so that we can support these incredibly hard-working frontline staff?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to praise the people who work for the DWP in his constituency. We have more than 4,000 civil servants in service centres nationally and we constantly monitor the volume of work as universal credit grows, but I assure him that sufficient resources will be in place to support those workers in his constituency.

T2. [912584] **Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (LD): Last month, I met my constituent Dr Karen Gilmore, a specialist in pain management, and several of her colleagues and members of the independent assessment service. We discussed how the personal independence payment assessments in particular do not meet the needs of people living with chronic and severe pain. Will the Minister meet Dr Gilmore and me to discuss how we can improve these assessments?

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady and her colleague. We are determined to continue to improve PIP—31% of claimants now access the highest rate of support, compared to just 15% under the legacy benefits—but I would welcome any additional information.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): As we have heard, many 1950s-born women have now reached the age at which they expected to receive a pension but are not, and many are struggling. Given that the judicial review is now out of the way, will the new Secretary of State agree to meet me and my co-chair of the all-party group on state pension inequality for women, the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), to discuss the proposals in the transitional arrangement document we produced? Can she also give us an estimate of how many women are affected in this way and whether they are in work?

Dr Coffey: That was about four questions in one. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) in due course.

T3. [912585] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The benefits freeze has driven increased food bank usage in my constituency, as family incomes have fallen far below rising costs. The freeze is supposed to end in April. What work is the Secretary of State doing now to assess the real minimum income levels necessary to avoid destitution?

Dr Coffey: Such decisions need to be made fairly soon, and I am conscious of the analysis presented to me and the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), as we make decisions on that matter.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): On Friday, I visited the new Barnstaple Work Club, a fantastic initiative giving support to those seeking employment, particularly those with disabilities. Will the Minister join me in welcoming this new initiative and in thanking the volunteers as well as Barnstaple library for hosting it?

Justin Tomlinson: It would be a pleasure to thank those volunteers doing so much to create new opportunities for disabled people, which is something I know my hon. Friend, as their MP, regularly champions, as I have seen at first hand on some very good visits there.

T4. [912586] **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): This morning, at the start of Challenge Poverty week, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report entitled “Poverty in Scotland 2019”, which looks into some of the reasons why poverty levels in Scotland are not quite as bad as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. One of the major factors that it identifies is the much greater availability of affordable housing, and, in particular, the impact of nearly 20 years of council house building, and the fact that the Scottish Government have built 87,000 affordable houses since 2007.

Does the Minister agree that, while he may claim that work is the best way out of poverty, unaffordable housing is a sure-fire way into poverty? Will the UK Government learn the lessons of what is happening in Scotland, and make social and council housing something to be celebrated instead of something to be demonised?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): I do agree with the hon. Gentleman that secure and stable accommodation is one route out of poverty. It will come as no surprise to him that I raise this issue regularly with my counterpart at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. I have been pushing the Ministry to consider providing more affordable homes, and homes for social rent, as one of its policy initiatives.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for youth employment, I warmly welcome the Minister’s announcement about additional support for our young people. Can he confirm that mentoring will be an important part of that, given that it has been proved that it will help, in particular, those furthest from the labour market and the most vulnerable into work?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. In the middle of last year, there were 63 new mentoring circles in operation. The circles originally focused on the race disparity audit, but they are now being rolled out across the country, as was agreed last January. I recently met the members of one circle in Basingstoke, where they were having a real effect on local young people who know what is around them. Mentors, businesses and employers can do a great deal to change young people's lives locally.

T5. [912587] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Childcare in York can cost more than £1,000 a month, and those on universal credit are being asked to pay that amount upfront. What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that providers have the resources that they need and claimants are not having to pay?

Will Quince: Childcare provision is far more generous under universal credit than it was under the legacy benefits system. Another recent change is that the flexible support fund can now be used to pay deposits or first month's payments.

Mr Speaker: I call Toby Perkins. [*Interruption.*] I did not call a Conservative Member because I know that the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) is normally paying the closest possible attention, and none of the hon. Members sitting on the Government Benches wished to contribute to the proceedings. I therefore alighted on the oratorical opportunities offered by the hon. Gentleman.

T6. [912588] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): There is literally nothing else to say about Conservative welfare policy. The truth is that anyone who has met people who work in a food bank, or people who work with the homeless, will recognise that there is a direct link between welfare policy, the sanctions regime, and the increase in homelessness and poverty. What serious work will the Government do to address that link—or will they at least have the decency and honesty to admit that that increase in homelessness and poverty is an absolutely accepted part of Government policy?

Dr Coffey: That is simply not the case. The first time that I became involved with a food bank was in 2006, when people were falling between the gaps. One of the things that make me proudest of the Conservative Government and the coalition is that people are better off in work than out of it unless they cannot work, and we have championed the vulnerable. Universal credit is ensuring that people can have more and more income, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

T8. [912590] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What training is in place to make jobcentre and other DWP staff properly aware of the needs of claimants with learning difficulties? A claimant in my constituency has been left with just £40 a month to support his family because of the lack of support that he received in a jobcentre.

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that important issue. We have doubled the number of disability employment specialist advisers, and we are

ensuring that we do everything in our power to identify claimants who need additional support. That is a real priority for us.

T9. [912591] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on DWP budgets of the failure to promise to uprate pensions for UK citizens in the EU for more than three years, and also to guarantee their healthcare for more than six months, in a no-deal scenario?

Dr Coffey: The right hon. Gentleman will know that we are still in the middle of a negotiation for how we leave the European Union at the end of the month. It is important to stress that we have decided on a three-year rise unilaterally. We encourage other European Union countries to do exactly the same and we will continue to support those who have relied on UK pensions.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): People with a terminal illness want the choice of whether to work or not, and they should expect help and support from their employer. Does the Minister support the TUC's Dying to Work campaign, which asks businesses to sign up and promise not to sack employees who have a terminal illness, and will she encourage more businesses to sign it?

Justin Tomlinson: The TUC has done really good work here. We are working with employers to highlight the importance of making those sorts of changes, and this is an area where I am sure there would be cross-party support.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): There are over 5,700 WASPI women in Inverclyde. Many have worked their entire adult lives. They have paid their dues and they were expecting a pension, not a benefit. If we mucked around with MPs' pensions in the same fashion, many Government Members would be standing and asking questions. Will the Secretary of State commit to undertaking an impact assessment for all women affected by changes in the state pension age and, once completed, offer a payment acknowledging any disadvantages caused?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be speaking to his own Government, who have the power under sections 24, 26 and 28 of the Scotland Act 2016 to take interventions and address the problem that he has raised.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Why are the Government not tracking young people when they leave the youth obligation? As such, how do they know whether the scheme works? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. This is very unseemly. The hon. Lady was asking her question and there is a lot of very noisy chuntering taking place between the SNP Benches and the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who luxuriates in the lather of the Treasury Bench. It is very unfair on the hon. Lady, very unseemly and very uncharacteristic of the hon. Gentleman, who is normally a most emollient fellow.

Mims Davies: The youth obligation programme is now being fully rolled out and looks at 18 to 24-year-olds making a new claim on universal credit. We had an internal evaluation report in April 2018 that identified a need for what the hon. Lady raises. We believe it is too soon to be looking at this, but I know that she and I share a great interest in how we can support our young people, and I am happy to speak to her further about this.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): One way that the Government could start to put right the injustices done to the women born in the early '50s who were denied their pensions is to have a discussion with their colleagues in the Department for Transport and local authorities and provide free bus passes. That would help them a lot.

Guy Opperman: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the judgment given by the High Court on Thursday and, obviously, any individual local authorities that wish to address that point in a particular way.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) is being addressed by her leader, which is a very solemn matter. Nevertheless, I intrude, in the hope that she still wishes to ask a question.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Or perhaps not by her leader but by any leader.

Christine Jardine: Further to the points already raised by other hon. Members, there are 6,500 women in Edinburgh West who were born in the 1950s and who have been affected by last week's Court judgment. Can the Secretary of State assure me that, in the meeting that she has agreed to with the chairs of the APPG, there will be a meaningful attempt to address the poverty that these women face and not just sweep it under the carpet like an inconvenient problem?

Dr Coffey: I refer the hon. Lady to the judgment that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), has already raised. She might also wish to speak to her party leader, because she joined me in the Division Lobby when we made the changes that we did in the Pensions Act 2011. [*Interruption.*] Or rather, at least that the coalition Government did. I wish to make sure that we have a sensible conversation going forward, but the judgment stands. It is open for the ladies to appeal, but I can assure the House that we have made every effort, as did the Labour Government before us, to ensure that people knew about these changes.

Withdrawal Agreement: Proposed Changes

3.39 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union if he will make a statement on when the Government intend to publish the full legal text of their proposed changes to the withdrawal agreement and political declaration.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): We are unconditionally committed to finding a solution for the north-south border that protects the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and the commitments that can best be met if we explore solutions other than the backstop. The backstop risks weakening the delicate balance embodied in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement between both main traditions in Northern Ireland, grounded in agreement, consent and respect for minority rights. Any deal for Brexit on 31 October must avoid the whole UK, or just Northern Ireland, being trapped in an arrangement without consent in which it is a rule taker. Both sides have always been clear that the arrangements for the border must recognise the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland and, reflecting that, be creative and flexible. Under no circumstances will the United Kingdom place infrastructure checks or controls at the border.

On Wednesday 2 October, the Government proposed a new protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. These were serious and realistic proposals that reflect the core aims put forward by both the UK and the EU. These proposals are consistent with the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and deliver our aim of avoiding any checks or infrastructure at the border. The proposals were set out in detail in an explanatory note and in a letter to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. The Prime Minister deposited both documents in the Library on Wednesday 2 October and published them in parallel on gov.uk. To support these negotiations, a draft legal text was also shared with the Commission on a confidential basis. The Prime Minister's Europe adviser, David Frost, and UK officials have been in intensive discussions with the Commission for some time now and will continue to meet their counterparts from taskforce 50 for further technical talks this week. These meetings will cover our proposals on the protocol and the political declaration to reflect the goal of a comprehensive free trade agreement.

The previous withdrawal agreement and political declaration would have trapped the United Kingdom within European regulation and customs arrangements. The Prime Minister is continuing talks with the EU leaders today, including the Prime Minister of Sweden, the Prime Minister of Denmark and the Prime Minister of Poland. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union is also travelling to EU capitals, including visiting Amsterdam and Valletta over the course of this week. Discussions with the Commission are ongoing and thus sensitive, and we must ensure that we as a Government act in a way that maximises our chance of success in these negotiations. We will of course keep the House informed as the discussions continue. The legal text that we have shared with the Commission will only be published when doing so will assist the negotiations.

We hope that those in Brussels will decide to work with us over the upcoming days. If they do, we will leave with a new deal. If they do not want to talk, we are prepared to leave without a deal. We need to get a new deal or a deal, but no more delays. We must get Brexit done so that the country can move forward and focus on other issues, such as the cost of living, the NHS and other domestic priorities.

Keir Starmer: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. The Government have presented the EU with a 44-page legal text, a seven-page memorandum and a four-page letter. In this House, we have seen the memorandum and the letter, but not the full legal text. Frankly, that is not good enough, because without the full legal text, we are being asked to guess at the detail of the Government's proposals, or, worse, we are being asked to take the Prime Minister's word on it. We do not want a summary. We do not want the Prime Minister's interpretation of the text. We need to see the full legal text. And it matters, because there appears to be what the Taoiseach has called a "contradiction"—his word—between what the Prime Minister tells the House and the words of the legal text.

Last week, in response to a question from the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), the Prime Minister said that "the proposals we"—that is, the Government—

"are putting forward do not involve physical infrastructure at or near the border or indeed at any other place."—[*Official Report*, 3 October 2019; Vol. 664, c. 1389.]

I noted the words used by the Minister just now, and I hope he can clarify this. The contradiction the Taoiseach appears to be highlighting is that the legal text may say something different on that very issue, and the Minister will know just how important that is.

Can the Minister now clear the issue up at the Dispatch Box? Does the full legal text bear out the Prime Minister's assertion to the House that his proposals do not entail physical infrastructure at the border, near the border or in any other place? That is what he said, and that is what prompted the Taoiseach to say that the full text should be published. That goes to the heart of the only defence the Minister has put forward—that of confidentiality.

Both the Taoiseach and the President of the EU Commission have called for the legal text to be published. That shoots through the confidentiality argument. They want us to see the text so that we can properly debate and scrutinise what the Government are putting forward. The only party insisting on secrecy are the UK Government, so the question is obvious: what are the Government hiding?

Then there is the question of a level playing field. As the House knows, no Labour MP could support a deal that strips away or undermines workers' rights, environmental protections or consumer rights, yet that is the very—[*Interruption.*] I hear the claims that it does not. If it does not, the Government should publish the text and assure the House. Before I first came to the House, and since I have been in the House, I have dealt with summaries and interpretations of texts, and I have seen texts, and there are differences between the full text and somebody's summary or interpretation. If it is clear that the text does not undermine workplace rights, environmental rights and consumer rights, the Government

[*Keir Starmer*]

should publish it and assure the House. What is being hidden? Will the Minister agree now to do the right thing and publish the full legal text forthwith?

James Duddridge: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for those comments. Last week, I was able to tell the House that proposals would be tabled to the EU by the end of the week. Not only were we able to table those proposals, but we were able to publish them and share them with the House. It is the Government's intention to share as much as possible, but at a time that is right, and not at a time when getting a good negotiation through takes precedence.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the Prime Minister's position in relation to his assertion that there would be no checks at the border, near the border or at any other place. I have not seen the Taoiseach's exact comments, but I can confirm that the position that the Prime Minister stated is still correct today and is the Government's position, and I see no reason why that is going to change.

In relation to level playing fields, we are not hiding anything. We do not wish to undermine workers' rights. We will keep those workers' rights. Truth will tell over time, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman sees the results of the negotiation. He wants a deal, and I want a deal. The Government genuinely do not think that sharing the full text now will make doing a deal more likely.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's statement in response to the urgent question, and we all hope for no further delays on the Brexit negotiation. Is he aware that business groups across the country want certainty, to allow them to plan for the future? What discussions has he had with them to reassure them?

James Duddridge: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. Clearly, he has been talking to business groups in his constituency. Businesses certainly do want certainty, and whether it is meetings with business groups in England, Northern Ireland or Wales, everyone wants to get Brexit done. The last thing they want is more delay. We have had delay and delay and delay, and the answer to delay cannot be more delay.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister on managing not once but twice to include all this week's Brexit buzzwords in such a short but, I am sorry to say, not particularly informative answer.

The Government have made public only their version of a seven-page explanatory document based on a full 44-page legal text. Last week, a number of Government loyalists criticised Opposition Members for saying we were likely to oppose the Prime Minister's plan before we had read it properly. They then went ahead and committed themselves to supporting it before they had read it properly—they cannot have seen it or read it properly, because nobody has seen it yet.

It is simply not acceptable for us to be asked to commit to support something based on the Prime Minister's version of what it says, because none of us can trust what he tells us. Last week, he twice gave us a promise

from the Dispatch Box—once to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and once to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady)—that the Government are going to restore full control of Scotland's fishing to the people of Scotland. If only that were true.

The Taoiseach told us that the Prime Minister's version of what is in the 44-page confidential document was not accurate. The Prime Minister told us last week that there would be no checks on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but even the seven-page summary tells us that that was not true.

Does the Minister not accept that if he is to have any hope of Parliament agreeing to the withdrawal agreement, he must trust Parliament and allow us to see the full agreement now, not at the last minute when there is no time to read 44 pages of detail? When will the document be published? When can we expect to be asked to vote on the deal? How much notice will we have regarding the detailed legal text? Going back to the question that is still being dodged, does the Prime Minister's proposal mean that there will be additional infrastructure anywhere in relation to the Irish border? If so, where will it be?

James Duddridge: The legal text will come forward at the right time. The hon. Gentleman is critical of Tory Members for supporting the Prime Minister before seeing all the detail, but I would not be critical. Indeed, I suggest that my hon. Friends should always support the Prime Minister as a matter of default. I understand that SNP Members will be more sceptical, but they will have all the information in front of them before they are asked to vote. However, we will not provide the legal text if it gets in the way of the negotiations and the deal, which I think the hon. Gentleman would want.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): As the Government approach the final stages of the negotiations to get the necessary changes to the backstop, is it not the case that if the EU believes that this House will not support the Government's deal, it is less likely that a deal will be achieved? We have heard people say, month after month, that they want the Government to negotiate a deal, so I say to Opposition Members who, like me, want a deal that now is the moment to speak up and support the Government in getting that deal.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. Now is the time for a deal, but the way that the House has behaved has made a deal less likely and made it more likely that we will have no deal. However, it is not too late. The Government are reaching out across the Chamber to our friends on the other side, saying, "Join us in supporting a deal. It is the right thing for the country."

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Earlier this year, the Government said that if we left the EU with a deal, we would keep our world-leading standards and rights on food, quality, employment and environmental protections. That commitment was pretty flimsy then, but people now fear that it has been ditched in desperation, and the Government will not even publish the text. The public have a right to know whether the Prime Minister is prepared to sacrifice the quality of food on supermarket shelves, the rights of workers to take holiday and our children's right to breathe clean air.

James Duddridge: We are supposed to be temperate in our language, but, quite frankly, that is a load of rubbish. That is not our intention, and if our constituents are worried and scared as a result of what the Liberal Democrats say, that is a terrible thing; it simply is not true.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I said from this spot a few weeks ago that it did not matter what the Government brought back, because there are Members in here representing leave seats who will always find a reason to vote against what the Government bring forward, because their real aim is to stop us leaving. Is it not the ultimate irony that the people who are giving the biggest croggy to a no-deal Brexit are the very people who repeatedly stand up and tell us that we have to vote for compromise but then vote against any compromise—any deal—that is put on the table?

James Duddridge: My hon. Friend is right. That is a particular problem with the Liberal Democrats who, for perfectly respectable reasons, do not want a no-deal exit but who will not back a deal. It makes sense for us all to get behind a deal, which is better than no deal. That is what the Government want to do, and we reach out to all Members to support a deal.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Something does not quite add up on there being no physical infrastructure at any other place, which is probably one reason why the Government's proposals are currently not acceptable to the European Union. The Prime Minister told the BBC last week that

“there will have to be a system, for customs checks away from the border.”

The explanatory note says that such checks will

“take place at traders' premises or other designated locations... Goods moved under either mechanism would be under customs supervision by one or other customs authority from the point at which they are declared for export until they are cleared by customs in the territory of import for free circulation”.

Can the Minister name any jurisdiction in the world where there are customs checks but no customs infrastructure?

James Duddridge: The Government are looking for a tailored solution. Of all the trade between the UK and Northern Ireland, only 1% of goods cross the border. As well as trusted trader schemes, goods could be examined by authorities at commercial sites run by hauliers and freight forwarding companies. That is already provided for under existing transit rules, under which logistics services are commonly approved as authorised consignees for these very purposes. It already happens.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Were any of the frightful diminution of rights mentioned by the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) to occur, it would clearly require primary legislation by this Parliament, wouldn't it?

James Duddridge: Yes. We would not propose it; I would not support it; and I do not think my right hon. Friend would support it. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats can say whether they would support it.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): We know the Prime Minister thinks that preparation is just for girly swots, but at least the last Prime Minister gave us a 90-page White Paper on her proposals and we got to see them at the same time as the European partners. Here we are, 11 days before the summit, and we have this pathetic rag—four pages—and an explanatory note. It would be comical if the Good Friday agreement and the promises contained therein did not rest on this. Can the Minister explain the magic thinking by which we have a border down the Irish sea and a border on the island of Ireland without border posts?

James Duddridge: I acknowledge, as I think the whole House would, that we are working to a compressed timescale compared with the previous negotiations, but those negotiations were not successful. Following the same tack in our negotiating strategy and expecting a different result would be foolish. It is time for a change of tack in the negotiations, which I welcome.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): As a member of the “MPs for a Deal” group, it would make my life easier if we were to include environmental and workers' protections, as requested by many Opposition Members, but does the Minister agree that the right place for those protections is probably in the political declaration?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for her work with the “MPs for a Deal” group, which brings together MPs from across a number of political parties. I welcome her introduction of the political declaration, as getting that right will set the tone going forward from 1 November, after we have left on 31 October, and will form the basis of the future economic partnership and the first-in-class free trade agreement that most hon. Members want.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response to our questions, and I wish him well in his job. Can he confirm that there is no intention to change the original position that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will take back control of our seas and our fisheries, enabling our fishing sector to grow and create jobs, and that we, the citizens of this great nation, will be in charge and in control?

James Duddridge: I can give the hon. Gentleman that confirmation, but I encourage him to discuss the detail with my colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. If that is not to his satisfaction, I will be happy to talk to him about fishing rights or impact at the same time.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the agenda of Members from the Opposition parties to overturn the referendum result, put a stop to Brexit and revoke article 50? Will he confirm that this Government and this Prime Minister will not let that happen?

James Duddridge: With great sadness, I can confirm that I fear that some Members on the Opposition Benches and in this House simply do not want to follow the mandate of the British people. They do not want to exit and they will use every trick and turn in the book

[James Duddridge]

to frustrate it. That is not to say that there are not some genuine concerns, and I recognise those, but she is right: some people, having offered the referendum to the electorate, do not like the result and are trying to interfere and overturn the democratic will of the public.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm whether the full legal text has been shown to the Democratic Unionist party? If it has, why is it reasonable for one party to be able to make an informed judgment about the Government's proposals while everyone else is kept in the dark?

James Duddridge: I am not going to get into the detail of—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members who have been Ministers will realise that lots of people see documents, and Ministers do not constantly want to be in the position of saying who has seen what documents, which versions and when. I will not comment on who has seen which documents or indeed on documents that I have seen or have not seen.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I love the way that Opposition parties are implying that if only they could see these documents, they would rush to support the deal. I think the British public are now wise to the way in which Parliament has frustrated the Government's negotiating position. Would it be possible for the Government to strengthen their negotiating hand by holding a vote on these proposals, in the way that we did on the Brady amendment in January, and show that there is a majority in this place for them?

James Duddridge: I think members of the public are getting wise to what is going on: this Government are trying to deliver Brexit and this Parliament, collectively, is trying to frustrate it. My hon. Friend raises the interesting solution of putting this to a vote, and I will discuss that with my ministerial colleagues.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Has the Minister seen the documents?

James Duddridge: I have already said that I will not comment on which documents I have and have not seen, or which versions I have and have not seen. This is a document that we are negotiating on. It makes sense to look at that document, negotiate on that document and come back to the House with a final document. This House does not want a blow-by-blow account; it wants to deliver a deal.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): As has been said by honourable colleagues on the Government Benches, it is a well-known fact, and the public are not fooled, that most MPs in this place—in all positions in this place—do not want to leave the EU. That is a dishonourable stance to take, after the EU referendum. Will my hon. Friend reassure the public and us that we will honour this referendum and leave the EU, with or without a deal, on 31 October?

James Duddridge: I can reassure the people of Dorset and the United Kingdom that we will be leaving on 31 October. Our preference is to do so with a deal, but we are very much ready to leave with no deal.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): I am sure, Mr Speaker, that you may not have heard the use of the word “dishonourable” to describe those of us who think that our great country has made a mistake and are doing nothing more than speaking out with the freedom that I thought was at the heart of our democracy. I would have hoped that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) might have withdrawn his comments. In any event, it is very odd that we are all being asked to support a deal, the details of which we know very little of, unless of course our name is Arlene Foster. We want to know the details of these customs arrangements, and of the structures and infrastructure, because of the position in other countries, notably Norway and Sweden. Sweden is a member of the single market and the customs union, and Norway is in the single market but not the customs union, and they have a hard border. May we therefore have these unicorn details please?

James Duddridge: I must say that although I am reaching out across the Floor, I have given up on reaching out to the right hon. Lady. There are many Opposition Members and there is still hope for people who will support a plan, but I suspect that under no circumstances will she support a plan, regardless of what we produce and what it says.

Mr Speaker: That may well be true but I hope that the right hon. Lady, who is not too delicate a flower, can bear the almost unendurable pain of the criticism of the Minister with such stoicism and fortitude as she feels able, in the circumstances, to muster.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Last week, the Leader of the Opposition said that no self-respecting Labour MP could vote for the proposals, yet we are now being pressed on a confidential document, the production of which would undermine yet again our negotiating position. Does the Minister agree that to reveal the documents would make no deal more likely?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for asking that question. No deal is indeed made more likely by the House not supporting the Government's position. As for the Leader of the Opposition, I think that MPs and the public are coming around to the idea that he is flip-flopping on these issues left, right and centre, and want a general election so that they can re-elect a Government with a strong Conservative majority.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): A few days ago, I asked the Minister whether the term “infrastructure” included cameras. He was not quite sure at the time; now that he has had a few days to go away and look it up, will he give us an answer?

James Duddridge: I do not think I said that I was not quite sure. I think I used the words, “It would have been something that was considered,” but that the House should not read anything into that in any way. I think that is what I said, virtually verbatim, and that remains the position.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I wonder whether the Minister could help the House. Opposition Members say that they are not supporting a deal because they are worried about workers' rights, yet if we had

a deal, it would be this House that would decide on workers' rights, and if they were ever in government, they could do whatever they liked. Can we conclude only that the Opposition do not think they will ever be in government?

James Duddridge: I think everyone in the House believes in higher protections for workers' rights and maintaining and expanding them over time. My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about the Opposition's level of confidence: not only are they not confident that they will be in government to improve workers' rights, but they do not seem to be confident that they will even win a general election. They are running scared of going back to the people because they know that they are trying to overturn the will of the people who wanted Brexit.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Paragraph 13 of the memo issued last week confirms that even if the European Union agrees to the proposals, and even if Parliament then agrees them, they would not come into force for more than a year, unless they had also been endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive, which has not met for several years. Will the Minister confirm that if the Northern Ireland Executive continues to fail to meet, the proposals automatically fall away after 12 months?

James Duddridge: The right hon. Gentleman is right: we are in a constrained period and we are trying to do an unprecedented amount of work. Even separate to the problem of which he speaks directly, there are already many hurdles to get over, but we will work together with all our partners to re-form Stormont—that is our priority in relation to Northern Ireland—so that we can get this deal through.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In the most recent general election, more Chelmsford constituents emailed me about the environment and animal welfare than about all other issues put together. I am enormously proud of the way in which the Government are leading the world on protecting the environment and on endangered species. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Lib Dem's suggestion that this deal, which is to resolve the issues on the Irish border, could somehow be used to undermine our standards on the environment, animal welfare or workers' rights is pure scaremongering and totally irresponsible?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. We will maintain environmental and animal welfare standards. I know that she works tirelessly to improve those standards, both in Chelmsford and with Back Benchers. I remember many a campaign that she has led in her time in the House of Commons, particularly on environmental issues, recycling, and changing behaviours and perceptions. I thank her for that work, and there is nothing in this process that means that we are going to go back on any of those commitments. In fact, the Government are committed to going further, as she has demanded.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD): It is almost as if members of the Government have been taking lessons dancing around slippery poles this afternoon. Essentially, we do not have a credible deal, because there are no customs borders anywhere in the world without some

form of physical infrastructure. We have a Government who are still insisting that they will obey law, but only those parts that it chooses to obey. Will the Minister at least confirm that the Government will comply with the spirit and the provisions of the Benn Act in full?

James Duddridge: In answer to the latter question, yes. When it comes to slippery poles, the thing that is slippery is introducing a ten-minute rule Bill to say that if hon. Members, for whatever reason, cross the Floor of the House and leave their party they should stand in a by-election, then not doing that when she crosses the Floor of the House. That is slippery.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My hon. Friend the Minister had a strong outing on this subject on 26 September—a date that I happen to remember. Today, I noticed a subtle difference in his wording, as he talked about our leaving with a deal or being “prepared” to leave without a deal on 31 October. Will he confirm not only that we are prepared to leave without a deal on 31 October but that we will actually leave without a deal on 31 October, unless we have deal?

James Duddridge: I thank my right hon. Friend, and confirm that nothing has changed since his birthday—I think that that was what he was referring to. Apologies for not congratulating him at the time. My language was not nuanced in any way. We will be leaving on 31 October with a deal or without a deal.

Mr Speaker: If I were charitable, I would say that the right hon. Gentleman turned 58 on 26 September, but I am afraid that I must not mislead the House. [*Interruption.*] I call Chris Bryant.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): May I ask about the political declaration, which is of as much concern to many of us as other elements of the withdrawal agreement? The former Prime Minister was quite right to say that if there is no deal, there is no deal on security. All the elements of security are shunted forward into the political declaration. I wonder where we are with extradition, because since the original version of the political declaration was signed, four major European countries have said that they will not on any terms extradite their nationals to the UK if we are no longer members of the European Union. Will that not pose a significant problem for us if we want people to face justice in this country?

James Duddridge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that. Obviously, the broader case is that the convention of the '50s on extradition will come into play. There is a problem with four or five countries, and we are having discussions with them. They are quite significant difficulties, as they concern constitutional arrangements, but there are other arrangements that are not entirely satisfactory to try people in their home country that can be used if we do not secure a workaround. It is not ideal, but there are workarounds, and we are progressing them.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on the volume of trade that would be subject to special customs arrangements that have attracted so much heat and light in discussions? Will he confirm that with good political will on both sides problems can be resolved?

James Duddridge: Where there's a will, there's a way. People said that it was impossible that negotiations would reopen, but negotiations did effectively reopen after the Prime Minister spoke to President Macron and Chancellor Merkel, so I am optimistic. I am optimistic because negotiations are ongoing now: David Frost is in Brussels as we speak; my Secretary of State is travelling around, whipping up support and enthusiasm from other member states; and I understand that at around the time we are speaking—if not as we are speaking—the Prime Minister is on the phone to other Prime Ministers to whip up enthusiasm for the deal and avoid no deal. If only there were that much enthusiasm on the Opposition Benches.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): With respect, who do the Government think they are kidding? The reaction from the EU to the Prime Minister's proposal is courteous but critical, and it is abundantly evident that no agreement will be reached on his terms. We ask only of the Prime Minister that he is straight with people and their Parliament, and acknowledges this. Can the Minister therefore guarantee that the Prime Minister will not hold a meaningless vote before the European Council meeting?

James Duddridge: To paraphrase a famous quotation: well, they would say that, wouldn't they? EU representatives are negotiating. When we put papers in front of them, they are not going to say, "Gosh, this is wonderful. Thank you very much for making all these compromises. Let's accept that wholeheartedly and send you back to celebrate." They are bound to probe and see how far the Prime Minister is going to go. We have already compromised significantly; this is a good solution in which the UK Government have made a number of compromises. It is now time for the EU Commission and member states to say that they are up for compromising as well.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my frustration with the attitude of the Opposition parties, particularly the Scottish National party, who seem more intent on sowing discord and division in our United Kingdom than acting in the national interest? If they really were working for the economy and peoples of our country, they would get behind the Government and support us as we try to get a deal to leave the EU in good order on 31 October.

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for speaking up for Scotland in this Parliament, and for focusing on the nitty-gritty of the economy. No deal will not be as good as a deal for the whole United Kingdom, including Scotland, so he is right to ask colleagues on both sides of the House—including Scottish National party Members and other Scottish Members—to back a deal.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister may not be aware of this, but until about half an hour ago I had no idea who he was. From his answers today, I wonder how he can be so deeply unpleasant to so many colleagues on the Opposition Benches. The fact is that today he has said that it is not loyal or legitimate to stand up for our constituents when we are asking questions about what is contained in the deal. Some of us would vote for a good deal if we could see

it—if we did not live in a secret society and a secret state. Will he wake up to the fact that there is a lot of good will in this House for a deal, if we could actually see it?

James Duddridge: I am flabbergasted that the hon. Gentleman says he does not know who I am, because previously when I was at the Dispatch Box he asked me whether I knew about Huddersfield, and afterwards he thanked me for not mentioning that I was a comprehensive schoolboy who went to school in Huddersfield and he is the Member of Parliament for Huddersfield who was privately educated in the south of England.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that at least some SNP Members are simply attempting to undermine the progress that has already been made and that this Government are attempting to make towards a deal? Does he find it as worrying as I do that, when challenged on passing on the Brexit preparation funding to local authorities in Scotland, the First Minister said:

"We should not be having to spend a single penny on Brexit preparations"?

Is that not taking a political view of Brexit preparations, rather than looking at what is good for the economy of Scotland?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for speaking up for Scotland. He raises a very important point about fund distribution, and while some of these things are in the purview of the Cabinet Office, I am happy to have a discussion with him about how we can improve the situation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: May I now appeal to colleagues for single-sentence questions without preamble? I do not want speeches. We have four other urgent questions, so short inquiries would help.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): We are here on 7 October. The Government's plan was for Parliament to be prorogued and not return until 14 October. Under the original plan, we would have had no scrutiny at all of the withdrawal agreement and very little time when we returned. Is that not the case, Minister?

James Duddridge: If Parliament had not been in Session, I would have been helping to negotiate with member states, and perhaps we would have collectively, having spent more time doing that, got a deal.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Much nonsense has been spouted about the impracticalities of dealing with consignments when they reach their destination, rather than when they cross the border. Is it not the case that Britain's biggest port by value operates on that basis already? Goods inbound to Heathrow airport do not stop at the border or near the border; they arrive at Heathrow and are dealt with there. Indeed, if the Minister were to visit the UPS hubs at East Midlands airport or in Cologne or Louisville, Kentucky, he would see tens of thousands of parcels crossing borders, with the duties, tariffs and VAT being dealt with in parallel with those goods travelling.

James Duddridge: My right hon. Friend served in the Department for Transport and knows these issues incredibly well. I look forward to talking to him in more detail about East Midlands airport and UPS, particularly because Southend airport is doing a little bit of transit of goods with Amazon. He is right that these things can happen without intricate checks.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I gently point out that Members who came into the Chamber after the questions started cannot now expect to be called.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Minister will be well aware that the withdrawal agreement we already have says that it protects the Belfast/Good Friday agreement “in all its dimensions”—those are the precise words. The withdrawal agreement also protects the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the principle of consent. I would like the Minister to take a few moments to explain in detail to the people of Northern Ireland in particular how the Prime Minister’s new proposals guarantee those essential features of the withdrawal agreement.

James Duddridge: The reason why they are an improvement on the backstop is that the backstop could have left Northern Ireland linked to the EU in perpetuity without any consent. This consent mechanism is a massive improvement. I thank the hon. Lady for the discussions we have had. I think she wants to have another discussion with me after this, and I am more than happy to do that.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The Minister was asked whether the Government are committed to publishing the details, but would that question not carry more weight if those on the Labour Front Bench had not already closed their minds? Within minutes of the deal being proposed last week, they said it was not good enough. Sadly, too many minds on the Opposition Benches—with honourable exceptions—are already closed. Is it not time to just get on with it?

James Duddridge: It is certainly time to get on with it. I think that there are a significant number of Opposition Members who have more open minds than those on the Labour Front Bench, and we look forward to working with them over the coming days and weeks.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): One reason why we need to see the legal texts is that there is every chance that this Government are planning to throw food and environmental standards under the bus for the sake of securing a dodgy trade deal with President Trump. Forgive us if we do not find the Minister’s reassurances very reassuring. We would like to see the full legal texts. While he is at it, could he have a word with the Prime Minister to make sure that the Trade Bill comes back in the Queen’s Speech, so that we have a chance at least of ensuring that planetary health comes before the interests of US trade lobbyists?

James Duddridge: We will continue food and environmental standards. I have made that clear, and I will pass on the hon. Lady’s comments to the Prime Minister with pleasure.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In Michel Barnier’s speech in October last year, he said that a hard border in Northern Ireland needed to be avoided; that customs checks would be required, but they could happen using existing customs transit procedures; and that regulatory checks would need to increase, but they could continue to happen in the Irish sea. Does that not sound remarkably like the Prime Minister’s deal? Is it not time for the EU to negotiate in good faith, so that Members across the House can vote for this deal and we can leave on 31 October?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for that information, and I had not quite linked the two together. Perhaps we should call it not the Prime Minister’s proposal, but the Barnier solution.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It has been interesting to watch the Minister’s position morph from “We are prepared to leave without a deal” to “We will be leaving without a deal” in the course of this afternoon. Is he aware that in Edinburgh at lunchtime today, the Court of Session accepted from the Prime Minister “unequivocal assurances” that he would comply with the Benn Act? Is the Minister now departing from that promise made by the Prime Minister to the Scottish courts?

James Duddridge: Just to be clear, we will leave on the 31st and we are prepared to leave on the 31st—that adds information, rather than detracts—and we will abide by the Court decision.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): This morning, a Cabinet source was quoted as saying that the reason the Prime Minister is removing the level playing field protections on consumer, workers’ and environmental rights is that the Government know they would

“seriously restrict our ability to deregulate and do trade with other countries.”

That is the real aim of the Government’s Brexit proposals, is it not—to deregulate our economy and cut back rights?

James Duddridge: No, it is not.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I have to say that the world of work wants a deal to be done, but the Minister’s contempt for Parliament today makes it less likely that a deal could ever be arrived at. Serious questions have got to be answered seriously. May I ask the Minister about this specific point, as someone, like many in this House, who fought for decades for peace in Northern Ireland and would never, ever put that at risk? The Prime Minister talks in his letter about the

“very small number of physical checks needed”, including at

“other points on the supply chain.”

I asked the Prime Minister last week:

“Where are they, and what are they?” —[*Official Report*, 3 October 2019; Vol. 664, c. 1409.]

He was unable to answer. Can the Minister?

James Duddridge: I have tried to be as open as I can within the remit of trying to get a good negotiation. On the record, in response to an earlier question, I went through the trusted trader scheme and where checks could take place.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Can the Minister confirm whether he has seen the most recent legal document and read it, and say whether it confirms when a data adequacy agreement between the UK and the EU will be agreed? Without one—whether it is deal or no deal—very little is likely to be crossing any border.

James Duddridge: I see all the papers I need to, but I will not go through them, on a paper by paper basis, saying which version I have seen and when I have seen it. I simply will not do that; it is not helpful to the Government process.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): If the Minister is so convinced that this is a good deal, whether or not he has seen the paperwork, why will the Government not put that deal straight to the British people?

James Duddridge: Because they have already voted for Brexit.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I raised with the Prime Minister on Thursday the concerns of the Irish Deputy Prime Minister, Simon Coveney, about the nature of the democratic issue in Northern Ireland, where a minority could potentially hold a veto over the wishes of the majority. The Prime Minister assured me that he would seek discussions with the Irish Deputy Prime Minister, so can the Minister update me on whether those discussions have taken place—or when they are scheduled—and what the outcome of them might be?

James Duddridge: I heard the hon. Gentleman in the questions to the Prime Minister. I have not discussed this issue with the Prime Minister since then, so unfortunately I cannot update him, but I am happy to do so in correspondence.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): Last year, *The Economist* reported from the Norway-Sweden border—at Svinesund—and said:

“Even with the latest technology being outside the customs union entails a hard border”.

There is automatic number plate recognition, and there are lorry parks and the confiscation of alcohol. How can we have anything but that if the Government proposals come forward?

James Duddridge: The hon. Gentleman refers to one border. There are many borders around the world. Technologies can be used to avoid a hard border, and this Government are committed to having no hard border.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Do the Government stand by the December 2017 joint report, in which the UK is committed to the avoidance of

“any physical infrastructure or related checks and controls”

in Northern Ireland?

James Duddridge: Yes, entirely.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Are the proposals for the Northern Ireland border the Government’s vision of the perpetual future relationship on the border, or

are they actually another form of backstop until some glorious new customs relationship is reached between the whole of the UK and the European Union?

James Duddridge: There will be the point of exit on 31 October; a future economic partnership and a final relationship; and the consent point for the Northern Ireland Assembly to review the issue. So there are many junctures in the future where things can change.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Have the Government sought and received advice on the compatibility of their proposals with strands 2 and 3 of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement?

James Duddridge: As a matter of course, the Government do not share the legal advice they receive, nor do they confirm or deny whether they have sought legal advice. That is standard practice not related to this specific issue, but more generally.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): As someone who supported Prime Minister May’s deal and wants to support a deal as opposed to no deal, and further to the answer to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), may I ask the Minister to reassure me that strenuous efforts are being made in Northern Ireland to recover the support for a deal that seems to have been lost since the DUP changed sides and supported a deal?

James Duddridge: Work is going on in Northern Ireland at a number of levels. I have been involved more at a business level, looking at the detail of the arrangements. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been involved on a more political level, as have a number of members of the Cabinet. This is obviously the big issue remaining: the Northern Ireland-Ireland border within the withdrawal agreement. All of the Government are working towards solving that. I am more than happy to discuss this issue with the hon. Gentleman in more detail, because I know he has a high level of expertise on it. I personally very much respect his position, and his thoughtful comments on this issue and many others.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister wrongly says that the backstop threatens power sharing. The Government’s solution is to hand a veto to one side, undermining strand 2 of the Good Friday agreement. What assessment has been made of the economic harm all this uncertainty presents for the promotion of business and investment in Northern Ireland?

James Duddridge: The whole idea of Brexit is to reposition the economy not only of Northern Ireland but of the whole United Kingdom around the growth areas of the world. That is not to say that we are turning our back on our European friends, whose trade is very important, but global growth in the longer term is with the rest of the world. It positions Northern Ireland alongside the UK in a much better place for long-term economic growth.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Government’s proposal makes it clear that the UK will not be in a customs union, there will not be a close single market

alignment and there will be even less protection for rights than the May deal offered. Given that, how do the Government expect the proposals to win cross-party support in this House?

James Duddridge: I think the Government expect cross-party support because there are a number of colleagues who have behaved very reasonably. I am afraid I did not hear who the hon. Lady was quoting at the beginning of her question, but I am more than happy to talk to her about that later on. Apologies, but I did not hear the beginning of her question.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Are cameras on the border infrastructure?

James Duddridge: To be frank, I was not being careful with my terminology. If the hon. Gentleman is asking, “Is there no infrastructure?”, there is no infrastructure. In relation to cameras, I saw cameras in Northern Ireland on the main road. I do not think it would be tenable to have cameras all along the border. They would simply be ripped down and be targets for terrorists to attack. I think he has successfully stretched my desire not to comment in any more detail. Certainly, he has done so effectively.

No-deal Brexit: Schedule of Tariffs

4.33 pm

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade if she will set out the final schedule of import tariffs proposed in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question.

On 13 March, the Government announced that they would implement a temporary tariff regime in the event of a no-deal Brexit. This regime would apply equally to all imports that are not subject to alternative trade arrangements and would apply for up to—I stress, up to—12 months while a full public consultation takes place to inform long-term tariff arrangements. The Government would prefer to leave with a deal and will continue to work energetically and with determination to get that better deal. This will require the European Union to show the same spirit of compromise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is demonstrating in his engagement with our European friends and allies.

As the UK leaves the EU, the Government are stepping up their preparations to get the UK ready to trade if there is no deal. The temporary tariff regime will maintain open trade on the majority of UK imports, helping to support consumers, business supply chains and sensitive sectors of the UK economy. Due regard has been given to the five principles set out in the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018: the interests of consumers in the UK; the interests of producers in the UK; the desire to maintain and promote external trade of the UK; the desire to maintain and promote productivity in the UK; and the extent to which these goods are subject to competition. It reaffirms our commitment to become a free-trading nation. It realises the benefits of an independent trade policy to support increased trade and investment with partners new and old around the world and increased choice for British shoppers.

At the same time, Her Majesty’s Government recognise the importance of retaining some tariffs. Tariffs would therefore apply on just over 10% of imports, supporting sectors facing unfair global competition, mitigating otherwise significant adjustment costs for the agricultural sector, supporting the strategically important automotive sector and maintaining our commitments to developing countries. Preferential access to the UK market is important for our developing country partners, and tariffs are being retained on a set of goods, including bananas, raw sugar cane and certain kinds of fish, to demonstrate the Government’s ongoing commitment to countries in the developing world. During the article 50 extension, the Government have remained responsive to the concerns of business and have reviewed the tariffs that would come into effect if the UK left the EU without a deal.

To answer the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), the Government will publish the final tariffs shortly. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on any amendments being considered prior to that announcement. As he will understand from his former guise as shadow Chancellor, to do so would be irresponsible. The Government will ensure that Parliament is informed as soon as is practically possible once a final decision has been made.

Mr Leslie: Thankfully, the Benn Act will safeguard Britain from a no-deal Brexit, but with the Minister still insisting that, in only 24 days' time, we might somehow crash out on a World Trade Organisation basis, does it not beggar belief that the Government have still not got around to publishing the final schedule of import tariffs for that eventuality? The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said that what we have had is not the final word, and he has repeated that today.

At present, we can import from and export to the EU without any customs duties applying, but that could be about to end. The consequences for so many sectors of our economy, including farming, manufacturing and engineering, are massive. I ask the Minister: how are businesses supposed to "get ready", as the £100 million advertising campaign suggests, if Ministers still cannot tell us the tariffs that will be imposed and seem incapable of even the most basic competent level of preparation?

The CBI director general Carolyn Fairbairn rightly asks why there is no time to consult industries about what tariffs will be applied. Even if we put aside the enormous non-tariff barriers of veterinary inspections, border checks and certification, are businesses to assume that the draft tariffs that were put out in March will still apply? Some of the import tariffs that Ministers are rumoured to be planning are really high. For example, if a British haulage company needs to buy an HGV truck from abroad, should it plan to pay an additional 22% on the cost or 10% because of the Government's tariff plan? Will my constituents have to add 10% to the cost of buying a new car? What about the UK energy and bioethanol sector? Will customers have to pay the 4.7% tariff on fuel imported from the EU, as they currently do for fuel from beyond the EU? If not, will that not push the British energy sector into a competitive disadvantage when the 4.7% is imposed on its exports? There are container ships full of goods, components, textiles and clothing that have already been dispatched from the far east and elsewhere, heading for arrival at our shores at the end of the month. Will they face tariffs when they get to Britain, or not?

If British businesses suddenly have to start paying tariffs to export into Europe, what will the reciprocal tariffs be on goods imported into our country? How will British farmers compete with foreign produce when, for example, their lamb will face a 48% tariff when selling into Europe, their cheddar 57%, their poultry 37%, their wheat 53% and their beef 84%? The National Farmers Union is deeply concerned about the risk of foreign producers undercutting domestic production. So can the Minister at least do us the courtesy of setting out the rationale and strategic logic behind his decisions? Where is the parliamentary authority for imposing these tariffs and taxes? When will there be a vote in the House of Commons as the customs legislation requires?

Given that the Government now want a customs frontier in Ireland, will the Minister confirm that goods coming from the Republic into Northern Ireland will have tariffs added on? How does he think people and businesses in Northern Ireland will respond to the imposition of a tariff border in that way?

Would it not be far better to accept that erecting reciprocal tariffs between the UK and the EU is a fool's errand—an endless cycle of costs and bureaucracy where everyone loses out in the end? Will the Minister at least

have the good grace to acknowledge that, by leaving the single market and the customs union, British businesses and customers will be worse off, and for no good reason?

Conor Burns: I said in reply to the hon. Gentleman's first question that it would be irresponsible to go through the entire list of proposed tariffs prior to the formal announcement by the Government, which, as I indicated to him, he may not have to wait all that long to see. He spent the majority of his subsequent questions asking me to do that which I had said it would be irresponsible to do and I will not be drawn down that road, however tempting it is.

I thought the hon. Gentleman's subsequent questions underlined the desirability of there being a deal between the United Kingdom and the European Union as we seek to leave. I hope that in the days ahead the EU will respond in the same spirit that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has demonstrated and show flexibility and compromise to get a deal that will pass the House. Then the tariff announcements might become redundant. That is very much our hope. The hon. Gentleman said that he found it extraordinary that so long had passed and we had yet to publish this. Many people in my constituency and around the country find it equally astonishing that it is more than three years since the UK voted to leave the EU and still people in this House are determined to thwart that democratic decision.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the situation on the island of Ireland. I am happy to confirm, as I think he will know, that there will be no tariffs on goods coming from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland. On parliamentary process, he will know exactly how that works. The House will have the opportunity to have its say within 60 days of the tariff regime coming into place.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: This is the second of five urgent questions I have granted today. There is a premium upon time and therefore I reiterate what I said in respect of the last urgent question. People who came into the Chamber after the question began should not expect to be called. I have a list of about half a dozen people who beetled into the Chamber after the question began. Please do not stand. It is not the right thing to do.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): The day one tariffs were set to produce price stability, protect businesses that took time to make adjustments and ensure there were not additional costs for British importers, who then add value and re-export. Given that it is a good policy and that the assumption of a sterling depreciation of 7% to 13% in the event of a no deal has not changed, can the tariffs be published as soon as possible? Will my hon. Friend also make it very clear that, if we have to introduce the day one tariffs as they are at the present time, the responsibility will lie not with the Government but with those who refused to accept a deal of any sort in the House?

Conor Burns: My right hon. Friend has put that argument extremely effectively and powerfully. May I use this opportunity—my debut at the Dispatch Box—to

thank him for all the work that he did in the Department? The fact that, in the last couple of weeks, we now have more than 72% of trade agreed in continuity agreements is largely due to the enormous efforts that he put in during his time at the Department. He is absolutely right: the day one tariff regime is determined to protect British consumers in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Those who can avoid a no-deal Brexit are our friends in Europe coming to terms with the Prime Minister in a deal that will be passed by the House and implement the democratic decision in the referendum of 2016.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box.

The Government failed to consult properly with business organisations or with trade unions before publishing these tariff measures, ignoring the very producers whose jobs and livelihoods would be most affected. Their refusal to listen and their inability to compromise are now posing grave dangers to our country.

The Government told us that EU manufacturers would be demanding a deal with us. They did not. The Government said that a trade deal with the EU would be the easiest in human history. It is not. The Government told us that they would have 40 trade agreements ready to be signed one second after midnight on Brexit day. They do not. Far from our seeing other countries “champing at the bit to strike trade deals with a post-Brexit Britain”,

as the Secretary of State claimed, many of those countries already have a trade agreement with us by way of the EU, but it is a trade agreement that will fall away if we leave the EU without a deal. The Government have failed to roll over all the existing deals with approximately 70 countries. That is why, earlier this year, the Government announced emergency proposals to reduce up to 87% of UK tariffs to zero, and to expand our tariff rate quotas in the event of a no deal. As new tariffs are imposed on our exports, damaging jobs, this is a desperate attempt to keep import costs down for British consumers.

So may I ask, first, whether the Minister will publish the Government’s assessment of the price rises that they anticipate would hit UK consumers in default of these tariff rates? The Government advise businesses that, in a no-deal scenario, we would trade under World Trade Organisation rules. However, the Government have yet to have our WTO schedules formally ratified owing to challenges over our tariff rate quotas—challenges that are likely to require substantial compensation to resolve. So, secondly, when does the Department believe that such a challenge may crystallise, and what contingency funds have they laid aside to pay compensation to any complainants?

The lunacy of the Government’s position has been exposed by a country that they previously regarded as a friendly model for their future free trade agreement with Europe. Canada has walked away from trade talks with the UK precisely because these measures would mean free access for Canadian exporters without requiring them to open up access to our goods and services in return. So, thirdly, can the Minister tell us what progress has since been made with respect to Canadian trade talks, and whether any other countries have similarly refused to negotiate as a result of the announcement of zero tariffs by the UK? Under this regime, UK companies will face competition from a flood of cheap imports,

undercutting them and putting thousands of UK jobs at risk, without any reciprocal right of free access to their markets for our manufacturers and businesses.

Just about every single major trade body and trade union in the UK has decried the lack of engagement with it, and, in particular, the Department’s lack of understanding in respect of trade defence measures. So, fourthly, I ask the Minister what assessment he has made of the diversion of goods originally destined for other markets at a time when those other markets are increasing tariffs and taking substantive action to tackle the issue of dumping. These are existential threats to our industrial heartlands. The steel sector, the ceramics sector and the automotive sector are all greatly at risk from the proposed measures.

The EU has introduced stringent new safeguard measures to tackle dumping, and is due to set out its approach to tackling circumvention shortly. So, fifthly, does the Minister recognise that this could add further tariffs to our EU exports in the event of a no-deal Brexit, and could drive even more dumped goods to our markets? If so, sixthly, can he explain why the Government have sought to establish the weakest Trade Remedies Authority in the world, and to do so without proper legal authority?

Conor Burns: Well, goodness me! We heard not a single word about what the Opposition would do to support the Government in trying to get a deal. We heard no word of compromise. We heard flip-flop after flip-flop, with not a single constructive suggestion from the shadow Secretary of State. Why am I not remotely surprised by that?

The hon. Gentleman talks about a lack of interest. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Lesley Laird) stopped chuntering and listened, she might hear something. The shadow Secretary of State said there was no interest in trade agreements. What does he think is going on with the United States? With Australia? With New Zealand? Everywhere that I have travelled in this role, I have discovered an enormous interest in what our withdrawal from the European Union means not just for the United Kingdom, but for our ability to do bilateral trade agreements with other countries. As I said in reply to my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State, we have transitioned over 72% of UK trade in continuity agreements, which will protect us in the event of a no-deal Brexit—which is something that the hon. Gentleman seems determined to advocate, given his lack of support for the Prime Minister.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the Trade Remedies Authority. There is not a single member of the civil service working today who was working in the civil service the last time the United Kingdom had her own independent trade body. The fact that we have established the Trade Remedies Authority, which I visited several weeks ago—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman took a bit of time to understand his brief, he would understand very clearly—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman laughs. He should be laughing at himself, because he does not understand the very policy that he shadows. The body is created. The body can function temporarily without the passage of the Trade Bill in the event of a no-deal Brexit, as he should know, and then we will put it on a statutory footing when we introduce a new trade Bill in a new Session of Parliament.

[Conor Burns]

The shadow Minister talked about all the things that we have not done. Let us talk about some of the things that he said he would do. He said that he would respect the referendum. He did not. He said that he would implement the decision of the British people. He will not. What we will do is take the opportunities of having an independent trade policy—the opportunity to sign bilateral trade agreements and the opportunity of free trade—to deliver prosperity to our citizens.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his clear command of his brief. Will he take this opportunity to update us on the progress that he is making on seeking continuity of some of the other EU trade agreements, particularly those with Canada and Africa, many of which the Opposition opposed?

Conor Burns: This Government take great pride in the number of those agreements that we have transitioned into continuity agreements. There are many more on the cusp of being agreed. We are dealing with some technical issues and there is ongoing engagement all the time. I was recently in Algeria and Morocco, where we are making substantial progress, and I returned yesterday evening from Vietnam—you might say that I am in another time zone, Mr Speaker, while the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) is on another planet. Even in Vietnam there is significant interest in coming to a continuity agreement with the UK. We will continue to work to deliver those. Of course, as my right hon. Friend and I will both agree, it would be much better if we did not have to go to continuity agreements but instead got the best continuity agreement, which would be a new agreement between ourselves and the European Union, which I hope the Opposition will finally support.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): When the temporary tariff regime was announced this March, the UK Government argued that if they maintained the current external tariff regime, there would be new tariffs on EU imports. They said that if zero tariffs were maintained with the EU, even though that would minimise trade disruption, that would be required to be extended to the rest of the world due to WTO rules. The Government also said that they would keep 43 of the existing trade remedy measures that were in place, but much has changed since then. There has been another round of US tariffs and there is the potential for another round of EU tariffs in response to the US action, so let me ask the Minister this.

Given new tariffs from the US and the EU, has the schedule in the temporary tariff regime changed and, if so, by how much? Has the list of 43 trade remedies to be kept and 66 to be abandoned changed and, if so, by how many? Most importantly, with barely three weeks to go to a potential no-deal Brexit—although the Benn Act should protect us from that—I say to the Minister that it is not irresponsible to publish the new schedule. It is absolutely necessary to publish it, not least to allow businesses—importing and exporting businesses alike—at least a little certainty and to ensure that they can continue to operate within the law. The Minister is having a great time teasing us about when the schedule will be published, so may I ask him to publish it today so that businesses understand precisely what they are dealing with?

Conor Burns: Of course, I did not say that it would be irresponsible to publish it. I said that it would be inappropriate and irresponsible to comment on what is in it before it is published.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): High-value manufacturing and engineering are key to our economy, including in my constituency. Will my hon. Friend assure me that as we develop our independent trade policy he will take action to ensure our vital industries are protected from unfair trading practices?

Conor Burns: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are determined that the trade remedies body will be one of the most innovative and strong bodies in protecting not just free trade but fair trade.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): The Prime Minister talks about getting Brexit done by 31 October and indeed, the Minister has just referred to that, too, but is it not the reality that, if Brexit were to happen on that day, with or without a withdrawal agreement, no trade agreement, including a permanent tariff regime with our biggest customer, the EU, will be in place at the point of departure? Is it not the case that, to put in place a permanent trade agreement will take at least three years? If I am wrong about that, can he name one EU leader who is suggesting that we could get a permanent trade agreement in place quicker than that timeframe? Nothing is going to be done, really, by 31 October.

Conor Burns: If there is a deal by 31 October, as the Government wish, it is highly likely that the deal will come with an implementation period. That would give us the opportunity to come to a comprehensive free trade agreement with our European Union friends and neighbours before the end of that implementation period. I give the hon. Gentleman full marks for consistency on this, as he has never seen any opportunities in the idea of Brexit, and he believes—it is a perfectly logical and consistent position—that our current membership of the EU under the current terms is the best thing possible. Many of us believe that there are significant opportunities for the United Kingdom not only to trade with our largest and nearest trading partner, but to have new bilateral trade agreements with countries around the world—that is the opportunity that Brexit provides.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm whether an impact assessment will be published at the same time as the new schedule of tariffs to show the effect of these tariffs on both imports and exports, and hence on jobs within the United Kingdom?

Conor Burns: The schedule has been drawn up to take account of much of the lobbying and of the assessments that the Government have made, and by our drawing on wide expertise on the position that we would face in a number of scenarios. My hon. Friend will have to wait for the publication, but I assure him that he will not have to wait for very long.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): For manufacturers in the north of England, it is hard to know which is worse: the fact that this Government are prepared to countenance no deal, or the fact that the deal that they are proposing significantly disadvantages

the north compared with Northern Ireland. Can I ask the Minister, therefore, further to the question from the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy): which representative organisations has he met that represent companies in the complex modern manufacturing supply chain?

Conor Burns: I have met both companies and representatives of companies—and, indeed, representatives of the two devolved Governments. My first visit as Minister of State for Trade was to Scotland, to meet Derek Mackay, and I then went to Wales and met Baroness Morgan; our two counterparts. I have met with various representatives of trade organisations and employers' organisations. We are listening widely. The idea that the hon. Lady seems to be advancing that we are sitting in Whitehall dreaming up schemes that are completely and totally divorced from reality—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) really thinks that—well, how many years has he been in the House? Come on.

We have our own advisory body, which we set up within the Department, and that has multiple employer groups, business and representatives of the regions and nations of the UK. We seek to inform ourselves as much as possible before these decisions are made.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I very much agree with my hon. Friend's point that the best way out of this situation is to pass a deal and avoid a no-deal outcome. However, I recently met arable farmers in my constituency who are profoundly concerned that, if there were a no-deal outcome, they could face tariffs of €90 a tonne. That would make their surplus unexportable through the port of Ipswich, especially as we seem to be considering nil tariffs on foreign wheat and barley. Does my hon. Friend understand that, from their point of view, that is not unilateral free trade, but unilateral protectionism for overseas competition? Whatever happens in the schedule, I urge him please to remember to support the bread basket of England.

Conor Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I point him to the comment that I made twice in my first reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie)—that this day-one tariff regime will apply for up to 12 months, and it will be reviewed during that time. We will be open-minded and open-eared to representations that are made to us. I would be happy to extend an invitation to people to meet me and to talk specifically about the point my hon. Friend made, which, if I may say so, he did robustly, as he always does, on behalf of those he represents.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Fawcett in Castleford, which exports malt to Europe, has described the tariff arrangements it will face in the event of no deal as manufacturing suicide. Tereos in Normanton, which imports sugar, expects a 50% increase in its costs as a result of tariffs in the event of no deal. Will the Minister confirm that these tariffs are not just costs that can be mitigated away by preparations or border changes, and that these are real costs to industry? If he has done all this work on the possible impact of different tariff schedules, surely he has a responsibility to publish the full impact assessment alongside the tariff schedule.

Conor Burns: I indicated the tests this tariff regime is set against. It is set to try to protect the interests of consumers and producers in the UK, and it will be kept under review. It will go for up to 12 months. However, I stress again that the best way to avoid any of this happening is for us to come to an agreement in this House and with the EU, and to get a deal through and leave the European Union on 31 October in an orderly way. Then, this would become an academic exercise.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition's vision is for us to stay in the customs union. Does my hon. Friend not agree that that does not honour the result of the EU referendum?

Conor Burns: It will not come as an enormous surprise to my hon. Friend that I agree wholeheartedly. Indeed, at the time of the referendum, the Government, of which we were Back-Bench observers, spent over £9 million sending a leaflet to every home in this country making exactly that point.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I reiterate what I said at the start of this exchange, which is that people who arrived after it began should not stand and expect to be called—[*Interruption.*] No, no. No matter how illustrious they are, and irrespective of the exalted office that they occupy. Other Members of this—[*Interruption.*] Order. I am not debating the point with the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil). I am telling him what the situation is, and that is the end of the matter.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): One of the most successful exports from my constituency is Penderyn whisky, which comes from a small village in the Brecon Beacons. If the Minister went to Wales, he must have discussed the situation of an industry such as that with Baroness Morgan. Penderyn is obviously concerned about the impact on its export potential.

Conor Burns: I am incredibly grateful to the right hon. Lady, whom I hold in the highest regard, having worked with her on a couple of international issues. She almost invites me to trespass on the subject of the next urgent question on the potential imposition of tariffs by the United States on the whisky sector. I would be happy to respond to that question in detail during the course of my reply to that UQ, but the Government take this matter very seriously and will be working to try to persuade our friends and allies in the United States that the imposition of such tariffs is not the way to go, that they harm both of us, and that the best thing to do is to talk and come to a resolution.

Mr Speaker: I gently point out to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) that there is a later urgent question on a matter of which he has considerable knowledge and in which I think he will be interested. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to participate in that exchange, he will, of course, have the opportunity to do so, and the whole House and the nation will benefit from his eloquence.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Anybody with a ha'p'orth of understanding of the Canadian skill at negotiating trade deals should have foreseen in March, when we issued our day-one tariff schedules, that Canada would not sign a rollover for the comprehensive economic and trade agreement. As we move forward with these new schedules, will the Minister assure me that nothing in them will undermine the deal that the Canadian Government and the Canadian opposition both say they want to achieve? If we are unable to achieve that deal, will he assure me that the Department is beginning work on at least rolling over the provisions on labour mobility, which are so important when it comes to independent professionals and inter-company transfers?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend yields to no one in his understanding of and expertise in Canada. I understand that not least because he never tires of telling us. I pay tribute to him for his work as the Prime Minister's trade envoy. I am probably not allowed to say this at the Dispatch Box, but I hope that he will take up that position again in due course, because no one in this House is better qualified to do it. I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that we remain determined to come to terms with Canada. It is one of our closest allies, and we share so much in common in terms of values. A free trade agreement between us will be to the mutual benefit and prosperity of all our citizens.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Dairy Council Northern Ireland represents the four companies that account for over 90% of the milk collected from farms in Northern Ireland each year. We are talking about 3,000 farming families in Northern Ireland. I want the Minister to address the warning given by the chief executive of Dairy Council Northern Ireland, who said today:

"If we don't get a Brexit deal and cannot transport raw milk south, without significant delays and/or certification requirements, then our industry is facing a crisis of epic proportions".

How will the Minister attempt to reassure dairy farmers in Northern Ireland?

Conor Burns: We are still seeking to come to terms and get a deal by 31 October. That is the Government's ambition and, as the hon. Lady will know, I am more alive than most to the situation in Northern Ireland. The situation there is unique and complex, and I hope that our European friends would demonstrate some of the spirit of compromise that has been demonstrated in various parts of the House, including by Opposition Back Benchers, in helping us to get to that deal and to avoid the difficulties that she so rightly identifies.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Welsh farmers are still unclear as to how the Government intend to sustain Welsh farming, particularly the production of beef and lamb. Is it by long-term tariffs, is it by market-distorting subsidy, or is it by paying farmers to produce nothing at all?

Conor Burns: First, we still want a deal, and therefore we hope this does not come into play. I was in Vietnam only two days ago to push Welsh lamb to the Government there as we look to a deal, and that is just one of many places where we are looking for new export opportunities by removing barriers and doing free trade agreements. The Government are looking closely at how we would

respond to protect such producer interests in the event of a no-deal situation, and I believe nothing is ruled out.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister and his Department have been in consultation with the British Ceramic Confederation on the impact that zero tariffs could have on the ceramic industry, which would affect many of my constituents. Can the Minister give me an assurance that on day one, if we have a no-deal Brexit, which I genuinely do not want to see—I think a deal is the way forward—no anti-dumping legislation and no anti-dumping duty on Chinese goods will be less than it was the day before under the European scheme?

Conor Burns: Not only would I be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss this in some detail, but I would be very happy if he felt minded to invite me to visit some of the ceramic manufacturing businesses in and around his constituency. I am sure that will have been heard by people who can make it happen.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is reckoned that a quarter of rural businesses may face bankruptcy if there is a no-deal Brexit and we see the expected tariff schedule. Dairy has now joined beef and lamb in expressing an existential threat. How many rural businesses does the Minister think will survive in my primarily rural constituency if we have a no deal?

Conor Burns: I hope the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will help my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government by doing all they can to lobby our European friends and allies, and indeed Monsieur Barnier, to ensure that does not happen.

I hope the predictions of doom and gloom and bankruptcy that the hon. Gentleman makes again today prove as ill-founded as those he has made over the past three years.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure the Minister will agree that certainty is important for business, so will he give a guarantee that, on 1 November, all the necessary systems and technical infrastructure will be in place for businesses to be able to deal with any tariffs that are imposed? Particularly for small businesses, how far in advance of 1 November will advice and guidance on these systems be available?

Conor Burns: I have indicated several times that I do not think hon. Members will have to wait too much longer for the publication of the schedule. The Government are working with incredible energy to put out the information that businesses need. It has been more than three years since the referendum, and businesses have had plenty of warning.

By the way, recent surveys indicate that the behaviour of this House has made it more likely that businesses will not put in place the necessary measures to prepare for the event of a no deal, because this House continues to send a signal that it intends to do all it can to thwart that.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Everyone seems to be interested in what is happening with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Our farming industry has serious concerns about the tariffs that will potentially

be imposed by Europe. As the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) said, milk is exported to the Republic of Ireland, where it is mainly processed, before being sent back. Milk will have no tariffs on the way back, but it will receive tariffs on the way into the Republic of Ireland.

Conor Burns: As I indicated to the hon. Member for North Down, I am acutely alive to these very serious challenges. I spent the first eight years of my life in Northern Ireland, so I understand it pretty well. The best way to avoid these challenges is to come to a deal.

By the way, the best way to have effective government in Northern Ireland is for all the parties in Northern Ireland to get back together and get back into government. Let us get a functioning Executive and a functioning Assembly that can truly speak at a local level for the people of Northern Ireland.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The imposition of tariffs on the export of chemicals from Teesside will have a hugely detrimental effect on the region's industry. That comes on the back of the decision by Ineos to close its plant, which is both a supplier and a customer within a complicated supply chain. What are Ministers doing about this additional threat to the chemical industry—over and above the tariffs—that will cost more than 220 direct jobs in my constituency, and potentially many more? Maybe the Minister could visit us, too.

Conor Burns: I always stand ready to visit colleagues from across the House and their constituencies, and their local businesses, to understand the background to commercial decisions that are being made. I am not particularly aware of the detail of that one, but, again, if the hon. Gentleman thinks it useful, I would be happy to have a meeting with him. It may be more appropriate for him to meet colleagues from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, but I am very happy to talk to him.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I was approached by people from Stanlow oil refinery in Ellesmere Port over the summer as they were concerned about proposals to zero-rate certain petroleum imports. I therefore added my name to a cross-party letter from a number of Members whose constituencies were affected by those proposals warning the Secretary of State about the impact such proposals might have on the refinery sector. Will the Minister therefore assure us that these concerns have been listened to and the proposals will do nothing to impact the viability of the UK refinery sector?

Conor Burns: The issue of the refineries and how tariffs may have an impact there has been discussed and continues to be looked at closely at the heart of government. Those representations are having an impact and are being listened to carefully.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)
rose—

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

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, the competing claims of Edinburgh, Strangford and West Dunbartonshire. What a taxing choice. I call Deidre Brock.

Deidre Brock: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does the Minister consider that these new tariffs will be good for Scottish businesses? And how?

Mr Speaker: A splendidly succinct question—you can come again!

Conor Burns: Obviously, we do not consider that the imposition of the temporary tariff regime is, of itself, a good thing; we would much prefer to leave on 31 October with a deal. As I have explained, what these arrangements do is our level best to protect producers and, crucially, consumers in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for his responses. The Ulster Farmers Union has consistently stated that it has worries about tariffs—I declare an interest, as a member of the UFU. I know the Government and the Minister are well aware of the position of Northern Ireland lamb, beef, pig and chicken producers, and I am keen to know what discussions he has had with the UFU in order to support, assist and protect our farmers in Northern Ireland. In addition, have any discussions taken place with the Republic of Ireland?

Conor Burns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that. I have not had direct talks with the UFU, but the voice of Northern Ireland is very effectively represented in government by the Secretary of State and the Minister of State, and the voice of Northern Ireland will always be heard when the hon. Gentleman is in this House.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: In the last hour, the President of the United States has tweeted:

“As I have stated strongly before, and just to reiterate, if Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey (I've done before!).”

So I wonder whether the Minister can tell my constituents who are producing and bottling fine Scotch whisky—this is especially in relation to the next urgent question—whether these arrangements are to be used as leverage against the unmatched wisdom of the President of the United States in a future trade agreement of a no-deal Brexit?

Conor Burns: I am enormously grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that. As I said, this is my first appearance at this Dispatch Box, but my cursory knowledge of these matters is that one is accountable at this Box for things within one's responsibility. However vast the portfolio that I have the honour to discharge, the tweets of the President of the United States were not in my job description the last time I checked.

Mr Speaker: Very deft, if I may say so. Some of us might think, on the basis of personal experience, that there is an unmatched wisdom in Nancy Pelosi, but there you go.

US Tariffs: Scotch Whisky

Mr Speaker: We come now to the next urgent question. At the risk of embarrassing him, the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) tells me that this is the first time he has asked a question from the Back Benches in 14 years, but I am sure it will not show.

5.19 pm

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): I know that you always indulge a novice in these proceedings, Mr Speaker.

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade to make a statement on what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the US and EU, following the announcement by the United States trade representative of their intention to impose tariffs of 25% on single malt Scotch whisky and other UK products on 18 October.

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Oh, the Minister is making a second performance at the Dispatch Box. Excellent.

Conor Burns: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question.

The United Kingdom continues to be a champion of the international rules-based order of which the World Trade Organisation is the cornerstone. However, the United Kingdom is clear that resorting to tariffs is in no one's interests. Low tariffs and free trade underpin prosperity and jobs in the UK and globally, which is why we are pursuing an ambitious free trade agenda, lowering tariffs and quotas where possible and working on an ambitious package of bilateral free trade agreements.

The Government are disappointed by the United States Administration's announcement that they intend to impose tariffs on the UK and our European partners following the most recent ruling. My right hon. Friend asks what communications there have been between the Government and the United States. We have continued to raise this issue at the highest levels; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has spoken to US Trade Representative Lighthizer, Commerce Secretary Ross and Vice-President Pence; my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has raised the issue of Airbus tariffs with the US Secretary of the Treasury; and the issue was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) with President Trump during his state visit to the United Kingdom in June this year.

The dispute has a long history; indeed, it goes back to 2004. I will not detain the House by setting out that history, but it is long and complex and has led to the WTO judgment. Although the UK, France, Germany and Spain took steps to bring their support into compliance with the WTO, the WTO ruled last year that further steps were required to bring that support fully into compliance. Following that ruling, the UK and other Airbus nations have now taken steps to bring their support fully into line. The Airbus nations are seeking confirmation from the WTO in the ongoing proceedings that those steps are sufficient to achieve compliance. A ruling is expected in the coming months.

However, WTO procedure allows for the US to seek authorisation to retaliate against the EU in parallel to the ongoing proceedings and before the WTO has confirmed whether the Airbus nations have now complied with their WTO obligations. On 2 October, the WTO announced that the US can be authorised to impose up to approximately \$7.5 billion in tariffs annually. Following that, the US published a list of tariffs on the EU, targeting products produced by the Airbus nations and the wider EU. These measures are not in the interests of the UK, the European Union or the United States. Tariffs will only inflict damage on businesses and citizens on both sides of the Atlantic and harm global trade and the broader aviation industry at a sensitive time.

We are working closely with the US, the EU and our European partners to support a negotiated settlement to the Airbus dispute, along with the separate Boeing disputes. I reassure the House that we will continue to press the issue at the highest levels and urge the United States to withhold tariffs until the WTO has confirmed that we have complied in the compliance proceedings—something that we expect to happen within the next couple of months.

Single malt Scotch whisky has been tariff free with the United States for more than 25 years now, and whisky exports to the US are worth more than £1 billion annually. Single malt producers are often small and medium-sized companies, and the tariffs will hit those who can afford them least. We will continue to talk to the US at the highest levels to press for a settlement and for the US to hold off applying the tariffs until we have had time for a ruling.

David Mundell: I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box and thank him for his answer. I welcome the fact that this urgent question was chosen to be discussed, because the matter is urgent. There are 10 days left until the US proposes to introduce tariffs of 25% on Scotch malt whisky, which represents 60% of the UK-origin goods included on the list and 10% of the non-aviation goods from across Europe that are on the list. Curiously, products such as brandy and cognac from France are not included on the list.

As the Minister said, the US market is vital for the Scotch whisky industry, with a turnover of more than £1 billion. The distilleries involved in exporting malt to the United States are often small. They are often craft distilleries, whose establishment in recent years we particularly welcomed in Scotland. If tariffs are imposed, those industries will have to scale back their efforts in the United States. The industry estimates that there could be a loss of £228 million in revenue, and that 3,000 jobs, mainly in rural Scotland, could be affected by the proposals.

I want the Government to show even more urgency than they have done to date. There are two things that can be done immediately. First, the industry has made it clear that if the Government announce that when the UK leaves the EU on 31 October this year that they will not impose tariffs on bourbon or American whiskies, that would greatly help the dialogue with the United States.

Secondly, I know that the Minister has the close ear of the Prime Minister, and it is important that he urge him to intervene directly with President Trump. It was my duty to welcome President Trump to Scotland last year.

During that event, he told me that he loved Scotland. If the Prime Minister could convey directly to President Trump the damage that the proposals would do to Scotland, particularly rural Scotland, that could have an impact. I would be pleased if the Minister confirmed that he would indeed urge the Prime Minister to make those representations.

Conor Burns: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for those questions. He represents a powerful voice on behalf of the industry and the people of Scotland, along with my hon. Friends around him. It is not just whisky—but I will return to whisky in a second—it is pork, cheese and cashmere. There are a number of areas that will be harmed by the tariffs. Earlier this afternoon, I spoke to Karen Betts, chief executive of the Scottish Whisky Association, who is in South Africa. It is a measure of her concern that she took time out of her schedule to talk to me. The Government are enormously sympathetic, and as I said in my answer, we would urge the United States—tariffs are not in place, and there are 10 days before they are introduced, as my right hon. Friend said—to think again. These tariffs are in no one's interest. The President of the United States prides himself on being the champion of the little guy, the little business. Well, it is the little business and the little guy who will be harmed most directly if the tariffs come into play.

I can entirely understand my right hon. Friend urging the Government to adjust section 232 countermeasures by removing the tariff on bourbon. We believe in the international rules-based order. It would be the easiest thing in the world simply to say to him, “Yes, we are going to do that.” However, while we remain a member of the European Union, we have to comply with the rules of the European Union. What I would say to him is that when we leave the European Union, nothing is off the table.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the urgent question asked by the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). I welcome, too, the measured tone of the Minister's response, the factual information that he provided at the Dispatch Box and his support for the international rules-based order.

It is no secret that the American President has sought to define his Administration as one of trade warfare, seeking to put the interests of America first and to repatriate jobs and industry to the USA. He believes that a trade war is one that the US can win. Does the Minister agree that no one wins in a trade war? That much is clear from the spurious Boeing case against the importation of C Series aircraft and the use of section 232 national security measures to prevent steel and aluminium exports to the US, and now again in respect of automotive imports.

The concern for British exporters is that the recent findings of the WTO in relation to aircraft subsidies will be used to secure an advantage for American producers and for American interests in any future trade agreement between our nations. The US trade representative has been clear that the US will impose countermeasures in the first instance and will seek to discuss how to resolve this dispute with the EU thereafter

“in a way that will benefit American workers”.

Other European leaders have been clear in their condemnation of the measures, but our Government have been decidedly more reserved, perhaps for fear of jeopardising any future trade talks. I note in the Government's response published last week that the UK was seeking clarification from the WTO that the UK was compliant with measures regarding subsidies to Airbus, so I ask the Minister when he expects that such confirmation will be given and whether this indicates a divergence from the EU response.

Many products that these tariffs are being imposed on are subject to geographical indications, which are awarded under trade agreements to protect products of cultural heritage. It is no surprise that these products have been targeted first, as American producers of rival products have made no secret of their desire to destroy such protections. Does the Minister agree that this is not just about responding to the subsidies ruling, but about undermining and eliminating competition in favour of US producers who have long sought to do away with product labelling requirements, restrictive geographical indicators, and even sanitary and phytosanitary standards? Does he agree that going after some of our most iconic products is part of that strategy?

The Scotch whisky exports from this country amount to £6 billion a year—21% of all our food and drink exports, and 41 bottles a second. That is faster than I can drink it! Scotch whisky is so important to our exports. In fact, I think it is our third largest export, so the Government need to do all they can to protect it. These measures come at a time when the UK Prime Minister still insists that we could have a no-deal Brexit in a matter of days—a scenario under which substantial tariffs could be imposed on our exports to the EU. That would be a double whammy for British producers.

The impact of these tariffs on our biggest markets would be enormous, particularly for products such as Scotch whisky. No amount of new trade agreements overseas could mitigate that imminent threat. The EU is understood to be exploring what position to take in respect of these new tariffs. What role will the Minister's officials be taking in those discussions, given our pending withdrawal?

Conor Burns: I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for his support; I think this is a relatively rare but very welcome moment where there will be an outbreak of consensus across the House.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the Scotch whisky industry to the UK. Whisky is the UK's biggest single agrifood export, accounting for more than 21% of all UK food and drink exports. In 2018, exports of all whisky from the UK totalled £4.8 billion, of which the Scotch Whisky Association claims £4.7 billion is Scotch whisky. Scotch whisky is the biggest single contributor to the UK balance of trade in goods, and the largest single market for UK exports of all whisky—not just Scotch whisky—by value is the United States, which imported more than £1 billion-worth in 2018 or a volume of 84,791 tonnes.

Beyond that, a further £268 million is injected into the economy through the supply chain, leading to a UK-wide impact of just under £5 billion. Some 40,000 jobs are directly supported by the Scotch whisky industry, 7,000 of which are in rural areas of Scotland. This is an

[Conor Burns]

absolutely vital sector to the United Kingdom and one that we are determined to do everything we can to protect.

The shadow Secretary of State will have heard me say to Mr Speaker earlier that the dispute that has led to these threatened tariffs in 10 days' time is a very long and complex one and is being governed by the investigations at the WTO. It is regrettable, although we accept it, that we were found not to be in compliance and the WTO has given the United States permission to go down this route.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about our belief that we are now completely compliant and have taken the remedial measures necessary to bring ourselves into compliance in this dispute. We hope that that will happen within the next couple of months. We are pressing the WTO for an early decision on that, because the evidence base on this stuff is incredibly important, particularly in our conversations with the United States.

I am anxious this afternoon to dial down the atmosphere and not engage in deep personal attacks on people in other countries. The hon. Gentleman was very restrained, and rightly so, in what he said. We want to keep it on the issues. We think that the proposed tariff is unfair, wrong and unjust, and if we can demonstrate that we are now in compliance in this very long-running dispute and have taken the necessary measures, I hope that we can engage calmly with the United States.

I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree that one of the reasons why the United Kingdom is so internationally necessary, and why our taking up our position again in the WTO when we leave the EU is a good thing and is widely welcomed internationally, is that we believe in the international rules-based order. We believe that any fair, reasoned, rational observer who looks at this will conclude that these tariffs are unjust, unfair and wrong and are targeting people who have done absolutely nothing in terms of the dispute that has given birth to these retaliatory measures. I hope that, with constructive engagement and calm dialogue, we may persuade the United States to think again.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Mr Speaker, as you know from my application for an urgent question on this subject today, my constituency is severely affected by the announcements from the US last week. Moray is home to 40% of all Scotch whisky distilleries, as well as a sector that has not been mentioned so far: the biscuit industry. Some 50% of biscuits exported to the US are Scottish shortbread. Moray is home to Walkers of Aberlour, and when I spoke to Jim Walker earlier this afternoon, he wanted me to stress that figure. I met Lewis Maclean of Maclean's Highland bakery in Forres on Friday, who expressed his concerns for his sector as well.

Can the Minister update the House on what steps the Government will take over the next 10 days to try to stop these tariffs taking effect from 18 October, which feeds into the important Christmas market? I also reiterate the point that a zero tariff on bourbon and American whiskey when we leave the European Union would send the strongest possible message to the US that the UK is on its side, and it should take away these tariffs?

Conor Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a doughty champion for his constituents and the commercial interests in his constituency. I was aware of the presence of Walkers Shortbread in his constituency and the fact that it exports more than £29 million a year and is a significant local employer. Before coming to the House, I asked for a list of all Members who represent Scottish constituencies and how many distilleries they have in their constituency. I was more than surprised to find that my hon. Friend has a significant number—I think more than 40—in his constituency, which makes the following offer very easy to make: I would be delighted to visit him in his constituency and see some of those distilleries, and perhaps also Walkers Shortbread.

As for what we can do to get this message across, the United States ambassador to the UK, Ambassador Johnson, is known to many of us, and he is known to be very close to President Trump. I encourage all Members across the House to contact the American ambassador and make him aware of the strength of feeling on this subject in this House and across the country.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As the Minister will find out, it is quality rather than quantity that counts when it comes to Scotch whisky. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Scotch whisky, I have no doubt that these tariffs will have a hugely negative impact on one of our most important, successful and growing industries. The Scotch whisky industry employs 11,000 people directly. I encourage UK Ministers to do everything they can to resolve this as quickly as possible, because it is in no one's interests to have a trade war like this, where everybody will almost inevitably end up on the losing side and jobs, confidence and future investment will be affected. I fear that these tariffs will disproportionately impact on the small independent distilleries, of which there are many in my Argyll and Bute constituency and, indeed, across the economically fragile, rural parts of Scotland.

The Minister listed a number of conversations that have been had, but I would like him to clarify what conversations have taken place since Thursday with both the EU and the United States? Is it not the case that a post-Brexit, isolated UK would have much less negotiating power than it currently has as part of one of the world's largest trade blocs when it comes to fending off someone like Donald Trump?

Conor Burns: I am going to resist the temptation to launch on the last point. Tempting as it is, I would rather try to keep a degree of consensus on the issue, but I would say this to the hon. Gentleman. He opened by saying that it is quality, not quantity, that counts. I think that has been the cry of many down the generations. A trade war would be in no one's interests: there will be no winners in a trade war. The thing that I think agitates and upsets us most about this, as I said earlier, is that those who have done absolutely nothing in the Airbus-Boeing dispute, with the rights and wrongs on both sides, and people who have had absolutely nothing to do with that, going back so many years, will now be hurt and harmed if these tariffs come into play. We will continue to use every opportunity to convey to our friends in the United States that this is—

Brendan O'Hara: Since Thursday?

Conor Burns: I am not sure that it is helpful to have a running commentary on everything that is being said. I think those who are employed in distilleries in the hon. Gentleman's constituency would be much more interested in what the Government are trying to do to get a successful outcome. I have told the hon. Gentleman and the House the exchanges and the conversations there have been, and those will continue. We are determined to use the next 10 days to try to persuade our friends in the United States that this is the wrong way to go.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The decision by the US affects other iconic Scottish industries, such as cashmere and textiles. We have a long tradition in my constituency in the borders, and both Hawico and Johnstons in Hawick have been in touch with me in recent days, expressing severe concerns about the impact that these tariffs are going to have on their American business. Can the Minister assure me that textiles and cashmere are on his radar, and that he will be trying to find a solution for those sectors too? If no solution can be found by 18 October, will the Government consider compensating those businesses for the duties and tariffs they are going to have to pay out?

Conor Burns: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am happy to reassure him by reiterating the comments I made to our right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) about cashmere and other product lines. This is not confined to Scotch whisky, although Scotch whisky will obviously dominate the coverage of this because it is such an iconic Scottish, and indeed British, brand. It is known everywhere, and only two days ago in Vietnam we were having conversations about the labelling of imports of Scotch whisky through third countries and how that was leading to an increase in illicit sales of Scotch whisky products. Diageo has been very vigorous in lobbying the Government on that and other related issues. We are absolutely determined to support this sector, and indeed the other sectors that my hon. Friend quite rightly highlighted.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Knitwear is something that defines Shetland in the eyes of many across the world. Just in the last week, we have seen visitors coming to the isles from right around the globe as part of an enormously successful Shetland Wool Week—especially coming from the United States of America. Does the Minister understand that the damage that will be caused by tariffs of this sort is not just about manufacturing and exports, but about tourism? The communities that rely on our defining products, such as Scotch whisky and knitwear, are some of the smallest and most economically fragile to be found anywhere, and jobs that are lost there will not be easily replaced.

Conor Burns: I could not agree more with the right hon. Gentleman. Knitwear from his part of Scotland is a small but very well-known British-Scottish-UK brand. He is absolutely correct to suggest that if the tariffs did come in and those sole traders, partnerships or companies with two or three people working together folded, it would be unlikely that they would come back. They are a very precious part of our heritage and this microeconomy would be lost, which is why we will do everything we can to persuade the US to think again.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, not all whisky is Scotch. I happen to have with me a bottle of Filey Bay, Yorkshire's first whisky. It was released on Saturday after the requisite three years and a day. It is from the Spirit of Yorkshire distillery in Hunmanby in my constituency. Will the Minister confirm that he will provide support for whisky producers wherever they are, whether from the great nation of Scotland or God's own county of Yorkshire?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman loses no opportunity. Why will it not be a surprise to right hon. and hon. Members to be reminded that his successful business career was as an estate agent? [*Laughter.*]

Conor Burns: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. Sparking a debate on what constitutes whisky is something I would not wish to do on my first outing at the Dispatch Box, Mr Speaker. I see some friends from Northern Ireland, although I am sure it has never touched the lips of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). Coming from Northern Ireland as I do, I know that some very fine whiskey is made there. I make this undertaking to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake): the Government will protect and promote whisky that is produced in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Bushmills is, of course, the only Irish whiskey made in the United Kingdom, and therefore the only British whiskey with an "e" in it, making it the most excellent whiskey in the whole of the United Kingdom. No doubt when the Minister was in his boyhood in Ballycastle he would have sampled the angel's share of that product. Can he confirm the proportion of product sold by the Bushmills distillery that are blends with other whiskey products from the Republic of Ireland? Can he confirm that they will therefore be zero-rated for all future sales? Given that that will then create an unlevel playing field, will he ensure that the same advantage rests with single malt whiskey made in Bushmills?

Conor Burns: As the hon. Gentleman knows, these tariffs relate to single malt whisky products. I can say to him that I have visited Bushmills many times and that I am a fan of Bushmills whiskey. The old inn at Bushmills is among the finest places to stay anywhere in the United Kingdom. His father and my grandfather shared something in common: they never drank at all. I did not follow my grandfather's example. I am sure he followed his father's.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): As the UK Government are rightly considering lowering some tariffs on food and drink products once we leave the EU, what opportunity will there be to get some benefit or leverage out of that spontaneous reduction?

Conor Burns: As my right hon. Friend knows, we are determined to take full advantage of the opportunities of leaving the European Union. We believe, as a Government and as a party, that low tariffs, preferably no tariffs, are mutually beneficial to us and to countries with whom we do business. Free trade creates jobs, prosperity and wealth. We have to continue to articulate that case, particularly to our friends in the United States who are normally free market in outlook and

[Conor Burns]

light touch in regulation, and who mirror our basic political philosophy. A trade war benefits nobody, not least those we are elected to serve.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Many years ago, Mr Speaker, when Mr Speaker Weatherill sat in your Chair, I was taking part in a filibuster and I mentioned Penderyn whisky at length. As a result, Mr Speaker Weatherill said that he would very much like to sample it, and I believe that he was sent several bottles. Earlier, the Minister asked me to return to the question of what will happen to Penderyn whisky—obviously, he wants to give me more information than he was able to during the previous urgent question. I repeat: Penderyn whisky is from a small distillery in my constituency on the edge of the Brecon Beacons. It is an important employer in an area of still high unemployment and it is very important that it is protected.

Conor Burns: The right hon. Lady makes a very powerful case. As I have said a number of times at this Dispatch Box in answer to several hon. and right hon. Members, we believe that it is terribly unfair that the small producer will be caught in the crossfire of a dispute in which they had no part and no part in making. I am very happy to meet her to talk particularly about her local employer and hear its local arguments, and she must feel under absolutely no obligation to come to that meeting with any whisky from her local producer.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I welcome the Minister's commitment to trying to protect the industries that could be affected if these tariffs come into place. I also welcome the UK Government's commitment—specifically, when there are an additional 12 Scottish Conservative MPs—on support for the spirits industry across Scotland and in Angus. I ask him for reassurances that in an upcoming Budget, he will look carefully at the spirits industry as a whole and other industries that would be affected were these tariffs to come into play on 18 October.

Conor Burns: I congratulate my hon. Friend on yet another demonstration of what a powerful advocate she is for those who put their trust in her to serve as their Member of Parliament. I said earlier that the tweets of the President of the United States were slightly beyond my remit. I am afraid that the Chancellor's next Budget falls into a similar but not distinct category, but I am sure that she will make that point very powerfully to our right hon. Friend, and that it will receive a warm welcome.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Airbus Industries will be heavily impacted by the decision last week. Has the Minister raised this issue with Airbus since Thursday, and has he raised with the United States ambassador the 275,000 jobs that are provided by Airbus in 40 states in America, as well as the thousands in my constituency and across the whole north-west?

Conor Burns: I have not yet had the opportunity to raise this issue directly with Airbus, but I have put out a call to the American ambassador. As I hope the right hon. Gentleman will understand, the reason that I have not yet had the opportunity to talk directly to Airbus is

that I returned to the UK only late last night after a visit last week to Vietnam. When I came into the office, I spoke to the chief executive of the Scotch Whisky Association and I reached out to our counterparts in Scotland and Wales. Such conversations will be happening urgently in the course of this week.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Ind): I welcome my hon. Friend's respect for the rules-based international order, but does he share my concern that the US, under this President, has by contrast ridden roughshod over multilateral institutions and agreements? This President has made it abundantly clear that he views trade negotiations simply as a means of reducing US trade deficits, subverting the rules of the WTO whenever they get in his way.

Conor Burns: I am very keen that we do not try to personalise this as a dispute between the United Kingdom and the person of the President of the United States. The relationship between the UK and the US is one between two great nations and two historical allies. It is the case that the United Kingdom continues to take strongly the view that we should uphold the international rules-based order. We see the WTO as a very important part of regulating and acting as a fair and impartial arbiter in international trade disputes. We have already said publicly that we do not think that the WTO is perfect and that we would welcome some reform—in particular, to increase the speed at which dispute resolution takes place. We will continue to engage with our counterparts in the United States, and we hope that we can persuade them that these are damaging measures that should not happen. There was chuntering when I said that I would continue to reach out during the course of this week—I mean by tomorrow, but I cannot guarantee that people will answer the phone.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Every bottle of Bowmore, Laphroaig, Ardmore, Glen Garioch and Auchentoshan malts are vatted, bottled and packaged by 200 skilled workers in Springburn in my constituency, so the impact of this could be devastating for that workforce. However, what was clear to me from a recent visit there was the symbiotic relationship between the Scotch whisky industry and the American bourbon industry, not least, brands such as Maker's Mark and Jim Beam, because the casks are used to mature those Scotch whiskies. Will the Minister impress upon his counterparts in America that this is a mutually destructive measure by the American Government and that they ought to consider the impact that it will have on not just British industry, but American industry?

Conor Burns: The hon. Gentleman, if I may say so—[*Interruption.*] I am sure that Scottish National party Members would like to listen to the reply, because the hon. Gentleman made an excellent point that I had not thought of before. I welcome what he said and I would be very interested in talking to him more about that because that could be a very fruitful line of discussion between us and the United States. Perhaps we could have a conversation about that this week.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Will my hon. Friend advise me what steps the UK Government are taking to help to broker a negotiated settlement between the EU and the United States on what is

essentially a long-standing issue regarding airplane manufacture between Boeing and Airbus, thus avoiding damaging tariffs for companies such as William Grant & Sons in Girvan, in close proximity to Trump Turnberry, and on cashmere produced by Begg & Co. of Ayr?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend asks an excellent question. I have articulated what we are trying to do: first, to persuade the United States not to act in the timeframe that they have set out; and secondly, to work with our friends and colleagues in the European Union to press the WTO to come to judgment on the Airbus/Boeing case and our compliance with the judgment as quickly as possible, so that we can move on from this and get back to proper free trade. In terms of the textile and whisky companies that my hon. Friend mentioned, we are acutely aware of that and they have our support.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): As my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) outlined, Bushmills whiskey is defined internationally as Irish whiskey. Is the Minister aware that the Republic of Ireland seems to have negotiated an opt-out for its single malt Irish whiskey? Did he or the Department engage in renegotiations to try to get an opt-out for whiskies from the UK, and how does he intend to catch up with the Republic of Ireland on this issue?

Conor Burns: We want to deal with the macro on this issue. These are very bad tariffs that we believe have no foundation. We believe that they are wrong and profoundly unhelpful, and we believe that they undermine the whole concept of free trade and will damage people who are producing and employing. I would rather go down the route of trying to persuade our American friends to abandon this entire series of tariff attacks and look at the issue calmly and reasonably based on the current facts, not ancient dispute, than seeking to try to get an opt-out in some way, which in a sense would legitimise the underpinning of something that we consider to be wrong.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Whisky is an enormous employer in Ochil and South Perthshire, from Glenturret to Tullibardine to Diageo. They employ thousands of people across the constituency. What is my hon. Friend doing to limit the impact on the broader supply chain that will affect not only my constituency, but Scottish and northern English farmers? Will he join me and the rest of the Scottish Conservatives' campaign for the Treasury to continue to freeze spirit duty in the next Budget to ensure that there is not a double hit for our producers in Scotland?

Conor Burns: I congratulate and salute my colleagues representing Scottish constituencies. To weave into this, my debut performance at the Dispatch Box, the writing of the Chancellor's Budget shows a degree of ingenuity I welcome. I will certainly make representations on behalf of my hon. Friends, who serve the people of Scotland so well, about what the Chancellor can do in his Budget to help protect this sector.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) said, Airbus is a huge employer on both sides of the north Wales border, so when the Minister has his conversations will he emphasise that point and the point that the United States employs a significant number of people in the same industry?

Conor Burns: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point, and he makes it well, and he is correct.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I warmly welcome my good friend to the Dispatch Box—he is doing a great job—and if he wants to visit Aberdeen on his way up to Moray, he will be more than welcome. Can he give a commitment that in future trade talks with the US his Department will prioritise the export market for the great iconic Scottish whisky industry, and does he agree that as we leave the EU we have the opportunity to open up new and growing markets, such as India and Taiwan?

Conor Burns: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who serves his constituents in Aberdeen so effectively. Absolutely, that will be the case when we start our discussions and negotiations with the United States. I chaired a trade discussion with the Taiwanese last week, before I went to Vietnam, and I was struck by how incredibly interested they were in growing the sector. Asia is a massive growth market for Scottish whisky. We are also determined to seek to remove some of the tariff and non-tariff barriers to other markets in the Asian region.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The Minister said he did not want to personalise this, but even with a small urban constituency I have a maturation warehouse, a bottling plant and three cooperages. If the UK has such a special relationship with the US, why does the Prime Minister not just pick up the phone to Donald Trump and tell him to drop these ridiculous tariffs?

Conor Burns: I have no doubt that the Prime Minister, the next time he speaks to the President of the United States, will want to express his disappointment and concern at these measures and will urge the President to invite his Administration to think again. I say to all right hon. and hon. Members, however, that if our shared goal is not seeing these tariffs implemented in 10 days' time, I am far from convinced that the best way of achieving that outcome is to personally attack the President of the United States.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is not often I say this, but I completely agree with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara): it is about quality, not quantity. I represent Scotland's two finest distilleries, Royal Lochnagar and Fettercairn, and I think the Minister hit the nail on the head. My Scottish Conservative colleagues have mentioned the possible quid pro quo of removing the bourbon tariff in exchange for removing the 25% Scotch malt whisky tariff being imposed by President Trump. Can he confirm whether that suggestion has been made to the United States, and if it has, how did it go down?

Conor Burns: I can confirm to yet another powerful advocate for the Scottish interest on the Conservative Benches that I am not aware that that has been put to the United States. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), we are either a believer in the rules-based international order or we are not. We are still currently a member of the EU, and we have to comply with the rules of that institution as long as we are in it. I do not

[Conor Burns]

think that to do something unilaterally on bourbon at this time would be right. However, as I made clear to my right hon. Friend, when we have left the EU, if we have not resolved this, the Government do not take any option off the table.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): The Glenkinchie distillery, in my constituency, has been around since 1837 and is the finest lowland distillery in Scotland. Can the Minister confirm that, if we were to leave the EU, the US tariffs would not automatically fall but would indeed continue? To quote the advice of a former President to a former Prime Minister during the banana trade wars, politicians in America do not seem to have a lot of control over this. Who is the Minister reaching out to in the US beyond the immediate politicians to secure a revocation of the tariffs, hopefully before they are imposed?

Conor Burns: Ultimately, these are decisions for the United States Administration, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has reached out to her counterpart, why the Chancellor has reached out to his, and why my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) raised these points when President Trump was here over the summer. As I said in answer to a previous question, I am sure my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will want to make this point directly to the President the next time they speak. I say to all right hon. and hon. Members, however, that we are not bystanders in this process; we are participants, and everyone in the House has a perfect right—indeed, an obligation, if they have an interest in this—to make their views known to the United States ambassador in the United Kingdom, who will then be able to convey them back to his Administration at home.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): As well as the many distillers across Scotland, including the two wonderful distilleries in my constituency, Macduff and Glenglassaugh, the news of these tariff proposals will concern the many thousands of people involved in the Scotch whisky supply chain, including the farmers in my constituency who produce the finest malting barley for the Scotch whisky sector. Can my hon. Friend assure me that the UK Government will safeguard the interests of barley growers and all those who may be indirectly affected by these tariffs, in addition to the distillers?

Conor Burns: I pointed out in a previous answer—to the shadow Minister, I think—the degree of reliance on the Scots whisky sector within the supply chain. That supply chain adds enormous value to the UK economy, and hundreds if not thousands of jobs depend on it, so I am very happy to give my hon. Friend that undertaking.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I cannot boast any of the fine distilleries that other hon. Members have mentioned, but I do have a bottling plant with American connections and the global headquarters of Diageo, one of the world's largest producers of spirits—indeed, the producer of the single biggest selling spirit in the world—and they will not be immune to this tariff. Does the Minister share our concern that this latest

dispute with the United States simply illustrates the position we might be in if we leave the EU and depend entirely on the WTO—the very organisation that okayed these tariffs today?

Conor Burns: We should be under no illusion: in this respect, the WTO was doing its job. We were found not to have abided by the rules. In a sense, the WTO is obliged to allow the sanctions. As I have said repeatedly, the great sadness—the great sense of unfairness and foul play—is that the people who will be targeted, some of whom could be destroyed commercially, if the tariffs are implemented in 10 days' time had nothing to do with the dispute where we were found not to have done the right thing. The best way to guarantee free trade is proper bilateral free trade agreements between us and other countries, and that is why we want a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU and a deal that allows us to leave in an orderly way on 31 October.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his debut at the Dispatch Box. If he goes on like this, it will not be long before he is presenting the Budget, and he will have a chance to sip the devil's buttermilk as he does so.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that America is the largest market for Scotch whisky. What other levers can he pull to promote whisky in the emerging markets of Asia and further afield—for instance by using the efforts of the GREAT campaign? This is a real opportunity to push our whiskies into other markets.

Perhaps you should lead by example, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker's 10-year-old single malt sells for £29 a bottle, which is a remarkable increase on what it retailed for 10 years ago. Perhaps as your parting shot, Sir, you should immediately commission, as a gesture of confidence in the Scotch whisky business, a new bottle of Speaker Bercow's brew.

Conor Burns: I am incredibly grateful to my right hon. Friend. Indeed, having served as his Parliamentary Private Secretary from August 2010 for, I think, a couple of years, I now model myself on him, having watched his deft performances at the Dispatch Box from a position behind him.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the growing interest in Scotch whisky around the world. As I have said, the Taiwanese market has been discussed several times in Vietnam in the last few days. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend might be on to something. Perhaps we should tie it to the GREAT campaign, and perhaps we should invite our new prime ministerial trade envoys in the beefed-up programme to make this a priority.

Scotch whisky is genuinely one of those international iconic brands. It is up there with Rolls-Royce, and all the other brands that are instinctively recognised as British. It is as well known as Buckingham Palace or, indeed, this very building, and it is integral to our promotion of ourselves as global Britain.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) justifiably feels great pride in his protégé—the person whom, in fact, I might describe as his mentee. The mentoring skills have clearly had their impact.

Sir Hugo Swire: A new generation, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Indeed.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Although Stoke-on-Trent does not make Scotch whisky, Wade Ceramics makes the ceramic bottles in which whisky is sold all over the world. In a similar vein to the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham), may I impress on the Minister that the supply chain for this product may be deeply impacted, and I ask what conversations he or the Government are having with the representatives of that supply chain to pass on in the negotiations, which I know they will welcome protecting their interests?

Conor Burns: As this session evolves, I am becoming ever more impressed by the ingenuity of colleagues who want us to write Budgets and also to raise the position of other sectors. I mentioned the supply chain a couple of times earlier, and we talked about the ceramics sector during the urgent question on the day one tariffs policy. We absolutely recognise the importance of that, and I am always willing to meet the hon. Gentleman and other representatives of the sector to discuss what more the Government can do to support it.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right—we should not engage in personal attacks on the President, but is it not nevertheless a strategic concern for us that we are seeing an Administration who appear to have a remarkable proclivity for protectionism? Does that not underline the fact that we as a nation need to be a champion of free trade, and that as we negotiate our exit from the EU we will have to have practical powers and instruments at our disposal, so that we can be that champion of free trade in practice?

Conor Burns: The answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's question is yes, absolutely, we must remain a champion of free trade, and that we will do. The answer to the first part of his question is that we have to deal with the world as it is. The greatest strategic interest that we have—that the House has, that the Government have—is to try to persuade the United States not to implement these tariffs in 10 days' time, and thereby to protect the Scotch whisky industry.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I must say that it is wonderful to hear a UK Government Minister recognise the enormous value that Scotch adds to the UK economy. I hope he will remember that next time his colleagues try to suggest that the Scottish economy is some kind of basket case.

The North British Distillery, which is in my constituency, is one of Scotland's oldest and largest grain whisky producers, and is a very important employer in Edinburgh South West. While this tariff is of course aimed at single malts, it is a worrying indication of how the US Government may treat iconic Scottish food and drink products in any trade negotiation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) suggested, if the Prime Minister's alleged good offices with President Trump cannot resolve this problem, what hope is there for future trade negotiations outside the EU?

Conor Burns: After—how long has it been?—quite a long time during which we have enjoyed such wonderful consensus, I fear that we have now entered the press release-writing section of this urgent question.

No Conservative Member would ever speak of the Scottish economy in such denigrating terms. It is, in fact, because of our respect for the people of Scotland and the Scottish economy that Government Members passionately believe in Scotland's integral place as a part of the United Kingdom. It is we who passionately believe that we are better together, and it is we who passionately believe that the best interests of the Scottish people are served by membership of this United Kingdom. It is this Government, serving every part of the United Kingdom, who will do all that we can to protect that sector, and to protect whisky producers in every part of this country. But if the hon. and learned Lady, who has taken some time off from her court cases to come here today, genuinely believes that the best way of resolving this dispute is to attack and denigrate personally the President of the United States, I think that shows how naive she is.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Let me confirm to the Minister that no Scottish Conservative considers Scotland's economy to be a basket case. What an insult that was from the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). However, I am concerned about the single malt distillers in Stirling, namely Deanston and Glengoyne: I am anxious that they should be able to continue to prosper. Is one of the options that the Government might pursue in their representations to the United States that this date of 18 October might be postponed a little, to allow us some time in which to continue negotiations?

Conor Burns: As I have indicated on a couple of occasions, the Government think that the way to move forward is to ask our friends and allies in the United States not to implement these tariffs within the timeline that they are proposing, to work with the EU and the other countries within it which are affected by the Airbus-Boeing dispute and are therefore subject to these tariffs, to secure a judgment from the WTO that confirms that we are now compliant, and to talk to the United States about how we can withdraw the tariffs and allow a sector that is vital to us and to the United States to proceed unimpeded.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): This announcement has put the hard reality of trade disputes into sharp relief, but may I ask the Minister whether the tariff also applies to Welsh single malt whisky, such as that produced by Dà Mhile Distillery in my constituency? In the harmonised tariff schedule published by the United States Government, the relevant subheading and description refer only to Irish and Scotch whisky.

Conor Burns: My understanding is that that applies to the whole United Kingdom, but I shall be happy to check and to write to the hon. Gentleman tomorrow.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): There is a huge sense of frustration in the Scotch whisky industry and, indeed, among other spirits manufacturers about the fact that several European spirits were not included in the list, and that they are being treated as collateral

[Paul Masterton]

damage in a trade dispute that has nothing to do with them. As we move forward, what steps will the Government take to try to de-escalate trade disputes more generally, so that situations such as this do not continue to arise?

Conor Burns: As I have said several times, one of the great frustrations about this particular case is the fact that the Boeing-Airbus dispute goes back a long way. It was found that we had not behaved appropriately, hence the judgment. We would like to see reform of the World Trade Organisation to accelerate the dispute resolution process through the WTO so that the situation does not arise again, but we would also like to try to decouple that dispute and those judgments from this sector and other sectors that will be affected. We do not think that these tariffs are just; we think that they are wrong, and we want to work with our friends in the United States to try to persuade them not to implement them.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am surprised at the Minister's tetchy and defensive response to the gentle questioning from my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). All he was asking was how many meetings the Minister had had in the past five days since this was announced. His ill-mannered friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), suggested that there would be meetings tomorrow. The Minister himself has hinted that his phone calls will not be received or secured. He is a Minister of the Crown, for goodness' sake! Get on with it! Make sure you are speaking to them! Get this sorted!

Conor Burns: I am incredibly grateful for that question.

The hon. Gentleman says that I should have had these meetings last week, but I was in Vietnam last week. I arrived back in the UK today, and my officials and I have been working today and reaching out. I am actually quite fond of the hon. Gentleman, but I think that he is deliberately teasing me and misrepresenting what I said. I hope to have those conversations tomorrow, but what I said was that I could not guarantee that people would pick up the phone.

Pete Wishart: You're the Minister!

Conor Burns: The funny thing about being a Minister is that it does not necessarily mean that everyone talks to you, and it certainly does not mean that they talk to you—[*Interruption.*] I did say to all colleagues in the House that we all have a role to play in this. It is not a matter of, as the hon. Gentleman says, "Give it to us". We are all in this together, and the people who work in the sector will not care whether it is the SNP, the Tories or Labour. What they will want to see is this entire House of Commons coming together to support the industry.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Chambers of commerce and transatlantic trade bodies play a key role in shaping trade policy, including on the other side of the Atlantic. What engagement has my hon. Friend had with those bodies to open up trade and markets for our exports?

Conor Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, particularly as he is the last in the thin blue line between me and a barrage of questions from SNP colleagues for the remainder of these questions. He makes a very powerful point indeed.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): We're over here! Hello!

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) asked the question, and we speak through the Speaker, so I am looking directly at the Speaker. I say to the hon. Lady that I observe the conventions of this House.

My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. If we are going to advance our international trade objectives, that is done not just Government to Government, bilaterally; it is done trade organisation to trade organisation. To coin a phrase, we are all in it together.

Patricia Gibson: Clearly these punitive tariffs on Scotch whisky will be extremely damaging for distilleries such as those in my constituency in Lochranza and Lagg on the beautiful island of Arran. Despite the Minister's words, it is clear that this damaging trade war we face does not sit well with our so-called special relationship with the US. A number of people have asked this, and I too want to press him on whether he shares the concern that this trade war is happening just as we are at the point of preparing to lose our collective trading strength as part of the EU.

Conor Burns: I share the concern of the hon. Lady, and of Members from every part of the House who have spoken this afternoon, that this is happening at all. It is the objective of the Government to try to persuade the United States to think again and not impose these damaging tariffs in 10 days' time.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Mr Speaker, when you think about it, the most remote UK mainland jobs associated with Scotch whisky distilling are in my constituency by definition. I think of Old Pulteney in Wick and Glenmorangie in Tain, which are two examples providing vital jobs in places where jobs do not grow on trees. In all fairness, I wish the Government well in trying to get the United States to see sense, but the European Union is the biggest market for Scottish whisky—30% by value and 36% by volume—so surely the present trade deal we have in the EU is best for Scottish whisky.

Conor Burns: We want to try to persuade our friends in the US—I can go on repeating that; I will doubtless get into trouble with the Chair if I do so. He is no longer in his place, but as I said to the current hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna)—and, to judge from a leaflet that came through the door of my flat in London last week, the aspirant Member for Westminster—he has consistently taken the view that the membership of the EU on current terms was the best deal for the UK. That is a consistent, logical and admirable view to take. It is his view and I respect it. It was not the view of the British people in 2016 when they voted to leave the European Union. They knew what they were voting for because we sent a leaflet telling them what it meant, and we have to deal with that reality. Many of us on the

Government Benches, and indeed in other parts of the House, think there are great opportunities for the United Kingdom outside the European Union. The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) is right that we should absolutely have an ongoing trade agreement with the EU, which is why I would urge him and others from across the House to get behind the Prime Minister in his moderate, sensible, flexible offer to the EU. Let us get a deal across the line. That would be much more constructive than his party's position of arguing for the revocation of article 50.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): As well as having Edrington headquartered in my constituency, I have the Glasgow Clydeside distillery, which opened in 2017, and Douglas Laing & Co, whose plans for the Clutha distillery at Pacific Quay are moving on apace. However, all that is now plagued by uncertainty because of this trade dispute. What assurance and support can the Minister give to businesses in the Scotch whisky industry, particularly fledging businesses, to ensure that that investment is sound?

Conor Burns: The best support we can give them is to strain every sinew to persuade the United States not to implement these tariffs in 10 days' time.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): These tariffs will cause concern not just in my constituency but across Scotland. Can the Minister confirm that since last Thursday there has been no direct contact between him or any other UK Minister and the US Administration over this issue?

Conor Burns: On this I can only speak for myself, having returned to the United Kingdom from Vietnam last night. I have not had a direct conversation—

Drew Hendry: Why not?

Conor Burns: Because I was in Vietnam. I went to the office today, and we have been reaching out and having those conversations. I say to Opposition Members that the absolute determination that we must all share is to try to protect the Scotch whisky sector and persuade the United States not to implement these tariffs in 10 days' time. That will be my focus for the rest of this week.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Like many Members, I have a constituency interest. One of the largest employers in my constituency is the Edrington bottling plant, which bottles brands such as Macallan single malt. I am amazed to hear the Minister say that we should be straining every sinew to get this sorted, when he cannot pick up a phone from Vietnam. That is incredible. This was a decision backed by the World Trade Organisation. Can he confirm that, post Brexit, we will simply be swapping one set of EU trade rules for a different set of WTO rules and that, as such, things such as Scotch whisky will continue to be bound by decisions made elsewhere?

Conor Burns: The hon. Lady talks about the WTO and decisions being taken elsewhere. The WTO is the international body that does dispute resolution between countries and endeavours to work for an international level playing field in trade. I am not particularly fond of

the word, but I thought there was great consensus across the House on wanting to follow an international rules-based order.

By the way, on this point of who has spoken to whom, I outlined the representations made by this Government to our counterparts in the United States, which have been made at the level of the Chancellor and of the Secretary of State to Vice-President Pence and to her counterpart US trade negotiator. We have made incredibly high-level representations on this subject and will continue to do so, because we have a determination to try not to point-score, but to come to a successful resolution on behalf of the Scotch whisky sector.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): May I first congratulate—I think I might be the first Member to do so—the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) on securing this urgent question? It is an important question for the entire House, not just for those of us whose constituencies are home to Auchentoshan, which—I will chide some Members—actually finds its heart and its spirit in the Kilpatrick hills. I should know: I illegally played in its distillery as a child and first represented it in 1992 as a councillor in Clydebank. Indeed, this very House's house whisky—or hoose whisky—is Loch Lomond, found in the beautiful vale of Leven, and our largest export to Europe is Ballantine's from Chivas, found of course in Dumbarton.

The Minister will know that this White House is the most transactional in history and will have seen from developments in, for example, Ukraine that it has thought nothing of ratcheting up leverage in as many ways as possible, as a precursor to securing concessions at a later date. Can he therefore say what the Government are doing to limit those 25% tariffs, or whether we are going to become another Ukraine?

Conor Burns: We are doing everything we can to try to persuade the United States not to do this. That has to be the overriding ambition of us all, across the House. I have said this a couple of times already, and will do it again very briefly: we all have the ability to contact people in the United States on behalf of the UK Government. The party the hon. Gentleman represents—

Martin Docherty-Hughes: You are the Government of the United Kingdom.

Conor Burns: I was going to say to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* If he wants to chunter, I can sit down—*[Interruption.]* Asking questions and then listening to the answer is how it sort of works, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to carry on chuntering rather than listening I can sit down and he can explain to his constituents why he did not get an answer.

Mr Speaker: That was rather unseemly. It has to be said that the Minister is being utterly courteous in his responses and it would behove Members to dignify the occasion with attentiveness to his answers.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): There are currently more Scottish whisky industry jobs based in my constituency than in any other, and the very nature of these jobs leaves my constituency and those workers extremely vulnerable to a whisky downturn. Will the Minister reassure them that no stone will be left

[Gavin Newlands]

unturned by this Government, including that of an urgent intervention from the Prime Minister to the President of the United States, in ensuring that this deeply damaging tariff is not applied?

Conor Burns: I am very happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we will continue to make representations. As I have said, the Prime Minister follows proceedings in this House very closely, and I will make sure that he is aware of the strength of feeling across the House on this issue and of how important the House feels it will be for the Prime Minister to convey this message very strongly to the President on the next occasion on which they speak. I am sure that will be soon. I was going to say this to the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), but as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) is listening very politely, I will say it to him: we should all be doing everything we can. The party in which the hon. Gentleman serves serves in government in Scotland, and the First Minister of Scotland herself will have a role to play in this. We must all pull on the rope together to deliver the result we want—that is, no imposition of these tariffs, which would be so damaging to the sector, in 10 days' time.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): We know US trade groups have been pressing for any future trade deals with the UK to drop current EU requirements on the ageing of whisky so that their younger products can be labelled and sold as some sort of equivalent. How concerned is the Minister that this is just the opening shot in what will be a determined effort by the US to destroy the protections around this iconic Scottish product?

Conor Burns: As I said before, we view this round of tariffs as wrong, ungrounded and without foundation. I do not share the hon. Lady's overall concern. It is very important to remember that this goes beyond Scottish whisky—there are other sectors, such as cheese, clothing and so on that are caught in the crossfire of an almost ancient dispute, which goes back to 2004. They should not be, and we will do everything we can to try to persuade the United States that this is the wrong course of action and of the damage it will do to small producers, who are exactly the sort of people for whom the President says he wants to stand up in the United States. I hope that we can persuade him to protect those people here in the United Kingdom.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given that I do not actually have a distillery in my constituency, I am in the unusual position of having more workers in my constituency employed in the neighbouring aerospace sector, at Prestwick airport, and in the Airbus supply chain. It is important for both sectors that this trade dispute is resolved as soon as possible. It is also quite obvious that, although whisky is a by-trade of this, unilaterally taking tariffs off American whiskey will not solve this, given the amount of trade we send to America. These negotiations are therefore important. Given that the Minister did not pick up the phone to the US ambassador while he was in Vietnam, did he contact the EU to see what it was doing about this?

Conor Burns: Until the hon. Gentleman reached the very end of his question, I was going to say that I found myself in the very unusual position of agreeing with absolutely everything he had said. He is absolutely right that we need to decouple these tariffs and this dispute from the sector. We need to persuade the US that this is the wrong thing to do and that it is deeply harmful to people who had no role to play in the old dispute that has now finally reached judgment.

I am genuinely touched by the belief that my picking up the phone from Vietnam or anywhere else would have resolved this when people much higher up in the Government—at Cabinet level and at a very senior Cabinet level—have quite rightly been making these representations. I will now join in and support them in making these representations.

How many times do we say these things? The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy spoke to the Vice-President of the United States when he was here very recently. She spoke to her counterpart, and the Chancellor made representations to the US Treasury Secretary. I will endeavour to make sure that the Prime Minister, when he understands the strength of feeling here, raises these matters with President Trump. I will say it again: those who are watching this, those who have returned home and been foolish enough to put the Parliament channel on, will not want us to score points against each other. They will want us to deliver for the Scotch whisky sector.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): In the interests of brevity, I do not intend to reel off all the world-leading brands produced in my wonderful constituency, although I should make an exception out of deference to and respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). Killie will always be the home of Johnnie Walker, even though it is now produced and bottled in my constituency.

The world-leading brands that are produced and bottled by Diageo in Fife are almost exclusively blended whiskies, so on the face of it we are okay, but I am uncomfortable, partly because so many others are not okay and partly because something that damages part of our whisky industry damages all of it. Does it worry the Minister at all that without the UK Government being able to do anything about it we have been put into a position where it will be seen as a massive success just to get back to where we were before? Is that a precursor of what trade deals will be like in the brave new world of the WTO?

Conor Burns: In the interests of brevity, no, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Speaker: I think that the House is grateful to the Minister both for dealing with this urgent question and the exchanges on it the last 77 minutes, and for his efforts on the previous such question. He mentioned to the House that he was making his debut at the Dispatch Box. I cannot readily call to mind an example of a Minister who on making a debut at the Box has had to answer successive urgent questions, and the hon. Gentleman has done so with considerable commitment and élan. We are grateful to him.

Operation Midland Independent Report

Mr Speaker: Before I call the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) to ask his urgent question, I must inform the House that I have been advised that Carl Beech has appealed his conviction and sentence. Colleagues, those appeal proceedings are therefore sub judice under the terms of this House's resolution and no reference should be made to the merits or otherwise either of that appeal or of the sentence imposed by the court.

6.38 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): May I add my commendation to the Trade Minister who responded to the previous urgent question, who did so as to the manner born?

To ask the Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service if he will make a statement on the Home Office's response to Sir Richard Henriques's independent report on the Metropolitan police's Operation Midland.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): This is a deeply concerning case. Operation Midland was the Metropolitan Police Service's investigation into allegations of child sexual abuse made by Carl Beech against a range of public figures. Beech is now serving an 18-year prison sentence for perverting the course of justice. He has appealed his conviction and sentence, as you mentioned, Mr Speaker, and they are a matter for the courts to consider. This case has had a devastating impact on those he accused and their families. Sir Richard Henriques's report on how the Met handled the investigation raises many concerns. The Met has already apologised for failings in the investigation and acted on many of Sir Richard's recommendations, and we very much welcome the publication by the Met on Friday of the fuller detail of what Sir Richard found. I note that the commissioner of the metropolis has issued a further statement and apology today.

It is now vital that the public receive independent assurance that the Met has learned from the lessons identified in Sir Richard's report and has made the necessary improvements. That is crucial to restoring public confidence that police handling of an investigation of such sensitive matters is both fair and impartial. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote last week to Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary and fire and rescue services to ask him to undertake an inspection at the earliest opportunity to follow up on Sir Richard's review. It must be right that a body independent of Government take this work forward. She also asked that the inspection take account of the findings of the report of the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which was published this morning, and which we will be considering carefully.

The public must have faith in the impartiality of their police service, and no one should have to suffer the ignominy of public false accusations of the most heinous kind. The Government are determined to ensure that the lessons are learned by the police and that the failings of this investigation are never repeated.

Mr Davis: The fundamental principle of our justice system is innocent until proven guilty—a principle undermined over the past decade when the rules of police

forces were amended, particularly after the Jimmy Savile scandal. The entirely understandable aim of those changes was to increase the conviction rate for sexual offences, but that has been a complete failure, with conviction rates for sex crimes having dropped dramatically in the last five years.

The price that has been paid in terms of reputational damage and ruined lives has been enormous. High-profile figures investigated under Operation Midland have had their reputations disgracefully and unjustly tarnished. The IOPC, whose report was published this morning, has failed miserably to identify the Met's failures, identify the culpable people or resolve the issues.

However, it is not just the Met. Other police forces across the country follow policy guidelines, automatically believing all allegations brought by complainants, and therefore disbelieving the defendants. This has damaged the reputations of Cliff Richard, Paul Gambaccini, Jim Davidson, my hon. Friend the Member for Ribbles Valley (Mr Evans) and many other, less well-known defendants. Will HMIC therefore review not just Operation Midland, but the judicial and policing rules and procedures covering all such cases, so that we get justice for victims and protection for the innocent?

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend raises issues that are, of course, important. He rightly points out the devastating impact, as I mentioned earlier, that this episode has had on many significant public figures, one of whom was a much decorated war hero. I hope he will recognise that, in many circumstances, the police face a difficult task in trying to balance the need to give victims of crime the confidence to come forward, engage with them and report crimes, against the requirement to have justice or impartiality in an investigation at the same time.

The College of Policing, which looked at the guidelines, considered, for example, the tendency or policy that had been adopted for victims always to be believed. We have clarified the guidance that is available to police officers in those circumstances, such that, while a victim's allegations must be heard with integrity and properly recorded once an investigation has begun, that must be done with impartiality. We hope and believe that the audit or inspection by Her Majesty's inspector will look specifically at whether the Met has learned the lessons of this particular episode.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) on securing this important urgent question.

Sir Richard Henriques's report makes for extremely sobering reading. At the heart of this case are the victims and their families, who have faced years of questions and unthinkable damage on the basis of false and malicious allegations. It is clear that this case has exposed a serious failure of the police's investigative functions and decision making, which has had profound consequences. Officers failed to present the whole picture when seeking search warrants, and the investigation into Lord Brittan went on far too long. Of that there is no question.

The question for the IOPC is whether the five officers involved acted deliberately or criminally. Its conclusion is that they made mistakes and that the processes failed, but that they were not guilty of gross misconduct.

[Louise Haigh]

Indeed, Sir Richard himself acknowledged that, notwithstanding the many mistakes made, the officers conducted the investigation

“in a conscientious manner with propriety and with honesty.”

The question, therefore, for the police, for the Home Office and for us, as Parliament, is what needs to change organisationally and culturally to ensure that investigations are properly, objectively and successfully pursued. That institutional change must be our objective, but it is so often lost in the heat of the tabloids’ gaze.

It is right that our police are subject to the most intense scrutiny. The accountability of the police is a fundamental cornerstone of our democracy, and many of Sir Richard’s recommendations must be implemented in the interests of accountability. Will the Minister therefore confirm exactly how many of his 25 recommendations have already been delivered and what the timeline is for further recommendations from both Sir Richard and the IOPC to be implemented and for HMIC’s review?

Does the Minister believe that there is a systemic issue on disclosure and search warrants that must be nationally addressed? What steps will the Home Office take to lead on this work? Will he specifically look into the recommendation around the audio recording of warrant applications? Furthermore, it was disappointing that the report was selectively leaked over the last week. Is any investigation intended into those leaks?

Finally, as has been touched on, this case has reignited the debate around belief of victims by the police. That debate cannot be had outside the context of record lows for rape prosecutions, with only 3% of cases reaching the courts. Our criminal justice system does not currently deliver justice to victims of sexual abuse, and it has not done historically. From Rotherham to Oxford, and from Torbay to Rochdale, victims have been failed time and again by all institutions of the state. We must therefore think carefully before imposing sweeping changes regarding the belief of complainants by the police that would have the effect of undermining genuine victims in coming forward.

As the Victims’ Commissioner has said, complainants’ rights do not exist in competition with suspects’ rights. That is why it is right that officers believe, take seriously and treat with respect every complainant of crime in the first instance and then investigate thoroughly, without fear or favour. Does the Minister therefore agree that the right approach is currently contained in the College of Policing guidance and that this approach must always be carefully balanced against the impartiality of the subsequent investigation?

Kit Malthouse: I thank the hon. Lady for a sensible intervention and for her questions. She is quite right that, as she concluded, we face the challenge of striking the difficult balance of ensuring that victims have confidence that they can come forward, that they will be taken seriously and that their allegations will be considered, but also of ensuring that those who are alleged to have carried out crimes know that the investigation will be conducted with impartiality and balance and that, in the end, justice will be served. That is absolutely the balance that we are seeking to achieve through the guidance, which was updated recently with the College of Policing to make that clearer. Part of the inspection

that we have commissioned from HMIC into the Met police will be to make sure that some of these lessons have been learned.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about the number of recommendations in the Henriques report that have already been enacted, and part of our commission with the inspector is to find out exactly that—where we have got to in terms of progress. I will certainly look at the point she raises on audio recording and consider what more action we can take on that.

The hon. Lady will understand that both the report itself, which we have seen recently in full, and the IOPC report, which was issued this morning, are large documents and contain significant implications for policing into the future. That is something that we want to consider and that the Home Secretary wants to consider as well. As to the investigation into leaks, that would obviously be a matter for the Metropolitan police, should they wish to pursue it,

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I agree completely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis): the shining jewel of our criminal justice system is that somebody is innocent until proven guilty. That is their protection against the might of Government and, of course, the might of the media when they reach a speedy judgment. It has always been a concern that the processes we are discussing have casually turned that aside and that, as far as the public have been concerned, people have been guilty until proven innocent. I hope my hon. Friend will address that. Sir Richard makes that very clear.

The other vital point, which no one has raised yet, relates to interventions by public figures trying to get the police to pursue matters further. I refer in this particular case to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson)—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I presume that the right hon. Gentleman has informed the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) that he intends to raise this matter in the House.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am not making any further reference to him other than that he was raised in the report—

Madam Deputy Speaker: I advise the right hon. Gentleman that it is important that a Member is given notice if they are going to be referred to, so I am sure he will bear that in mind in his closing comments.

Mr Duncan Smith: I will. I was simply referencing Sir Richard’s report. My point is a general one. Will the Minister address the reality of the police finding themselves unnecessarily influenced by public figures as to the direction of their investigations? There needs to be some method by which they can resist that.

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend raises some important issues, not least the much-debated challenge of pre-charge anonymity. The guidance is clear that those against whom allegations have been made pre-charge should generally be kept anonymous until they are charged.

However, I am sure that he will accept that it is appropriate in certain circumstances for the police to release the name of somebody who is suspected of a crime, not least, for example, if they are conducting a manhunt looking for a suspect in a murder.

My right hon. Friend also raises the influence or otherwise of us and other public figures on police investigations. In his long years as a constituency MP, he will no doubt have had cause to write to the police on numerous occasions with regard to investigations into his constituents or on the behalf of his constituents, which is a perfectly legitimate thing for him to do. However, we all have a duty to bear in mind the protections and privileges that are afforded to us in this place and to use them as wisely and judiciously as possible

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): False allegations of sexual assault and abuse may be rare, but they do happen. They harm not only the wrongfully accused, but those who have been the victims of sexual assault and abuse by making it less likely that they will be believed, and I say that based on my experience of three years as a sex crimes prosecutor in Scotland's national sex crimes unit. Does the Minister agree that the police owe it both to the victims of sexual crime and to the principle of innocent until proven guilty to carry out their investigations professionally and thoroughly without fear or favour? What steps will he be taking to reassure the victims of sexual crime that the mess that the Met has made of this case will not jeopardise future cases? Finally, there can be few things more serious than misleading a court, which is particularly serious when it is done by a police officer, so what repercussions will there be for the officers who unlawfully obtained warrants by misleading the court?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. and learned Lady raises an important point about the continuing confidence of victims to come forward. As she quite rightly says, false allegations not only betray those against whom the allegations are made, but those who come afterwards with similar allegations, who will naturally feel, in the wake of a large and difficult situation like this, that they are less likely to be believed. That is absolutely not the case, and we will do our best as a Government to continue the increase in public confidence, which has seen a significant rise in the number of historical allegations of child sexual abuse, into which an inquiry is under way already. People should have no fear that they will not be taken seriously.

The Home Secretary has commissioned an inspection of the Met police to ensure that it is learning lessons and embedding exactly the measures to which the hon. and learned Lady aspires. Once that concludes, the inspector will no doubt make a report available to the House, and I would be more than happy to come and update the House in the future.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). I cannot say that on many occasions, but I agreed with every point that she made on this occasion. Following on from one of her points, the Sir Richard Henriques report is very critical of the then Deputy Assistant Commissioner Steve Rodhouse. The public will be surprised to learn that he is now the director general of operations in the

National Crime Agency—an organisation for which the Minister has direct ministerial accountability. Does he have full confidence in Mr Rodhouse in that position? If so, will he tell the House why?

Kit Malthouse: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will understand that it is extremely important for credibility and trust in policing in this country not only that the police service is operationally independent, but that the organisations charged with its discipline and governance and for investigating complaints exactly such as this are also deemed to be independent. He will know that the IOPC, which is charged with that duty, has found no reason to conduct any action against that particular police officer. It would be inappropriate for me, as a Minister of the Crown, to intervene to countermand or to criticise that investigation in any way. However, both the Home Secretary and I will be carefully considering both the Henriques report and the IOPC report that came out this morning and what our next steps should be.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): If I went to the police to report that my car had been stolen, I would expect to be believed until the investigation or the evidence proved otherwise, but the situation is not the same if I were to report child abuse. I am concerned that commentators on the Beech case are using it as a way to discredit victims and survivors of child abuse and sexual assault. Will the Minister please confirm that if people do have the courage to come forward and report such crimes, they will be taken seriously, they will be supported, and the cases will be properly investigated?

Kit Malthouse: All allegations of crime, particularly such sensitive allegations, should be taken seriously, properly recorded, assessed sensitively, but then investigated with due impartiality. Those are the guidelines by which the police should be operating, and we will take steps to ensure that that is the case.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): As a neighbour of Ted Heath, an admirer of Field Marshal Bramall, a colleague of Harvey Proctor, a friend of Leon Brittan, and—this is a matter of public record—as someone twice accused of this sort of thing by people who were bad, mad or sad, I think the House can agree that we can support the police and let them account for their failings when they come.

Will the Minister also get the inspector to look at the GOLD Group on Operation GIANNA? A written parliamentary question on the matter was answered by his predecessor on 25 July about the case of Gurpal Viridi. A vertical slice through the Metropolitan police managed to accuse a good officer of things he had not done at places he had not been and when none of the evidence linked him to it. All the evidence showed that the complainant was untruthful, and the weapon that was supposedly used on the complainant was introduced to the police force eight years after the event that was supposed to have taken place. May I ask that Operation GIANNA is referred to the inspector to see whether it is appropriate for him to consider it as well?

Kit Malthouse: I am happy to look again at that case. I should declare that, as a previous deputy mayor for policing in London and chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, I did have dealings with Mr Viridi and

[Kit Malthouse]

his case, so it is not unfamiliar to me. I would be more than happy to meet with my hon. Friend to discuss what further steps may need to be taken, if any.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Having sent in a copy of the Geoffrey Dickens file, I was asked to meet Operation Midland, to which I explained in some detail why I thought its lines of inquiry were fundamentally flawed, providing some documentation to back that up. I also represented 30 of my constituents for four weeks in the Nottinghamshire strand of the child abuse inquiry when, it is a fair summary to say, those who had suffered abuse were unanimous in their condemnation of the police for not believing them when they came forward. When one case was reopened, one of my constituent's assailants ended up getting a 19-year sentence, and there are other cases that I cannot comment on because they are currently sub judice. Will the Minister ensure that nothing is done that in any way impinges on the ability of the independent inquiry to report freely and openly next year, both to Parliament and Government, when it has had the chance to conclude its full investigation, including, of course, the Westminster strand?

Kit Malthouse: I can give the hon. Gentleman those assurances, and I hope that he will have adduced from my answers today that I am studiously attempting to respect the operational independence of these organisations and inquiries.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I was not only the policing Minister but the victims Minister, and I have real concerns following the two reports that victims need to be believed. We must make sure that the police work hard to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward. I am deeply concerned that Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services, which was created when I was the Minister, is perhaps not the right vehicle for such an inquiry, as it does not have the powers to sanction—not necessarily prosecute—police officers. This report clearly shows that not only did police officers make mistakes but that there was malpractice, which is probably the best word.

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend is right about the limits on the powers of the chief inspector of constabulary. The organisation that has the required powers is the IOPC. The IOPC has produced this report, which we will consider carefully.

Once again, my right hon. Friend is correct that we all need to do our best to reassure victims that they will be taken seriously when they come forward. We are trying to make sure with inspection that the various steps, lessons and recommendations in these reports, not least the Henriques report, are being embedded in Met police practice so that we can promulgate them across the country.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One of the worst things about deliberately false, vexatious or overexaggerated allegations is not only that the person against whom the allegations are made is put through hell but that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) said, future victims may find it more difficult to get justice. But do we not also need to look carefully at

another aspect? When the press and the police have too close a relationship and, by some miracle, the whole of the regional press turn up after, frankly, being tipped off by the local police that somebody is about to be arrested, it does no justice to anybody whatsoever.

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Gentleman is right, and he will know there was a significant inquiry into the relationship between the press and the police that came to certain conclusions, and the practices, certainly the formal practices, within the police service have since changed. Having said that, although primary responsibility lies with the police, the media also have a responsibility to report such things responsibly and to recognise that they have a wider responsibility towards society beyond just selling headlines.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, you may recall that, six years ago, the then chief constable of Sussex was found to have breached privilege after an investigation by the Standards and Privileges Committee into a vexatious investigation against me. It then took the IPCC over three and a half years to uphold four of my five complaints, by which time all the officers investigated had retired, and therefore no penalties could be imposed.

It looks as though the same has now happened with the IOPC. The investigation took far too long, and only one of the officers was actually interviewed face to face. How is it that the damning Henriques report talked about Operation Midland in terms of

“incompetently, negligently and almost with institutional stupidity”, yet today's IOPC report refers to “shortcomings” in the handling of the whole investigation. What will the Minister now do to ascertain whether the IOPC, almost two years after it took over from the IPCC, is actually fit for purpose?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend raises an important point about the timeliness of IOPC investigations. Some of the timelines in some of these investigations are unacceptably long. We have plans to introduce measures next year to urge, compel or incentivise the IOPC to complete its investigations in under 12 months. If an investigation goes beyond 12 months, the IOPC will have to issue an explanation.

My hon. Friend knows that significant reforms were introduced during the transition from the IPCC to the IOPC to try to strengthen the organisation's governance, not least by creating a board with non-executive directors in the majority, as opposed to the previous structure in which the investigators or inspectors themselves sat as an internal board. There is now some internal scrutiny, but there will be an opportunity to continue the path of reform. If he has ideas about how we should proceed, he should please let me know.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): In the past year, there has been a 27% decrease in convictions for rape. Only 2% of reported rapes end in a conviction, so does the Minister share my concern that the recommendations pursued by Sir Richard could have a chilling effect on the already unacceptably low prosecution rate for rape and domestic abuse?

Kit Malthouse: As I have said, I am genuinely concerned, notwithstanding the Henriques report, about the confidence of victims to come forward, not least in relation to crimes of a sexual nature. Although there has been some difficulty and disappointment with the number of convictions and prosecutions for rape, the level of recorded rapes and the number of victims coming forward has increased significantly. Although, from a headline point of view, the stats do not look good, it is actually good news because it means more and more people are confident about coming forward. The hon. Lady will have seen that the Government recently promised significant financial support for the kind of counselling services and independent sexual violence advisers across the country that will enable victims to come forward more confidently and be supported through the judicial process.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The good name of Sir Edward Heath was further dragged through the mud by the Wiltshire constabulary, led by the now thankfully suspended Chief Constable Mike Veale, when they appeared at his front gate in Salisbury to call for more victims. Some 32 officers spent two years investigating, at a cost of £2.3 million, despite the fact that the alleged perpetrator had been dead for many years. Does the Minister agree that, in addition to examining the report on Operation Midland, now is the time for the investigation into Operation Conifer—the Wiltshire police operation—to be reopened?

Kit Malthouse: As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, the decision to investigate or otherwise is not for me, but the Henriques report has a section on Operation Conifer, which I will be considering carefully.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I regret to say that I have not heard much this evening that will reassure the widow and family of Lord Brittan and the families of all those involved, including General Bramall. This House also needs to look at itself and at the role played by Members. The police admit they were encouraged to pursue these matters by various Members. If we cannot control the outcome of some of these investigations into the police, as seemingly we cannot, we can do something to make sure that no one in this House has fallen short of the high standards expected of Members of Parliament by exerting undue pressure on the police, hastening the death of Lord Brittan and causing misery to many people who have served this country rather better than some Members.

Kit Malthouse: I am sorry that the exigencies of operational independence, plus the fact that Mr Beech has lodged an appeal against his conviction, naturally limit what I am able to say, which may come as a disappointment to some of those against whom false allegations were made. However, on my right hon.

Friend's second point, as I said earlier, it is absolutely right that the House looks at how the protections, privileges and, indeed, power exercised by hon. Members on an almost daily basis are used responsibly by finding some mechanism to ensure that those who would seek to use them irresponsibly cannot do so.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Of course, the immediate day-to-day responsibility for the Metropolitan police lies with the Mayor of London, as my hon. Friend perhaps knows better than anybody. The Mayor of London, as we know, is normally very vocal about pretty much anything that is not in his portfolio, but this is very much within his portfolio of interests. Does my hon. Friend share my surprise that the Mayor of London has neither accepted nor even responded to the important recommendations in this report?

Kit Malthouse: Given my previous position at city hall, with responsibility for the Metropolitan police, I have been surprised at the lack of reaction from the primary accountability body for the Metropolitan police. I would certainly urge the Mayor and his deputy mayor for policing and crime to take a much more proactive and vigorous approach to making sure that this sort of thing never happens again.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): About five years ago, I raised some concerns about the case that has come before us here, and I got a letter from Patricia Gallan, assistant commissioner, specialist crime and operations. I will not name the Member concerned, as I am being very careful about this, but the letter completely contradicted what Sir Richard has said. It stated:

“I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that”

the hon. Member concerned

“played no part in influencing the subsequent investigation and as a consequence the MPS has no basis to investigate the allegation contained within your letter at this time.”

I was bang on the nail with what I put in my letter on that day five years ago, and I would like the Minister to tell me whom I should take my file to for further consideration.

Kit Malthouse: Obviously, my hon. Friend is perfectly at liberty to submit his views and evidence to the IOPC for further consideration should he wish to do so. However, I have absolutely no doubt that given the scale, nature and prominence of this episode, the Home Affairs Committee will wish, once it has digested both the IOPC report and the full Henriques report, to look further into this, call those people who have been involved, including Members, and ask them to account for their actions.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

7.11 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, following the release of one Australian-British national who was also imprisoned at Evin prison.

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): May I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on her urgent question and thanking her for the passion and persistence she has brought to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case? Her constituent can be sure that she and her family have been well served by the hon. Lady as a constituency MP.

In recent weeks, we have seen further cases of unwarranted detention of foreign nationals in Iran. These cases are completely devastating for the individuals concerned and deeply and profoundly upsetting for their families. We are of course delighted to hear that Jolie King, a British-Australian national, has been released from detention in Iran. That is good news, but it invites us to think about others who are detained in Tehran.

Equating the cases of foreign nationals in detention in Iran and cases of British-Iranian dual nationals is unlikely to be helpful, as Iran perceives the two to be quite distinct, and it is Iran with which we have to deal. We want to do everything we can to resolve Nazanin's case. We also want to see the resolution of the cases of other British-Iranians detained in Iran. The trouble is that the Iranian authorities do not recognise dual nationality; they consider Nazanin simply to be an Iranian national. Consequently, they do not grant us consular access; nor do they give us sight of legal process or changes, despite all of our efforts.

The House will be fully aware of the lengthy chronology of representations made at ministerial level on this issue. On 11 September, the Foreign Secretary again raised his serious concerns with the Iranian ambassador to London about Iran's practice of detaining foreign and dual nationals. The Prime Minister raised his concerns with President Rouhani on 24 September, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did the same with Foreign Minister Zarif on 17 September. My colleague Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon hosted an event at the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September to bring attention to these incredibly important issues, as I did in Tehran earlier this year. I can assure the House that our efforts to raise the plight of those detained with the Iranian authorities at ministerial and ambassadorial level will continue.

It is a matter of deep regret that a country such as Iran, with such a rich and proud history, is failing to uphold its basic international obligations. That this sophisticated and cultured country is arresting individuals on unclear charges, failing to afford them due process and, in some cases, committing acts of torture and mistreatment on not only dual nationals but its own citizens is deeply disappointing, to put it mildly. Dealing specifically with dual nationals, we are absolutely clear that Iran's behaviour is beyond unacceptable. The treatment of our dual nationals, including Nazanin, is unlawful

and unacceptable, and it must end. Be in no doubt: this matter remains a top priority for the UK Government. We will continue to lobby at all levels for Nazanin's unconditional release, so that she can return to her patient, long-suffering family in the UK.

Tulip Siddiq: My constituent Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been imprisoned in Iran for three and a half years, during which time she has been in solitary confinement, she has been chained to her bed and shackled, she has been through depression, she has been suicidal, she has been on hunger strike and they have found lumps on her breast. Among all that, one of her biggest traumas is the changing fortunes of her fellow prisoners; prisoners will come in and she will become close to them, and then they will leave and go home, but she remains in prison. One such case is that of Jolie King, an Australian-British-passenger who was travelling in Iran and while she was flying a drone she was accused of spying, even though she was actually using that drone to take selfies with her fellow traveller. Nazanin was sharing a cell with Jolie and slept in the bunk above her. On Saturday 5 October, Jolie was released from prison, three months after she was caught. Australian Ministers said that their Government held very confidential and sensitive negotiations with Iran to ensure that Jolie was released and that she was treated appropriately while in detention.

Nazanin has said to her husband Richard, who is watching from the Gallery today, that of course she celebrates Jolie's freedom but that she wants to know why her Government, the British Government, are not doing the same to get her out of prison. During this time, while the trauma is going on, the family are having to make a decision that no family should have to make, which is on where her five-year-old daughter, Gabriella, will go. Will she remain in Iran to be near her mother, or will she come back to London to be with her father, with whom she can no longer communicate because she has lost the ability to speak English, having spent most of her life in Iran?

Bearing that in mind, I have a few questions for the Minister. I am aware that no two consular cases are identical, but can the Minister explain to me, first, how the Australian Government have been able to achieve such rapid progress for another British national, whereas Nazanin remains in jail, three and a half years on? Secondly, in recent weeks, as the Minister and the House will know, there have been notable developments in British-Iranian relations. The first was the release of seized oil tankers. The second was a £1.2 billion payment from the Treasury to a private Iranian bank. Have the Government, at any point, threatened to withhold such enormous sums unless Iran releases imprisoned British nationals?

Thirdly, if Gabriella does return to the UK, can the Foreign Secretary assure me that the Foreign Office will provide security for her while she is travelling from Iran and when she comes to the UK? Finally, with the prospect of Gabriella returning home to begin school, I have enormous concerns about Nazanin's wellbeing. Will the Foreign Secretary update me on how the Foreign Office will step up its efforts to provide full consular support for Nazanin in this case?

I ask you to indulge me for one moment, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am here for the fourth time before this House asking about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe,

because I am genuinely concerned about my constituent's wellbeing. I want the Prime Minister and Ministers of this Government to be able to look themselves in the mirror in years to come and say that they did everything possible to ensure that my constituent did not die in prison in Iran and that they brought her back home.

Dr Murrison: I said in my opening remarks that the hon. Lady's constituents can be proud of her, and they truly can be. Her passion shines through. I really do share her frustration, but I must resist the suggestion that the Government are in some way dragging their heels in this matter. That is absolutely not the case, and I think she probably knows that to be so. I have read out a series of diary dates on which we have made contact with the Iranian regime at the highest level, and we will continue to do so.

The hon. Lady has to understand that the tools we have in our toolbox are limited. She draws comparison with the Australians; I said in my earlier remarks that we have to accept that although Nazanin has Iranian-British dual nationality, Iran does not accept that she also has British nationality. That lies at the heart of this issue. Jolie King is a British-Australian national. That is the difference. It is invidious to compare consular cases and I am certainly not going to be drawn into doing so, not least because many of those who find themselves discommoded by the Iranian regime want us to keep their plight under the radar. That is their choice and that of their family.

In respect of any assistance that the UK Government can give in consular terms, of course we will provide that when the opportunity arises. We will do everything we possibly can to assist Gabriella if it is the family's wish that she returns to the UK. As things stand, we do not have access to Nazanin, as we believe we should. We will continue to lobby hard; we should be able to access her and to have proper oversight of the legal machinations in Tehran so that we can assist her where we can, but we are up against a regime that has, up to this point, been impervious to our pleas on her behalf. We will continue to do that. I absolutely give the hon. Lady the assurance, which she requests, that we will continue to do all in our power to ensure that this poor woman returns to her family at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I understand the issue relating to how the Iranian Government treat dual nationals, but is it not imperative that we send out a signal from the House that every British citizen is equal and all British citizens will receive the highest standards of support from the British Government? My biggest sadness as Foreign Secretary was not being able to bring Nazanin home. Will my right hon. Friend confirm to the House that the highest duty of the state is the protection of its citizens, and that nothing—no other priorities—will stand in the way of reuniting this innocent woman with her loving husband and daughter?

Dr Murrison: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend and pay tribute to him for the hard work that he put into this case and the cases of other dual nationals in relation to Iran. I have to say that, as a newly arrived Minister in the Department he used to lead, I was genuinely impressed by the attention that he gave to so-called consular cases. He was absolutely rigorous in

the application of his time and energy to these cases, and the case of Nazanin was certainly top of his list. I pay tribute to him for that.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this urgent question, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for so assiduously pursuing this issue and so eloquently explaining why warm words from the Government are no longer enough—if, indeed, they ever were. Like her, I welcome the release of Jolie King and her partner, and I applaud Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marise Payne, whom I met recently in Canberra, on her work to secure their freedom. Her success shows what can be achieved, even with Iranian hardliners, when working with tact, diplomacy and dedication to the task—let us be frank: not what we got from the current Prime Minister when he was in charge of this brief.

I will not repeat the many excellent points that my hon. Friend made regarding Nazanin's health. In the time I have, I wish to focus on one specific issue: the linking by Tehran of Nazanin's case to the restoration of the money Iran is owed in relation to the tanks purchased prior to the Iranian revolution. I am absolutely clear, and I think we would all agree, that we cannot accept that a dual British national should be held hostage by a state power as a bargaining chip in diplomatic and financial negotiations. Those tactics will never succeed; otherwise, they will be repeated, not just in Iran but by other authoritarian countries around the globe.

However, regardless of the situation with Nazanin, the legal facts are clear, Iran is owed the money and the Treasury has set the money aside. All that remains is to determine the exact amount and to establish a means by which it can be paid over without breaching sanctions regulations. As has been demonstrated today, those questions are unlikely to be resolved by the courts. Does the Minister agree that it is incumbent on the Government to find a way to break this impasse without breaking our principles, so that we can take the issue of the tanks compensation off the table and then have a discussion with Tehran about Nazanin, based not on quid pro quo or diplomatic bargaining but on the simple justice, freedom and humanitarian care that are owed to this innocent woman?

Dr Murrison: I thank the right hon. Lady for her remarks. She dismisses warm words; I have to say that these are more than words. Words are important and it is correct that we get our language right in these matters. She refers to tact, dedication and diplomacy; we just had a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), and I have to say that the tact, dedication and diplomacy that he applied to this issue were exemplary. I very much hope that we all approach this matter in the same spirit.

The right hon. Lady is right to say that we appeal to Iran's decency in this matter. That is where this issue rests and it is absolutely right that we should appeal to Iran in that way. I still hope that Nazanin will be released, because Iran is, as I said in my earlier remarks, fundamentally a decent, civilised nation. I want the Iranians to find that within themselves in order to do the right thing in this particular case.

[*Dr Murrison*]

In respect of the International Military Services debt, the right hon. Lady will know that the matter is before the courts. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran has itself specifically decoupled the repayment of debt from Iran's detention of dual nationals. It is not the UK Government who have done that; it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran itself. The right hon. Lady seeks to join the two; Tehran says no, and that the two are separate. Given that Iran has said no, even if we were minded to do so it would be very difficult for us to proceed on the basis of, as she puts it, *quid pro quo*.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Ind): I commend my right hon. Friend on the way in which he is handling this distressing issue, and I again commend the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on the way in which she raises it. The House is united in expressing concern and distress about the circumstances concerning Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, as it has done before.

I have two questions for my right hon. Friend. First, is it not the case that even if Ms Zaghari-Ratcliffe is treated as an Iranian citizen, she has now served enough time to be eligible for parole, and it is therefore open to the Iranian authorities, without making any concession in relation to the charges against her, to release her? Secondly, although there are no formal linkages related to her case, Iran covers a wide front in terms of its concerns about issues around it and the negotiations it takes part in, so will he simply confirm that the United Kingdom keeps an open mind in engaging in all those discussions, which will help to reduce tensions in the region? A reduction in tension may make it easier for other matters to be considered.

Dr Murrison: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, he had this file, as it were, as my predecessor, and I pay tribute to him for the time that he spent on this issue. Again, when I arrived in the Department in May, I was struck by how much the ministerial team had put into this matter. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend. The family need to know that the Government are behind them in doing everything that they possibly can to secure Nazanin's release. I say that with my hand on my heart.

My right hon. Friend is of course right. Tehran will always say that this is a matter for its judiciary, but the longer this goes on, the more scope it has to be merciful, to do the right thing and to release Nazanin.

My right hon. Friend is right to comment on the general atmospherics. Although I have made it clear that the MFA in Tehran has decoupled the payment of any debt from the release of Nazanin and dual nationals in general, nevertheless we want to reach a position where the atmospherics are greatly improved. Clearly, those atmospherics are broad and wide right now, with recent events in the Gulf and further afield. I hope that we can move this on, and that we can, for example, re-engage Iran with the joint comprehensive plan of action, and give it something of what it needs and, bluntly, the respect that it feels—rightly in my view—is its due. In those circumstances, I think that things become easier—let me put it in those terms. To link

things directly with events and actions and with the release of dual nationals will continue to be resisted by the regime in Tehran for the reasons that I have outlined.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): May I again thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing this urgent question and for her ongoing efforts on behalf of her constituents? I hope that she does not mind, but I should like to pay particular tribute to Mr Ratcliffe for his tireless and brave efforts on behalf of his family and the wee girl, Gabriella. I am glad that the dual nationals were released, but we can understand Mr Ratcliffe's frustrations, which we all share. There is no reason why this innocent woman should have been imprisoned in Iran for so long—she should not have been imprisoned at all.

The Prime Minister's comments when he was Foreign Secretary that Nazanin was teaching journalism were wrong. He was right subsequently to correct those comments, but they were used incorrectly by the Iranian authorities. To be doubly clear, will Ministers make available all documents showing that they were wrong, including any documentation that was sent to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, so that this can never, ever be used by the Iranian authorities again? Will the Minister—I know that he has touched on this—reflect on the fact that Nazanin is still imprisoned wrongly. She is innocent. He made remarks about consular access. It is fair to say—and we heard the remarks of the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), of the shadow Foreign Secretary, and of others—that there is unity in the House that Iran's actions are totally unacceptable. That is felt across all levels of the House. At all levels of the House, there must be representations to ensure that she receives assistance. If possible, can the Minister give us an update on the healthcare that Nazanin is receiving?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am not interested in political point scoring. I am interested in getting Nazanin back home. I pay tribute to Richard Ratcliffe, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting. I was struck by his sincerity. He has done an extraordinary job on behalf of Nazanin, and I salute him for that. The hon. Gentleman is right—Iran is acting unlawfully under international humanitarian law, which it has clearly breached. It needs to be brought back into line. My advice to my interlocutors in Tehran, if it were sought, would be, "Do so, and your reputation will increase. You will be one step closer to being shoulder to shoulder in the international panoply of nations, which is where you desire to be."

This does Iran no good. I appeal on humanitarian grounds in relation to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. I would also appeal on the basis of Iran's reputation. While these harrowing, dreadful cases continue, it cannot possibly expect to be able to deal with the wider world in the way that, I think, it wishes.

The hon. Gentleman asked about access. He must know that our access to Nazanin is non-existent. We are forbidden by Tehran to access Nazanin in the way that we would expect to have access to British nationals. I regret that. It would be extremely helpful to move this on if we were allowed to have access to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. I would strongly urge my ministerial interlocutors to consider that as a reasonable thing for us to have.

That is what we require as a minimum in the near future so that we can determine for ourselves many things on which the hon. Gentleman touched.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): In the middle of last month, it emerged that yet another person, Kylie Moore-Gilbert, a Cambridge-educated British-Australian academic, has been banged up in Iran, probably as a hostage for something as yet officially unspoken, for anything up to a year of a 10-year sentence for spying, so-called. Are there any other cases, without going into specifics, of which the Government are aware of people being held hostage in this way? Given the track record from the earliest days of the Islamic revolution in Iran of taking hostages and using them for nefarious purposes, what advice does the Foreign Office give to British dual nationals and others about the wisdom or otherwise of visiting that country?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Foreign Office advice is available on the Foreign Office website, and is updated periodically. On other cases, yes, there are number of cases with which we are dealing. I am afraid I cannot be drawn, for reasons that he will understand, either on the precise number of those cases or their identity, except insofar as they or their families wish the matter to be made public. We have to be led very much by individuals' wishes, which is why I am being a little cautious about giving a full answer to the question that my right hon. Friend asked.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I know from working with the Minister in the past that he is a compassionate and determined man. Does he have any information at all about the medical assessment that Nazanin underwent today in prison, to judge whether she is fit enough to continue in prison? If he has that information, will he update the House on the Government's assessment of her mental and physical health?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. The information that I have is the information that she has, as we do not have consular access to Nazanin. I read the newspaper reports, which I suspect that she has read, and I am deeply troubled by them.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The plain truth is that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was abducted and imprisoned illegally. The latest information that we have is that at the health hearing in Iran at which she appeared she complained that she had been deprived of her medication, was sometimes held in solitary confinement, and was suffering from deep anxiety. She fears separation from her five-year-old daughter, who is to return to England for schooling.

I say to my right hon. Friend—a personal friend, whose integrity is beyond question and whose determination is well known—that there are lessons to be learned from the recent Australian experience. Two Australians have been released. Will he enter into discussions with the Australian Government to discover what steps they took to ensure that release? No stone must be left unturned in the defence of British citizens at home or abroad.

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks. The truth of the matter is that Iran does not recognise dual nationals—that is the difference.

The case to which he referred concerns an Australian-British national. Nazanin is a British-Iranian national. As far as Tehran is concerned—we can argue the point, but it will not do us much good—Nazanin is an Iranian national, which is why it will not allow us to have access. I regret that very much, and we push back on that all the time, but, very sadly, that is the position adopted by the Iranians.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What more can the UK Government do to support Nazanin, Richard and their family, and to right this wrong?

Dr Murrison: I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration in this regard; I really, really do. But it is a sad fact that the tools in our toolbox are limited. What we can do is continue to make it clear to our interlocutors that this is not acceptable, right or proper, and that if Iran wants to restore its reputation, the early release of Nazanin and other dual nationals will go a very long way. It is the right thing to do, and I urge Iran to get on and do it.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for constantly raising this case, and pay tribute to Nazanin, Richard and the whole family for their enormous courage in this terrible ordeal. May I also thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for what he, his colleagues and his predecessors have been doing? I think he is right that there is a limit to what can be done. Nevertheless, persistence in raising this case day in, day out and week in, week out is so important to show that this House and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will never forget it.

Dr Murrison: I absolutely agree. Look, we want to make progress with Iran on a whole range of fronts, but it is difficult to do that when high-profile things of this nature remain to be dealt with. My constant message is: let us deal with this; let us get this done; let us do the right thing; and let us bring Nazanin and other dual nationals home.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): As a doctor, I have extremely grave concern for the mental and physical wellbeing of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. While the Prime Minister suffers from a textbook case of moral bankruptcy, I believe the Minister to be a good man who works with integrity. We are sitting on a ticking time bomb. The poor lady has depression and is suffering so greatly, and now we are looking at her being without her daughter—potentially the only lifeline she has left. I therefore ask the Minister today whether he is sure, with all his conscience, that he is doing absolutely everything he can.

Dr Murrison: I very much appreciate the hon. Lady's remarks. Her passion does her great credit. As a doctor also—and having read what I have read in the press about Nazanin's case—I too feel real sadness that somebody should have been brought to this pass mentally and physically. I can genuinely say to the hon. Lady that I and the Department that I have the privilege of working in have done everything we can to move this on, and we will continue to do everything we possibly can, but I do share her frustration.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Minister has used words such as “mercy” and “clemency”, which are fundamentally, in the end, religious words. I would have thought that, to many of the people who run Iran, those words would be intrinsically interesting. I just wonder—if I can put this question to him again—whether it would not be a good idea to ask the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York or maybe the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, to lead a religious delegation to Iran to see whether there might be a way of their asking that the quality of mercy be not strained.

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that suggestion. We discussed this on 17 July when I was here talking about Nazanin. I have to say that it would be a bit of a challenge if any group of people were to act in the way that the hon. Gentleman has described with the Government’s fingerprints all over them. I do not think that would be very helpful. Such a thing has to be truly independent. I would need to stand here at the Dispatch Box with my hand on my heart and say, “Genuinely, this is not something that is Government-inspired or Government-delivered.” But I do know that there are people and organisations that are doing what they can to improve the relationship between this country, and the international community in general, and Iran. I continue to encourage them to do that.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for continuing to pursue this case on behalf of her constituent. I also want to say to Richard and Nazanin that the people of Glasgow Central are asking after them and hoping that they will be reunited soon.

I have had a number of constituents who have experienced significant delays in their asylum cases and in getting leave to remain in this country who are originally Iranian nationals. I also have constituents who live here with leave to remain in the UK who wish for a family member to visit them from Iran. In both cases, delays do not help those individuals. Given the particular risks of people from this country going to visit Iran, would it not make sense for the Minister’s colleagues in the Home Office to allow people to come here to visit their family, and to do so quickly and easily?

Dr Murrison: I share the sort of constituency issues to which the hon. Lady has alluded. I am sure that my colleagues in the Home Office will have heard what she has to say, and I will certainly draw their attention to her remarks.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family are going through mental and physical anguish that we cannot even begin to imagine, although we do all we can to support them. Her case and those of other imprisoned British nationals raise questions about the effectiveness of consular services provided to UK nationals in prison—particularly, for example, in supporting them through mental anguish and helping them with their mental wellbeing. Does the Minister agree that it would be helpful for the Foreign Office to conduct a wider review of the support offered to British nationals in similar cases? A constituent of mine has recently been in prison in Ghana for 18 months in a case of mistaken identity and received almost no consular support.

Dr Murrison: I am very sorry to hear about the hon. Lady’s constituent. If she sends me details of the case, I would be more than happy to look into it. I think there is very often some confusion as to what our consular services can and cannot do. It might be helpful if we were to write to the hon. Lady with an account of what our consular service can do in country and what it cannot do, since there is often confusion about the role of consular services that can cause some misunderstanding.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): As has been said, one cannot imagine what Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her family have gone through. Like others, I commend the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for raising this issue.

The Minister talked about three and a half years of lobbying—essentially without success. As has been said, Iran has clearly breached human rights and international law, but from its point of view it has been able to do so with impunity and without consequence. Surely that is part of its calculation. I am not clear from this exchange what exactly the Government are saying to the Iranian Government will be the consequences of continuing to behave in this way—breaching international law and somebody’s human rights. From Iran’s perspective, it is able to do this and currently there is no consequence.

Dr Murrison: Well, I am open to suggestions from the hon. Gentleman. What is he proposing the British Government do beyond that which we are already doing? On a number of occasions today, right hon. and hon. Members have expressed frustration, which I certainly share. As I have said before and I have to say to him again, the options open to the UK Government are limited, but the reputation of Iran is on the line here. In my conversations with my interlocutors, I make it very plain that unless they address these issues and the general environment in which these issues arise, they are simply not going to make progress.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I would like to raise the serious plight of my constituent Robert Urwin, who is being failed by our consular services. He is being held in Ukraine after an Interpol red notice request from the United Arab Emirates for his extradition was dismissed and denied by the Ukrainian authorities—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I must ask the hon. Lady to be very brief because this matter is really outside the scope of the urgent question. She needs to be able to relate her point to the urgent question.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am aware that my question is a little out of scope. Despite my constituent’s innocence, the Interpol red notice has not been removed. As a result, Ukrainian authorities are refusing to allow him to leave the country. As the Minister will know, an Interpol red notice can remain active indefinitely. My constituent has been held against his will because of what appears to be a bureaucratic error. Although no longer incarcerated in Ukraine, he has been stuck there for over a year—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Lady has made her point. I am sure that the Minister will say that he will look into the case, but it is not within the scope of this urgent question.

Dr Murrison: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—that is precisely what I was going to say. The hon. Lady has been extremely ingenious in pushing the case of her constituent. Of course I will look into it. If she writes to me with some details, I will ensure that I deal with it.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) drew attention to the 40-year-long pattern of behaviour by the Iranian revolutionary regime of taking hostages. It is clear from what the Minister said that Nazanin's case is different from that of the Australian dual national, but there are other people detained in Iran—Canadian-Iranians, Austrian-Iranians and American-Iranians, as well as our own citizens. What discussions have the Government had with other countries whose nationals are detained in Iran, and has there been any co-ordination on how we might approach these questions collectively to pressurise this vile regime?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is correct: there are other dual nationals who are discommoded in a similar way. Of course we talk to our interlocutors in other countries where people are dealt with in this way, to ensure that we see what common ground we have and what we might do together to address these issues. But the fact remains that Nazanin is an Iranian-British dual national. That makes her case different from the other case that we have been discussing today.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I do not doubt that the Minister is doing everything within his power, despite the constraints he has laid out. Given the previous Foreign Secretary's involvement in this case, has he committed personally to raise the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe with the Iranian authorities, now that he has been elevated to Prime Minister?

Dr Murrison: Yes. He raised this with President Rouhani on 24 September in New York.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his excellent responses. We know that he is a Minister with compassion and understanding, and he is the right person for this job. As other Members have mentioned, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been arbitrarily and unjustly detained by the Iranian authorities. Unfortunately, that is not an uncommon occurrence in a country where, over the past 10 years, it is estimated that more than 1,000 members of the Baha'i faith community have been arbitrarily arrested by Iranian authorities simply for holding their beliefs. Does the Minister agree that the Iranian Government must respect the rule of law and the right to freedom of religion or belief and release all those who have been imprisoned unfairly?

Dr Murrison: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. He has been a real champion of the Baha'i people, and I pay tribute to him for that. He is right; these people should not be disadvantaged in any way by any regime, and I urge a change of heart by the Government in Tehran.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) raised the safety of Gabriella's passage from Iran to Britain in her opening question. I understand that Iran has yet to grant a visa for Mr Ratcliffe to travel to Iran to collect his daughter. What encouragement can the Foreign Office provide to ensure that a father has the right to collect his daughter?

Dr Murrison: Gabriella is a British national. We will provide her with every assistance we can to return to the UK if that is the wish of the family.

Point of Order

7.53 pm

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to make a small correction to the record. In my answer to one of the questions in the previous urgent question, I said that the Henriques report contained a chapter on Operation Conifer. It does not. That was an inadvertent slip, for which I apologise. I have made that correction personally to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), who raised the question, and I apologise to those on the Opposition Front Bench and others for my slip.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Minister for his point of order and for giving me notice of it. He has come speedily to the House to correct the record, and I am sure the House will appreciate that.

Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

7.54 pm

The Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household (Jeremy Quin): I beg to move,

That, in pursuance of paragraph 2A of Schedule 3 of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, Mr Peter Blausten be appointed as a lay member of the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority for a period of five years from 27 January 2020 to 26 January 2025.

The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is not a conventional Committee of this House. It is a statutory Committee, and its establishment, role and membership are determined by the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, as amended. The Committee has two responsibilities: first, to consider the candidates proposed by the Speaker, following a fair and open competition, for the posts of Chair and members of IPSA; and secondly, to approve IPSA's annual estimate of resources.

The legislation sets out the membership of the Committee, which comprises the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Chair of the Standards Committee, five further Members and three lay members. The three lay members have full voting rights. They were added to the Committee under the terms of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, following a recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life. They are intended to bring an external view and provide greater transparency and independence in the exercise of the Committee's statutory functions.

The motion before the House seeks to appoint Mr Peter Blausten as a lay member to succeed Bronwen Curtis CBE, whose term will end in January 2020. Ms Curtis has served the Committee and the House diligently, and I know that Mr Speaker and the other members of SCIPSA would wish to place on record their gratitude for her advice and service.

The motion seeks approval for the appointment of Mr Blausten to take effect from 27 January 2020 for a period of five years. At the Speaker's request, the recruitment panel was chaired by Dr John Bengier, then Clerk Assistant. The other panel members were: Sir Hugh Bayley, formerly the Member for York Central; Michelle Barnes, an independent HR consultant; and Mike Page, HR business partner in the House of Commons Service. The board was assisted by a specialist recruitment agency, and the recruitment process involved stages of advertisement, longlisting, shortlisting and interview.

The candidate named in the motion, Mr Peter Blausten, is a former FTSE 30 and 250 group HR director and civil service commissioner. He is currently a partner in Alvarez & Marsal, an international management consultancy. The interviewing panel concluded that Mr Blausten's analytical approach and experience as a human resources director would support and greatly assist the Speaker's Committee in its dual role of scrutinising IPSA's estimate and overseeing the recruitment of new IPSA board members.

The statute requires that the motion is tabled with the agreement of the Speaker, and I can confirm that the Speaker has signified his consent. I have been assured

that this process met the requirements of statute, and I hope that the House will support Mr Blausten's appointment.

7.58 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box for what I think is his first outing. It was remarkable, and he has had some friends here in support of him.

I thank the Minister for moving the motion. I too want to thank the board, which was chaired by the then Clerk Assistant, now Clerk of the House, Dr John Benger, and its other members: Sir Hugh Bayley, Michelle Barnes as the independent HR consultant and Mike Page from the House of Commons Service. I also thank the outgoing lay member, Bronwen Curtis, whose appointment will end on 26 January 2020. She has been assiduous in the way she has carried out her independent functions and incisive in her contributions on the Committee.

The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has published a helpful explanatory memorandum for Members, which is available in the Vote Office. Peter Blausten was selected following a fair and transparent competition. The board was assisted by specialist recruitment agency Veredus, and the recruitment process included an advertisement, shortlisting and interview. The interviewing panel concluded that Mr Blausten's analytical approach and experience as a human resources director would support the role of scrutinising IPSA's estimate and overseeing the recruitment of IPSA board members. Her Majesty's Opposition support this motion.

7.59 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) to the Dispatch Box, and I know he will serve with distinction from our Front Bench. I agree with those on both the Opposition and our own Front Benches about the motion that stands before the House.

I must welcome, provided this motion goes through, Peter Blausten to the Speaker's Committee for IPSA. I have to declare an interest because I sit on SCIPSA, as it is affectionately known, with—I am going to say this—my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), because we do truly represent a cross-party approach to looking at the budget and the ways in which IPSA operates.

It would be wrong of me to let this motion pass without thanking Bronwen Curtis wholeheartedly for her service to the Committee, the House and every Member of Parliament in this place. She has brought a very challenging commercial voice and, I have to say, often a completely refreshing perspective to the way in which we look at ourselves and the way in which we approach this very important part of parliamentary life. I also think that she has brought—dare I say it?—a woman's eye to the way in which this place operates when we are looking at estimates and how this should operate.

I also thank Shrinivas Honap—I always get his name wrong, but I am absolutely sure he will forgive me—who is one of our lay members, and Cindy Butts, but particularly Shrin because he has also brought a fresh voice to the Speaker's Committee for IPSA. It would not bode well

if we did not thank them. These lay members are selected by a very stringent process, and there is no doubt that they provide a complementarity to our proceedings that is welcome. However, I do think, as the Speaker's Committee looks particularly at the estimates, that any new lay member joining the Committee should be aware of some of the problems that face us in SCIPSA.

Just speaking as an individual Member, since the new computer system was brought in, I have experienced some personal problems. Rather than refer to anybody else's, I would like to leave with the House a few problems, which are being sorted out, but which have caused great anxiety and reflect on the new computer system that has come in. For example, incorrect information was put through in the preparation of my P11D, which was not exactly welcome. Money was paid into the wrong account when reimbursing me for valid expenditure, and a member of my staff received a pay increase higher than I had agreed with that member of staff, and I was not informed until I read those numbers. So anybody coming in as a lay member should know that all in the garden is not entirely rosy—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry; no pun intended, Madam Deputy Speaker. We would welcome those fresh eyes on our systems and the way in which we operate, because I think they can make a valuable contribution.

These issues affect not just 650 Members of Parliament, but of course the thousands of people who work with us and for us, and that is why it is so important we get this right. We often forget the people who stand behind Members of Parliament, to whom we owe a great debt of thanks, and we must get their payroll right. We must get their remuneration right, and we must ensure that IPSA goes on the right path, so that it can provide what anybody working in the commercial world would accept was normal practice. I do think that, when salaries are adjusted without the boss knowing, that needs putting right.

May I say that the job we do here—I think everybody would agree—is not a normal job? It takes a great deal of understanding. Although Peter Blausten comes to us with a fantastic pedigree, I would like to issue an invitation, which may come from anybody else in the Chamber: I hope he will come and work shadow, perhaps me or somebody else, so that he can gain an understanding of what happens in a Member of Parliament's office and how we need to be so careful in an area that has caused so much agony in the past for many Members of Parliament. We need to get it right, and we need the public to have confidence in the process. We need our staff and also every Member in this House to have confidence in the process, and I very much hope that Peter Blausten will arrive on the Speaker's Committee able to make a valuable contribution.

8.5 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I do not intend to say much in this debate, but I would like to express an incredible amount of thanks to Bronwen Curtis. I have been on the Speaker's Committee for just over two years now and, like the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), I found everything she said in those meetings to be incredibly useful and insightful. It was from a position of great knowledge, and also from a position of not being a

[Kirsty Blackman]

Member of Parliament, which I think is incredibly useful because she could perhaps see things from outside and take a step back from those of us involved in the minutiae of problems and discussions with IPSA.

I would not like Members in this House to think that SCIPSA is a Committee where we sit quietly. At every meeting that I have had, particularly when IPSA has been represented, we have taken it to task over various issues and problems that have arisen. I would agree entirely about the issues that there have been with the online system. I would also raise the issue that the online system has cost an awful lot more than we expected it would, and SCIPSA has not been backwards in coming forwards on that. We have said to IPSA on many occasions that this is a real problem.

I think Mr Blausten, if the motion is approved, will find the Committee incredibly interesting. I hope that he will go in trying to learn as much as possible about it and, as the right hon. Lady said, perhaps shadow a Member of Parliament, so that he understands exactly how things work in Parliament and how the Member of Parliament's job works. As I say, the main thing I wanted to do was to thank Bronwen Curtis for all her incredibly hard work and the way in which she treated me, as a new member, when I joined the Committee. I found she was very kind, and she looked out for me a bit when I first joined the Committee, so I am pleased that she was on that Committee.

8.7 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, too, commend the Minister for his latest outing at the Dispatch Box. Many Members of the House think of him as a very nice man, and it is nice to see him here with us today.

I wholly concur with the points that have been made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan)—I return the favour—and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) in relation to Bronwen Curtis. In fact, one of the keenest points that she made repeatedly in SCIPSA was that if IPSA wants a significant increase in capital expenditure to pay for a new IT system, it had better prove it is worth it. If I am honest, I think an awful lot of Members this year would have said, “Well, actually, the way it was introduced, with too few people to answer the telephone—the answers and the conversations you had to have were sometimes so complicated that they went on for 45 or 50 minutes—there are some serious questions about whether public money is being spent properly”.

This goes to the heart of something I think was wrong with the original legislation that was introduced. The Minister said that SCIPSA—the Committee—has two roles, and that is absolutely right, but IPSA itself has two roles as well, and I think they are mutually exclusive. One is to support Members in doing their job of trying to ensure that all those letters from our constituents are responded to quickly and all the rest of it, and that we are able to do our job of representing our constituents well. However, the second part is regulating Members. I think that all too often IPSA relies too much on the regulating element, rather than the supporting element. That, for instance, is why decisions that should

have been taken swiftly about providing finance for security measures in Members' constituency offices and in their homes—where it is not primarily about ourselves, but actually about our families and our staff members, to whom we have a duty of care—have been delayed far, far too long. All too often, it is left to the House authorities to take up the slack. That is a shame and a mistake, and we need to rectify that in the future.

Dame Cheryl Gillan *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I will give way, but I was hoping to come to an end very soon.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I was just going to ask the hon. Gentleman whether he was supportive of seeing those two functions split into different bodies at some stage in the future.

Chris Bryant: I think I argued at the beginning, when the whole thing was set up, that the two should be in separate organisations. I understand that there is a model of regulation, which we have adopted in many areas now, where the regulator is intimately involved in the industry. I think that that is a mistake. It would be better to separate the two, but that requires primary legislation. It would be a brave Government at the moment who introduced legislation in this particular area—well, introduced any legislation at all. We in SCIPSA need to make sure that we enable IPSA to do a better job to recognise the two halves of its role, supporting and regulating.

I am very confident that Mr Blausten will be a very significant addition to the Committee. We take our job very seriously. I say to hon. Members that, if they have issues that they feel need to be raised with IPSA, all the members of SCIPSA are available. I am sure that Mr Blausten will do a good job. The independent people sometimes say to us, “You know what, MPs? You should be arguing for better support, not the opposite, because you need to be able to do your job properly. If you were in any other industry you would quite simply expect to be able to do your job properly.”

8.11 pm

Jeremy Quin: I thank the shadow Leader for her kind words directed at the panel, Bronwyn Curtis and also me, for that matter. I am most grateful. It is very kind of her. I am also grateful for her support for the motion.

I was delighted that the House was able to hear from three other members of SCIPSA. We are indebted to the work they do on our behalf in serving on the Committee: my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), and the hon. Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). It was great to hear them, with their personal experience, thanking Ms Curtis for her work and her service. I think that they all mentioned the importance of lay members of SCIPSA understanding all aspects of MPs' role and the importance of SCIPSA getting it right. I know that is invaluable for their work of studying the IPSA estimates. I trust that Mr Blausten will do just that, if this House is pleased to agree to his appointment. It was a great pleasure to move the motion.

Question put and agreed to

Northern Ireland

8.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Robin Walker): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointment Functions) (No. 2) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 July 2019, be approved.

May I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, what a pleasure it is to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) at the Dispatch Box? He was a superb Parliamentary Private Secretary and a superb Whip, and he is already showing that he is a natural at the Dispatch Box.

This statutory instrument will allow for certain critical appointments to be made under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018. I am very glad that we have been able to bring it forward today. I know that Northern Ireland Members have been calling for it to be brought forward for some time.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I should just like to put on the record my enormous gratitude to the Minister, a very fine Minister and a great addition to the Northern Ireland Office, for making sure that this very important statutory instrument has been brought before the House today. As he will know, because I have scolded about it, the unlawful prorogation of Parliament by the Prime Minister on Monday 9 September meant that this statutory instrument, which was due to be debated in this Chamber on 10 September, did not get addressed. I am therefore enormously grateful to the Minister for ensuring it is here today, earlier than anticipated. It had been thought that it might have been delayed even more to 21 October. Thank you to the Minister.

Mr Walker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. She raised it on a number of occasions and we have been very keen to bring this statutory instrument forward at the first opportunity.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Minister knows we are well known for looking forward rather than backwards, but the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) is right that the statutory instrument had been scheduled for 21 October. I thank the Minister for all that he did to ensure the provisions were brought forward to this evening. As a former member of the Bar Library of Northern Ireland—I have raised this point with him—we will be able to proceed with Queen's Counsel appointments in Northern Ireland, something the profession has been looking forward to for some time. Individuals have had a tap on the shoulder. This is an important step to progress their professional development and appoint them to the positions they rightly deserve.

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He has been forthright in pressing for this to be brought forward. I am glad we are able to do so today. He says that he is looking forward rather than backward. I want to set out some context in my opening remarks, so he will have to excuse me if I look briefly backward before focusing on what the statutory instrument achieves.

The Government are committed to the Belfast agreement. At its heart is a devolved power-sharing Executive Government, and restoring that Executive remains our priority. Northern Ireland needs the fully functioning political institutions of the Belfast agreement and its successors. That being said, in the absence of devolved Government, the UK Government continue to have a responsibility to ensure good governance and that public confidence is maintained in Northern Ireland.

In November of last year, primary legislation was brought forward, which among other measures addressed the need for urgent appointments to be made to a number of bodies. The initial phase of appointments under the Act enabled: the reconstitution of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, which continues to fulfil its important functions, including the recent recruitment of a new chief constable; the replacement of the outgoing chair and board members of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; and the appointment of a new police ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

Under the 2018 Act, the Secretary of State also gave a commitment to make further appointments that may arise in the absence of an Executive. A statutory instrument was subsequently approved by the House in February 2019, which added six additional offices to the 2018 Act. As a result of that piece of legislation, critical public appointments were made in Northern Ireland, including that of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and appointments to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Government maintain that it is important, while prioritising the restoration of the Executive, to ensure the maintenance of good governance and public confidence in Northern Ireland. The appointments made to date under the provisions of the 2018 Act have contributed to that.

This new statutory instrument specifies further critical offices to be added to the Act, allowing for appointments to be made that will continue to safeguard the quality and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. In preparing this instrument, my officials have worked closely with the Northern Ireland civil service to identify those critical appointments that will arise between now and the end of the year. The instrument would add to the list in section 5 of the Act, thereby enabling the Secretary of State, as the relevant UK Minister, to exercise Northern Ireland Ministers' appointment functions in relation to the following offices: the board of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; the board of the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland; the board of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, or Translink as it is formally known; the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland; the Agricultural Wages Board for Northern Ireland; the board of National Museums Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland Historic Buildings Council; and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Those are the bodies that the Northern Ireland civil service has put forward as the most critical at this time.

As has been raised, the instrument would enable the Lord Chancellor to make Queen's Counsel appointments, a matter whose urgency has been raised a number of times in this House by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly). These are important offices for

[Mr Robin Walker]

which the exercise of appointment functions in the coming months is vital for the continued good governance of Northern Ireland. I commend the regulations to the House.

8.18 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. We welcome this statutory instrument, but not the basis on which it has had to be brought forward. Like the Government, we want to see our devolved institutions restored in Northern Ireland—and restored immediately. That is important for us because, as we know, a date is looming on the horizon—21 October—whereby certain laws will be enacted flowing from the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which was approved by Parliament. Those measures will fundamentally change the law in Northern Ireland on abortion and marriage in a way that lacks public scrutiny, that has not allowed for consultation with the people of Northern Ireland, and that crucially, has not allowed the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland to have their say on what kind of law we need in both those very important areas.

This is a real challenge. On our part, we want to be clear to the Government—and I want the Minister, if he will, to pass a message to the Secretary of State—that we believe that the Secretary of State should convene a meeting of the Assembly before 21 October, invite the political parties from Northern Ireland to come and nominate their Ministers to form an Executive, and allow the proper functioning of devolved Government once again in Northern Ireland. On our part, we in the Democratic Unionist party will respond positively to such an invitation. We will be at the Assembly. We will appoint Ministers to an Executive and get on with the job that the people of Northern Ireland elected us to do: to govern and deal with legislation that is relevant to Northern Ireland.

As important as this measure is this evening, I say to the Government that it can only be of a temporary nature. It is not a substitute for local Ministers in Northern Ireland taking decisions and making appointments, and crucially, for the Northern Ireland Assembly, as the legislature in these matters, to be attending to the business of making law in Northern Ireland that is relevant to Northern Ireland's specific needs. That is the whole purpose of devolution.

We want to see a devolved Government restored before 21 October so that, through the Assembly, we can deal with legislation relating to the sensitive matters of abortion and marriage, rather than having a situation prevail whereby we have a vacuum in which the law on abortion is decriminalised, we have no statutory basis for abortion in Northern Ireland beyond that of legislation going back to the 1940s, and we have a regime that would allow for abortion for any reason up to 28 weeks. I do not believe that that would be acceptable in any part of the United Kingdom. We believe, therefore, that the Northern Ireland Assembly should be restored to examine this issue and same-sex marriage. We should have a debate among the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland about what is relevant and appropriate for Northern Ireland, having regard to

what the people of Northern Ireland want. We want to see that happen. While this statutory instrument is a necessary step by the Government to fulfil certain responsibilities that currently cannot be fulfilled by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, it is no substitute for devolution.

I want to make a final point: if we cannot get the Assembly restored and if we get a deal on Brexit, as I hope we will, and the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, a multitude of decisions will need to be taken as a consequence, not least in Northern Ireland. In those circumstances and in the absence of a devolved Government, I say to the Government that they need to start planning for the reintroduction of direct rule for a period of time until we get those decisions made. We cannot continue with the current vacuum whereby some decisions are taken and others are not. That will not wash when it comes to the crucial ministerial decisions that flow from Brexit, from the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, and that are particularly relevant to the needs of Northern Ireland. If the other political parties—in particular, Sinn Féin—are not prepared to take responsibility, form a Government and take these decisions, it will fall to this Parliament and the Government at Westminster to start taking more of them. That will be essential. It will not be optional, and when Brexit happens, we—this Parliament—will have to take on that responsibility if the political parties in Northern Ireland are not prepared to.

I say to Sinn Féin, who say that they will not accept direct rule, that they have an opportunity. The Secretary of State should take the opportunity, convene the Assembly, call the parties and see who is prepared to form a Government. If Sinn Féin does not want direct rule, there is one step it must and can take, and that is to join with the other parties in forming an Executive. Then we can deal with the issues and outstanding matters that need to be addressed in Northern Ireland. Whatever they may be, let's deal with them. The people of Northern Ireland want a Government, and sooner they get it the better.

8.24 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I also thank the Minister for introducing the regulations today and for the appointments that clearly have to be made. My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) is right that it would be much better if it was the Northern Ireland Assembly making these decisions—no one in the House would say anything different—but that has not been possible, so the Government in Westminster need to make the decisions and put the regulations in place.

I am ever mindful that probably all my colleagues have at some time served in local government and that many government appointments are done through councils. In my case, it was Ards Borough Council, now Ards and North Down Borough Council. These are government appointments and their importance is clear. They enable departments to function and to turn the wheels. They do not take away the legislative power, which still lies with the Northern Ireland Assembly, or the importance of having locally elected representatives in Northern Ireland doing the real work, as my right hon. Friend said. That is everyone's ultimate goal: to see the Assembly back in place and functioning as it should.

The importance of some of the things the Minister referred to is very clear. The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), through the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and other Northern Ireland Members, often raise the importance of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and its appointees. To see that in place therefore is something we welcome right away. The Minister mentioned the police ombudsman and the probation board as well. There is a probation board next to my office in Newtownards, so I understand the work it does. We need someone in place to keep the wheels turning.

My constituency office is always getting issues with the Commissioner for Children and Young People. It is so important to have someone in place who can respond, in departmental ways, to the needs of victims and survivors. On there being a chair or vice-chair of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, I read in the press Friday past that the executive had £110 million in reserves. My goodness! I find that quite incredible. Yet it is unable to deliver its maintenance. If having a chair or vice-chair enables the system to work better, let us get it together. As one who spent 26 years in local government, I am pleased to see that the Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee is also to have someone in place.

Just last Thursday, my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) had the opportunity to meet the General Consumer Council and the retail Minister in Belfast. He and I and others understand the importance of having the consumer council in place—we write to it all the time—and we need to have a chair or vice-chair to make sure those things happen. On the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, education—again, how important. We are talking here about major issues—benefits, education, health—that are departmental responsibilities. We need someone in place to make things happen.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley mentioned a friend of ours who sat on Ards Council with me many years ago. The council always appointed someone to the Drainage Council. Many people ask what it does. Well, Simpson Gibson, former councillor, a friend of ours, a member of our party, served on the council and used to tell me how important it was for the farmers and the rural community to have someone on it who understood their business and could get a response. Some people might not be able to say what the Drainage Council is, but I can tell the House that it plays an important role in the agrifood sector across Northern Ireland.

What we have here, at long last, are appointments to the positions of chair, vice-chair and members, to enable this skeletal business to move forward. It is not ideal—it would be better if the Northern Ireland Assembly did this by means of legislation—but let us get it done. Let us put the first stages of the mechanics of responsibility for Departments in place, and then bring accountability, and help those Departments to work.

8.30 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to what I believe is one of his first outings on the Front Bench. I understand that he has other territorial responsibilities. We are not unfamiliar with double-jobbing in Northern Ireland, but I think that if anyone can do it, he can, and he is very welcome.

It is not usually the convention for the Opposition to speak last, but on this occasion I felt it was appropriate. I thought that we should hear the Northern Irish voices first, and I thank the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson)—but how much better would it be if those Northern Irish voices were resonating in the halls of Stormont rather than in this building. This is a bittersweet occasion. On the one hand, thank heavens, we have finally got round to making these appointments, particularly the Queen's Counsel appointments, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Belfast East. On the other hand, I feel shame for our politics in this United Kingdom that we in this House are having to consider matters that are so utterly and totally the business of Northern Ireland.

We heard about many of the positions that have finally been filled, but others were not mentioned, including the

“Member of the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland”.

Why are we here, in this Chamber, discussing an appointment to the Drainage Council of Northern Ireland? No doubt it is an important position—unbelievably important—and I am sure that they have been flooded with applications for the post—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry. I understand that there was a leak earlier on; I do apologise. In all honesty, why on earth are we discussing these matters in the House? I think that it is so inappropriate and so wrong, in so many ways, but it has to be done.

I want to ask a couple of small questions. We were provided with a rather interesting explanatory note, and the impact assessment contains something rather unusual:

“There is no, or no significant, impact on the public sector.”

I am not sure what that means. Is there an impact on the public sector, or is there not an impact on the public sector? If there is no impact, there is no need to mention it. If there is an impact, why say that there is no impact?

I do not want to become involved in dancing on the head of a pin, but I think that we should look at the issue of consultation. The explanatory memorandum tells us that the Northern Ireland Office and the Minister have consulted with political parties in Northern Ireland, but there is no mention of civil society. I think that civil society should have been involved in the consultation, because that would have addressed the impact on the public sector. I should be very interested to know whether it was the case.

However, the main point—the most significant point—of all this is quite simple. While the Opposition support the statutory instrument, as we have supported all previous ministerial appointments legislation, we need to know from the Government what they are doing about the pace and intensity of talks to restore devolution. We would like to hear from the Minister what is happening. Will he outline the ongoing talks process, and will the Secretary of State, at some stage, make a statement?

We should not be undertaking this business here. It is Northern Irish business, which should be settled in Northern Ireland. I do not want to get into the blame game. “The Blame Game” is, as I am sure the House will agree, an excellent television programme on BBC One Northern Ireland, featuring Tim McGarry, Neil Delamere, Colin Murphy and Jake O’Kane; but in this context,

[Stephen Pound]

the issue is not whose fault it is. The fact remains that we in this House are having to deal with this business tonight, which we should not be doing. It is not fair on the House, but, above all, it is to the shame of our politics, and it is not fair on the people of Northern Ireland. However, let me repeat that we support the statutory instrument.

8.34 pm

Mr Robin Walker: I thank the House for what has been a sensible and consensual debate on this statutory instrument. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), who described the debate as bittersweet. I think that we all recognise that concern. It is somewhat bittersweet to be welcomed by him to the Dispatch Box after three years, although perhaps people were fed up with hearing from me as a Minister at the Department for Exiting the European Union and are pleased to hear from me in a new capacity.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) said that he welcomed the instrument but not the basis of it. I absolutely recognise that. I think that we would all rather that these appointments were made by a properly constituted Executive and supported by a properly constituted Assembly. These are important offices, as we have heard from Northern Irish Members. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) neatly illustrated when he talked about people turning the wheels, these are offices that are necessary for the functioning of government. The other place has already approved this statutory instrument. So long as this House approves the motion today, we can get on with making these important appointments.

The hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) asked about the process of consultation. All these appointments are ones that have been recommended by the Northern Ireland civil service, which will of course engage in appropriate consultation. I can also reassure him that the Commissioner for Public Appointments will continue to regulate all these appointments, which will ensure an important check.

The people of Northern Ireland deserve strong political leadership from locally elected, accountable devolved Government. Achieving that and delivering a positive outcome from the talks remains our absolute priority. Northern Ireland has made huge progress in recent years. While the UK Government will do all that is necessary to ensure that good governance and public confidence is maintained in Northern Ireland, we can achieve even more with a devolved Government and legislature that unlocks all the potential that Northern Ireland has to offer. We remain focused on achieving that outcome. As we have heard again today, it is an outcome that we all want to see. I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Census (Return Particulars and Removal Of Penalties) Bill [Lords]

Considered in Committee

[DAME ELEANOR LAING *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF THE CENSUS ACT 1920

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss clauses 2 and 3.

8.37 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): I will not prolong this part of our debate. The purpose of the clause is simple. It amends the Census Act 1920 in respect of England and Wales to remove the penalty for not responding to census questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. This means that those questions will be voluntary. As I am sure hon. Members will recall, this reflects the approach taken by the Census (Amendment) Act 2000, which removed the penalty attaching to a failure to answer a question on religion in the census.

Clause 2 amends the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 to remove the penalty for not responding to census questions on sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to replicate the changes that we are making in law for England and Wales. The power to include questions on sexual orientation and gender identity already exists under the Northern Ireland legislation. Clause 2 does not create new powers to ask those questions; it simply ensures that if they were asked in a future census in Northern Ireland, they would be voluntary.

Finally, clause 3 sets out the territorial extent, commencement and short title of the Bill. The territorial extent of the Bill is England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Bill does not extend to Scotland, where the matter is devolved and where the Scottish Parliament is dealing with the relevant legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 2

QUESTIONS ON GENDER IDENTITY

“(1) Any question or questions asked about gender identity under the Census Act 1920 or the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 must be framed so as to enable statistical information to be obtained about gender identity within different ethnic groups.

(2) The ethnic groups in subsection (1) must include Sikhs.”
—(*Preet Kaur Gill.*)

This new clause would mean that if the census included a question on gender identity, it would have to be written in such a way as to provide information about gender identity in different ethnic groups.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment (a) to new clause 2, at end insert “, Jains and Zoroastrians”.

Amendment (b) to new clause 2, at end insert “and Kashmiris”.

New clause 3—*Homeless people and questions on gender identity and sexual orientation*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must make a statement to both Houses of Parliament on what steps the Office for National Statistics will take to ensure that people who are homeless have an opportunity to answer any questions about gender identity or sexual orientation under the Census Act 1920 or the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.

(2) The statement in subsection (1) must be made within two months of the passing of this Act.

(3) In this section, “homeless” is defined as set out in section 175 of the Housing Act 1996.”

This new clause is intended to ensure that the Office for National Statistics takes steps to increase the participation of homeless people in the Census so that data on sexual orientation and gender identity includes information from people who are currently homeless.

Preet Kaur Gill: Sikhs are being discriminated against. This new clause tabled in my name and those of other right hon. and hon. Members would mean that if the census included a question on gender identity, it would have to be written in such a way as to provide information about gender identity in different ethnic groups.

Discrimination exists in different ways within different communities and the only way to successfully understand the outcomes and the reasons behind discrepancies as well as to provide services is to look at intersectional areas, including the breakdown of gender within different ethnic groups. At the national and local level, public bodies including schools, hospitals, police forces, local authorities and central Government Departments only use ethnic group categories specified in the census to collect data for public service planning and decision making. I want to make it clear that contrary to what the Government have stated, public bodies do not use the religion category to provide public services. That is an important point. In total, there are 40,000 public bodies across the country. This amendment will allow the underestimation of Sikh numbers and inadequate allocation of resources to Sikhs based on current census statistics to be overturned.

According to the Women and Equalities Committee, the quality and depth of data on ethnicity collected by Departments varies widely, which is hindering efforts to tackle racial discrimination in public services. As a result of not being monitored as an ethnic group, Sikhs of all genders are left out of the equation in policy decisions. The Government have stated that the option to tick “other” and write in Sikh as an ethnicity in the census is adequate, knowing full well that public bodies ignore the “other” option and that this will do nothing to counter discrimination against Sikhs in their own right.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for tabling this new clause, and as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, in which the Sikhs are a stakeholder, I think that her point is very important. I support wholeheartedly what she says and I think that the Government need to be responsive to a changing society in which Sikhs are playing an important, crucial and critical role. I therefore urge the Government to support the new clause.

Preet Kaur Gill: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has taken on board the issue of ending discrimination, because that is exactly what this new clause does, and that he fully backs it. As legislators, we should uphold the law and, given that Sikhs are already classed as an ethnicity in legislation, we should end this kind of discrimination—that is what we are here to do.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): My hon. Friend knows that my name is among the six at the top of this new clause. She will know that the Sikh community is very concerned to have this level of recognition, and that there are many people who have been pressing for many years for the resolution of this issue and for a box on the census that Sikhs can tick. Does she not agree that it is time this matter was dealt with seriously by the Government?

Preet Kaur Gill: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and he is absolutely right. There has been cross-party support. This campaign commenced in 2001 and has had immense support in favour of addressing the discrimination Sikhs have faced in this country because of the fact that they are not counted and that, as a result, public bodies do not recognise that they need to provide services.

The relevance of the new clause and the importance of gender equality in the Sikh community date back to Guru Nanak Dev Ji, whose 550th birthday we are celebrating this year. He promoted fairness and gender equality and denounced discrimination of the sexes. My new clause would allow us, as parliamentarians, to do what we are elected to do and to challenge inequalities and unfairness. It would enable us to understand the obstacles facing the Sikh community in greater detail and to ensure that every public body knows what it is supposed to be doing and what impact it is having.

8.45 pm

For example, data obtained by Housing Justice showed that more than 5% of those experiencing homelessness in London who died outdoors in the last 12 months were male Sikhs. That is disproportionate compared with the Sikh population, which is only 1.5% of the population in London. In April, when I asked the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government what steps the Ministry was taking to determine how many homeless people are Sikh, I simply got a response explaining that it had no current plans to collect that information.

The former Prime Minister’s race disparity audit used 100 datasets across Government, but none included data on Sikhs. In discussions with Government representatives, it has become clear that the reason is that there was no such data. In the current situation, with the lack of data, we do not know the prevalence of

injustice, but what we do know does not make for positive reading. In 2016, the UK Sikh survey reported that almost one in five British Sikhs had encountered discrimination in a public place over the previous year, and one in seven had directly experienced workplace discrimination.

The all-party parliamentary group for British Sikhs has campaigned since before I was elected to make sure that comprehensive data on Sikhs is gathered to ensure positive outcomes for members of the community, and I am pleased to have submitted this new clause to continue that work. Accepting it would mean that policy making was better informed in situations where Sikhs have all too often been omitted or misrepresented in the past. For example, hate crime has been categorised as Islamophobia in the statistics, although, even with this misreporting, Sikhs still accounted for 2% of religious hate crimes recorded by the police in 2017-18, despite making up less than 1% of the population.

As the first Sikh woman to become a British MP and as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for British Sikhs, I am fiercely proud of our community and believe that supporting a Sikh ethnic tick box would be a step by all Members in this House to show that we want to support the Sikh community and defend its members from discrimination and injustice. The Sikh community has been unable to understand why, given an opportunity, any hon. Member would be unwilling to change legislation to reflect case law on anti-discrimination and would wish to continue to reinforce discrimination against them.

The High Court has accepted a judicial review claim from the Sikh community, with a hearing in November. Agreeing to include a Sikh ethnic tick box in the census will mean the Government do not have to contest the claim, and gives a clear commitment to the Sikh community that they are committed to addressing inequalities and ensuring that public bodies are clear that no further discrimination should take place. I will continue to campaign for that, and I hope the Government will join us in righting this wrong today by accepting the new clause.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I speak briefly to new clause 3, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett)? It calls for the Minister and the Office for National Statistics to produce a report on the important issue of homelessness and particularly to ensure that people who are homeless have the opportunity to answer questions about gender identity and sexual orientation in the census. I was pleased to receive a letter from the Minister just this morning detailing exactly what was asked for in new clause 3. As such, it is not our intention to press it any further, and I am grateful to the Minister for his actions in that regard.

Let me turn now to new clause 2, which was moved so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill). As she said, it would further enhance the data gathered about minority ethnic groups in society and would help us to understand the discussion about creating a Sikh ethnic tick box. I had thought that this was a contentious proposal, but my hon. Friend's eloquent and comprehensive contribution put that incorrect view firmly in its place. In fact, she tells me that as many as 80% to 85% of Sikhs have expressed a desire to have this tick box.

Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Why is the ONS ignoring the legal status of the Sikhs as an ethnic group and continuing to discriminate against them by refusing to include a tick box despite evidence of cross-party support?

Christian Matheson: It is Labour's hope that the ONS will listen to the case put by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, and I will deal with that in a moment.

The campaign for an ethnic tick box turns on the recognition of Sikhs as an ethnic community by law, and many in the Sikh community feel that individuals should be able to identify as ethnically Sikh in the next census to ensure a more accurate picture of the community. The primary concern, as my hon. Friend stated, is that public bodies do not currently have enough information about Sikhs. I found the homelessness figures to be shocking and was unaware of the situation. More data would help inform the approach of the education, health, local government and business sectors towards the Sikh community. It is important to target services effectively, so data about such minority groups is vital because underreporting could allow discrimination to go unnoticed.

Labour fully supports the campaign by my hon. Friend and the all-party parliamentary group, which has been tireless and persuasive in pressing for a change so that the census includes a section on ethnic identity, with an option to choose being a Sikh. Indeed, to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith), I believe that there is not only legal precedent in this matter, but a pending court case that will seek a judicial review of the ONS's decision.

However, in conversations with the Minister outside the Chamber, he convinced me that this particular Bill might not be the appropriate vehicle for that matter to be addressed, so I ask him to address that concern in his contribution. I understand that today's Bill is concerned only with the section of the census relating to sexuality and gender identity. Will the Minister explain how the way in which new clause 2 is worded may cause difficulty for that section? Will he also address the view presented by the ONS that questions on gender, identity and sexual orientation may not be included if new clause 2 is passed at this stage?

I hope that the ONS listens carefully to the campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, because the discussions around having a Sikh tick box within the overall question on ethnicity may have been going on for 20 years and will not go away anytime soon. The sooner we can resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the Sikh community, the sooner we can get things right.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Members who have contributed to the debate. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said that he would not press Labour's new clause 3. I am glad that the Labour Front-Bench team found the letter of interest and that it answered their concerns. From conversations with the ONS, I know that it is keen to ensure that everyone is counted in terms of the homeless community, that outreach work is done and that special measures are put in place to try to ensure as many people as possible fill in the census form. The Labour Front Bench raised the

particular issue of those in the LGBT community who may be affected by homelessness in a different way and have a fear of it that differs from the rest of the community. A very worthwhile issue was brought up. I was therefore only too happy to send the letter, rather than wait until tonight. A copy of that letter has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses if Members want to consult the Government's comments.

Turning to the substance of the debate, new clause 2 was passionately moved by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and it confirms the importance of ensuring that the 2021 census provides detailed information on our society, and especially the Sikh community. The Government will be guided by the advice and recommendations of the Office for National Statistics, which has advised that the new clause's effect can be achieved through analysis of information collected under its existing proposals for the 2021 census.

Most importantly, the new clause is potentially damaging to the integrity of the census and threatens the inclusion of a question on gender identity, which would be counter to the whole aim of this Bill. For clarity, the new clause would not make any changes to the proposals for a question on sexual orientation; it would make changes only to the question on gender identity. Under the ONS's existing proposals for the 2021 census, it will already be possible to produce statistical information about gender identity within different ethnic and religious groups.

As in previous censuses, there will continue to be separate questions on ethnicity and religion, and the data from the ethnicity, religion and gender identity questions can be analysed to provide detailed information on gender identity across different cross-sections of the population.

Mike Gapes: From what the Minister says, I am unclear on whether it will be possible for Sikhs to tick a specific box on the 2021 census. Can the Minister please clarify?

Kevin Foster: I am happy to clarify that there will be a tick box for Sikhs under the religion section but not under ethnicity. There have been 55 requests for particular tick boxes on the census that the ONS is not recommending, and having a Sikh tick box under ethnicity is one of those that the ONS is not recommending.¹

As I said, the Government will be guided by the ONS's recommendations on what the census should include. Of course, Members can discuss the issue more fully when Parliament considers the main census orders that set the questions, but the Government will be guided by the ONS's recommendations in this area.

Anyone who wishes to identify in the 2021 census as having Sikh or Kashmiri ethnicity, or Jain or Zoroastrian religion, will be able to do so under the existing proposals using the write-in option or the new "search as you type" facility.

Preet Kaur Gill: Will the Minister meet me to discuss this? I have had numerous meetings with the ONS, which has not been able to explain how it will use the tools because they have never been used before. This conversation has been had on many occasions. I know he refers to religion, but we are talking about how we deliver public services in the United Kingdom. We do

not use the religion category. I challenged the ONS and asked it to make that category mandatory. It said there was no public acceptability in respect of that.

What I am requesting from the Minister is some challenge back to the ONS. If there is no data on Sikhs, especially when the Cabinet Office has looked at a hundred datasets across Government, surely we should present some challenge back. In the last census 90% of Sikhs—83,000 Sikhs—ticked "other" and wrote in "Sikh" as a protest vote. I would like to feel assured that he will present some challenge back, especially given that, as legislators, we should be upholding the law and Sikhs are classified as an ethnic group.

Kevin Foster: I am more than happy to meet the hon. Lady to have a more in-depth conversation about this issue, and I will make sure that ONS representatives are also present so that she can put her point directly to them.

I make it clear that the census is about data collection, and it is a criminal offence for a person not to respond to the overall census, but it is right that the questions are seen as having been professionally recommended for data collection purposes, rather than a Minister personally choosing the questions and tick boxes that are included.

Today's debate is about the questions on these two issues being voluntary, rather than coming through schedule 6, which would make them compulsory. For reasons with which many of us will agree, this is a very sensitive area of data.

Given that these analytical possibilities already exist, we believe there are no grounds for this new clause, which is potentially damaging to the integrity of the census. It would require changes to questions that have been extensively researched, tested and consulted on by the ONS in its independent advisory capacity over the three years of evidence gathering to inform the proposals for the 2021 census. It would also serve to introduce the risk of confusion and concern for individuals completing the gender identity question. My early discussions with the ONS indicated that, as was referred to by the shadow Minister, it would be likely to recommend that this question was not included in census 2021 if this new clause were passed, given the changes it would make to that question.

9 pm

Again, to be clear, this Bill simply provides for any questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to be voluntary in the next census. That allows information essential for the effective planning and delivery of services to be collected, while protecting people's privacy should they not wish to disclose what they may see as very personal information. The ONS consultations have identified a real user need for data on gender identity, and currently no official sources of data are available on this issue. It is therefore paramount that this information is obtained without the addition of confusion or complexity. To miss this once-in-a-decade chance would mean that the next chance to collect this type of information would be in the 2031 census.

Complexity or confusion lowers the quality of the data in any census question, but for a deeply personal aspect of the census the effect is likely to be greater, and that is especially true here as respondents' reactions to

these amendments are untested. I know it is not the hon. Lady's intention to undermine the integrity and quality of this vital data collection, and that she wishes to stand up strongly for the community she wants to represent in this place. I therefore hope she will agree to withdraw her new clause.

Preet Kaur Gill: I thank the Minister for his comments. It is worrying to hear him say that the ONS would think about pulling this whole section if this proposal went through, because, as the ONS will know, disaggregating data is very important and we know that there are a lot of issues to address on the data on gender and especially on ethnic minority groups. I am grateful to him for offering a meeting to discuss this further. As elected legislators in this House, it is our duty to challenge all public bodies, especially when they are not working to ensure that communities that have not been counted are. There is a real need here, because the ONS has said time and again that it accepts, recognises and understands there is a demand to have a Sikh ethnic tick box. Despite that it is not prepared to do this. All we are asking for is the option of a Sikh ethnic tick box, which is very doable. We all know that when the census order comes to this House it will be very difficult to make any amendments at that time, so any work that needs to be done needs to be done between now and the laying of that order. Once again, I thank the Minister. I would not wish to jeopardise this section on the basis of what I am pursuing, but I will persist and I am grateful to him for offering a meeting. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): As indicated on the Order Paper, Mr Speaker has certified that clause 1 relates exclusively to England and Wales and is within devolved legislative competence. As the Bill has not been amended during Committee, there is no change to that certification.

The appropriate consent motion has been tabled. Does the Minister intend to move it?

Kevin Foster indicated assent.

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).

[DAME ELEANOR LAING *in the Chair*]

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): I beg the Whip's pardon; this sort of yo-yo-type procedure can be a little confusing. In order to avoid confusion, I remind hon. Members that, if there is a Division, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion for England and Wales.

Resolved,

That the Committee consents to the following certified Clause of the Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill [Lords]—

Clauses certified under Standing Order No. 83J as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Clause 1 of the Bill (Bill 412).—(*Kevin Foster.*)

Question agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported. Third Reading

9.7 pm

Kevin Foster: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I am grateful for the support for the Bill, especially from the main Opposition parties, with which, as I touched on earlier, we have had some constructive discussions, not only on the Bill but on how the census can be taken forward to be the best it can be.

The 2021 census will provide decision makers and citizens with comprehensive data on our society. Getting the best information is essential to inform policy, planning and funding decisions across national and local public services. The Bill is simple: it provides that two questions—on sexual orientation and gender identity—could be asked in the census in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, on a voluntary basis. It does not mandate that those questions should be asked, but it does give the opportunity for them to be done on a voluntary basis. With that, I commend the Bill to the House.

9.8 pm

Christian Matheson: We learn something new about procedure every day in the House—and I say that having been here for four and a half years.

I return the Minister's compliments. He has worked openly with me and my colleagues on this important piece of legislation, which represents a positive step forward for LGBT+ rights in the UK. The Opposition proudly support the Bill, building on a long Labour party legacy of defending minorities and fighting for equality. As the Minister says, it will provide for voluntary questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to be asked in the England, Wales and Northern Ireland censuses.

Consideration of the Bill has seen Members make welcome points about the recognition of minority and ethnic groups. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) for her continued and tireless promotion of the questions we have discussed about the inclusion of Sikhs in the census.

It is vital that the Bill is passed and that work begins promptly on consulting a wide range of stakeholders across the community. Particularly at a time when the LGBT+ community continues to face widespread abuse, the inclusion of the tick boxes in the census is significant both practically and in principle. I should like to pay tribute to the work of Dr Laurence Cooley, the Economic and Social Research Council research leader, and lecturer in the School of Government and Society at the University of Birmingham. His research, which was published by the London School of Economics, outlines the dangers of an under-count of the LGBT population and the detrimental impact that that could have on the fight for full LGBT equality. On Second Reading, I cited some of Dr Cooley's work without giving him the necessary credit, simply because that was knocked out for some

reason from one iteration of the speech to the next. I apologise to him, and thank him for the gracious way in which he let me know that I was citing his work. Academics earn their living by informing public policy and by producing research that informs other work, and I am pleased to pay tribute to him.

The Minister has kept my colleagues and me informed about progress ensuring the participation of homeless people in the census. I pay tribute to him again for the letter that he has sent the shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), tonight, and which he is going to put in the House of Commons Library. Hopefully, we will meet staff and officials from the Office for National Statistics to discuss their work with charities and outreach programmes. We have seen reports that a record number of homeless people died last year—the biggest increase in deaths since reporting began.

LGBT+ homeless people warrant particular attention in this discussion, not least given the shocking statistic that up to 24% of the youth homeless population are from the LGBT+ community. Clearly, we are far from solving the issue of LGBT+ discrimination, but I hope that measures included in the Bill will give us the statistics and therefore the tools to help us solve that.

We still have a long way to go. The abuse suffered by LGBT individuals across society is shocking. Indeed, any abuse is shocking, but I hope that as the Bill becomes law and we prepare for the census we will be able to reflect better the society that we seek to represent, and that the mirror that we hold up gives us an accurate representation. I support Third Reading of the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I pause in case anyone has an inspirational contribution to make. [*Interruption.*] No.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed without amendment.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the Product Safety, Metrology and Mutual Recognition Agreement (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1246), dated 9 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9 September, be approved.—(*David Rutley.*)

Question agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): With the leave of the House, I propose to take motions 6 to 13 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the Animal Health and Genetically Modified Organisms (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1229), dated 5 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the Specific Food Hygiene (Regulation (EC) No. 853/2004) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1247), dated 9 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the Trade in Animals and Animal Products (Legislative Functions) and Veterinary Surgeons (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1225), dated 5 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION
(CIVIL AVIATION)

That the Air Services (Competition) (Amendment and Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1224), dated 5 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.

LOCAL LOANS

That the draft Local Loans (Increase of Limit) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 26 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CUSTOMS)

That the Customs Safety and Security Procedures (EU Exit) (No. 2) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1219), dated 4 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION
(FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS)

That the Financial Services (Electronic Money, Payment Services and Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1212), dated 5 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION
(FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS)

That the Capital Requirements (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 1232), dated 5 September 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.—(*David Rutley.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Reclassification of Ministers of Religion under Immigration Rules

9.14 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition entitled “Call to revoke the decision to reclassify Ministers of Religion under immigration rules” on behalf of the residents of Glasgow North East at St Augustine’s parish church, Milton, Glasgow.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of Glasgow North East,

Declares that visiting clergy offer respite to dedicated Ministers and bring enormous cultural benefit to the communities they serve; and further that the introduction of severe conditions regarding English language proficiency and the sharp rise in fees for visas for Ministers of Religion would cause detriment to the communities they wish to serve.

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Minister for Immigration, the hon. Member for South Ribble, to revoke the decision to reclassify visiting Ministers of Religion as being Tier 2 visitors under immigration rules.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002526]

Hypermobility Syndromes: Healthwatch Calderdale's Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Rutley.)

9.15 pm

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): Healthwatch in Calderdale, like Healthwatch organisations across England, is the voice of people in its area on health and social care matters. It tells NHS service providers and commissioners about patients' experience of care and holds them to account, and has a say in how local services are delivered and designed.

As a very rough rule and guide at Healthwatch Calderdale, a trigger to indicate that there is a particular issue in an area of health or social care is when it receives about three complaints on the same issue at the same time. Hon. Members can therefore imagine the concern when Healthwatch Calderdale began to hear of difficult NHS experiences from a large number of adults with hypermobility syndromes, both at events and via its telephone advice service. The level of concern was so great that, for the first time since its inception, a joint piece of work was undertaken between all local Healthwatch areas across Yorkshire and Humber, with Healthwatch Calderdale taking the lead. Approximately 250 adults with hypermobility syndromes took part in the project—all relating stories of difficult NHS care. I will speak more about the findings of the report shortly, but first I want to give the House an outline of what hypermobility syndromes are.

Hypermobility is the term used to describe the ability to move joints beyond the normal range of movement—something that I have not been able to do for many, many years. Joint hypermobility is common in the general population, especially in childhood and adolescence, in females, and in people of Asian and African-Caribbean descent. In many people, joint hypermobility is not problematic at all. It can even be a bonus, especially for sportsmen or sportswomen. However, this debate is neither about athletics, nor is it about party tricks. It is about problematic hypermobility linked to chronic ill health. It is about people who experience symptomatic hypermobility that not only affects the joints, but also causes very challenging symptoms in many other body systems including the digestive system, the nervous system, the skin, the bladder, the cardiovascular system, the teeth and the immune system. It is these people who are described as having a hypermobility syndrome.

The most common of these syndromes is hypermobility spectrum disorder. Other conditions include heritable disorders of connective tissue such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, Marfan syndrome, osteogenesis imperfecta and Stickler syndrome. Although these are all conditions in their own rights, they are all complex, chronic conditions that are frequently associated with co-morbidities that require multi-disciplinary healthcare teams to diagnose, treat and manage.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for bringing this matter to the House for consideration. People suffering from hypermobility syndrome feel that they have to fight to be believed, fight to be seen, fight to be diagnosed and fight to receive treatment—they are tired of simply

fighting. Does he agree that the NHS in Calderdale and further afield must do better and must believe and treat these people?

Craig Whittaker: The hon. Gentleman is right in a lot of what he says, but the thing about hypermobility syndromes is that they are incredibly complex. As I said earlier, things like the digestive system, the immune system and teeth can all be factors. It is not like when someone goes to hospital with a broken leg, and we know what the problem is. There are multiple complexities around this disorder, so it is difficult from a professional point of view, which I will speak about later, but he is right in much of what he says.

From the Healthwatch work on the subject, it is clear that many people—specifically those with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome or hypermobility spectrum disorder—are not receiving the appropriate NHS care, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) indicated. It is not clear how many people in the United Kingdom are affected by hypermobility syndromes. Hypermobility is often misdiagnosed as fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, seronegative arthropathy, psychogenic rheumatism, depression or chronic fatigue syndrome. I do not know about you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but after that description, I need to lie down in a darkened room. So imagine how patients with hypermobility-related problems feel when they have to battle alone with immense health problems, often for years before obtaining a diagnosis, only then to face immense difficulties in accessing appropriate NHS healthcare to manage their complex and multi-system disorders and conditions. These patients describe feelings of being let down by the system, as well as huge frustration at both the widespread lack of understanding about their condition from medical professionals and the lack of appropriate care for their condition.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Craig Whittaker: It would be an honour to give way to my neighbour.

Holly Lynch: I am grateful to my neighbour for giving way. I thank him for securing the debate and congratulate him on articulating a number of those medical conditions incredibly well. I have two constituents I am aware of who have a diagnosis of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. I was incredibly disappointed earlier this year when the clinical commissioning group informed me that Manchester Royal Infirmary, which had been delivering a degree of care for those with hypermobility, was going to have to stop accepting tertiary referrals for that support. Not only are people struggling to get a diagnosis after years, but regional specialist care is then not available once they have received a diagnosis. We really need to address that.

Craig Whittaker: My hon. Friend and neighbour is right. Because there is a lack of understanding about this syndrome and because, not only at GP level but in some specialist areas, areas that do particularly well on this issue are now having to close the list to outsiders because they are becoming over-subscribed. She is absolutely right; that is one of the issues. When I get to the end of

my speech, one of my recommendations, which the Minister can hopefully address, is having a regional centre for this condition.

Healthwatch's report was published in July this year, and it focuses primarily on patient experiences. It presents the overwhelmingly negative NHS experiences of adults with hypermobility syndromes, and it makes for challenging reading. It is 70-odd pages, and it is not a pleasant read at all. The report took evidence from 252 people via focus groups and a questionnaire. Approximately 86% of the participants had a diagnosis of hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, or what would now be termed hypermobility spectrum disorder. A further 13% had other diagnoses linked to hypermobility syndromes. It is precisely those people who are presently excluded from NHS specialised rheumatology services, and it is those people on whom I would like to focus this evening.

The report identifies problems with NHS care in many different areas. It highlights that people are experiencing difficulties obtaining a diagnosis: 76% of respondents indicated that obtaining a diagnosis had been challenging; 22% described the process as difficult; and a staggering 54% stated that it had been very difficult. Frequently, people described the diagnostic process as leaving them feeling depressed, alone and isolated as a consequence of the lack of understanding that appeared to be the norm among professionals. This and the level of disbelief by professionals, as the hon. Member for Strangford pointed out, have led to people doubting themselves, despite their symptoms and, of course, their experiences.

Common terms used to describe how the diagnostic process made people feel included being angry, belittled, desperate, and feeling like a liar or a fraud, and some even said they were feeling as though they were going a little crazy. By contrast, obtaining a diagnosis generated feelings of hope and reassurance, and the feeling that they had been vindicated or were relieved at having an explanation of their difficulties.

On the road to diagnosis, many tests and procedures were commonly performed—sometimes repeatedly, sometimes in isolation and sometimes in conjunction with others. Many people reported that they had had many blood tests, scans and X-rays. A number of respondents spoke of being tested exhaustively over many years. For some people, this extensive testing was a route to an eventual diagnosis and, in some cases, supported interventions, but for others, this resulted in delaying the diagnosis, misdiagnosis and delayed support. A pathway would not only be beneficial to patients, but would also reduce the costs and associated wastage to the NHS of all the unnecessary tests, which are often carried out on a repetitive basis, as they are not giving the anticipated results at the time.

Participants reported that between one and six health professionals were involved in the diagnosis. One significant theme of the responses generally was the failure of medical professionals to link together the variety of symptoms and health issues being reported and a focus on the presenting symptom only. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many participants said that they had received other diagnoses, rather than a diagnosis of hypermobility syndrome. Altogether, a staggering 62 other conditions were named during the process.

[Craig Whittaker]

The complex and diverse symptoms resulting from hypermobility syndromes have led to many people being misdiagnosed. They were told, for example, that their symptoms were related to mental health issues or mental illness, such as depression, anxiety or stress, and this resulted in subsequent referrals to mental health services, as health professionals could not find a physical cause of the symptoms. People also reported that health professionals had ascribed the symptoms to excess weight, clumsiness or lack of physical exercise. Misdiagnosis, partial diagnosis or stereotyping left people feeling upset and patronised by health officials and led to feelings of anger, frustration, rejection and defeat.

Inadequate knowledge among health professionals was another key theme of the report, and that also emerged from the data. The majority of the respondents referred to health professionals as not aware of, not knowing about or not believing in the wide-ranging symptoms and the health and life impact of hypermobility syndromes on the patients. GPs were specifically mentioned in this regard, and rheumatologists and physiotherapists also received mixed feedback about their knowledge. Some people who had a diagnosis also talked of medical professionals disbelieving the conditions, with some being told, "It's all in your head," or assuming that people were just after drugs, rather than genuinely being in pain, despite the diagnosis.

Another key theme that emerges from the data is poor communication between health professionals, both between departments in the same service and between one medical facility and another. Communication between professionals is by no means consistent. Communication failures occur frequently and conversations are repeated at consultation. Again, this experience is described as exhausting and demoralising. A number of participants also reported difficulties in persuading GPs to refer them to consultants. Most people who responded to the survey said that they had either no NHS care or inadequate NHS care. The life impact of these difficult NHS experiences is significant, with people having to give up work, experiencing difficulties in education, having problems with social relationships, the breakdown of families and financial problems, too.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He outlines the case for people physically, emotionally and mentally, but it is also about the follow-on. If people cannot work, they need benefits and help. If doctors do not understand the intricacies of the health condition, how can they back up constituents' claims for benefits? Does the hon. Gentleman sometimes become bewildered with the system?

Craig Whittaker: It is not I who become bewildered with the system, but the patients who are incredibly frustrated at the whole process. As the hon. Gentleman says, not just with pre-diagnosis but post-diagnosis, there is a lack of professional understanding. Unless someone has a good consultant or GP who understands the system, the things we have talked about—the frustration, pain, stress and anxiety—go on for years. The hon. Gentleman is, again, absolutely right.

Ironically, people feel that they have to manage their own cases entirely without medical support and sometimes without fully understanding it themselves, researching

the condition so that they can then ask for what they think they might need. This was often stressful for the respondents, with the stress causing further problems. Some people spoke of having some NHS care, but for some people the only care they received was pain management, often without review. There are several examples of respondents being prescribed opium or strong medications, but they said it was without adequate medical support or review. In the few cases where people reported having good experiences of NHS care—there were some—this appeared to be generally after moving around the country, changing GPs or hospital specialists. This usually occurred over a long period.

It should be noted that not many people commented on social care experiences and this in itself may—there is no evidence—reflect the lack of involvement and awareness of the issues among social care staff. A few people have received some care or support via social care. The most frequently reported were aids and adaptations for the home. Some people have also been given additional support for personal care and social support.

The report details exactly what actions all the local Healthwatch organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber will take to raise the issues with local NHS service providers and commissioners. What is it that those who have experienced this poor level of care are asking for from the Government, NHS England and our strategic health authorities? I have gone through the common asks, but I have come up with five that I and the authors of the report think are probably the most important.

First, we are asking for improved knowledge and awareness of hypermobility syndromes and the related conditions among health professionals across the whole of the NHS. Secondly, we are asking for a dedicated care pathway with faster referrals and a specialist service of some form, such as a specific regional specialist centre. People felt that that would help to address the current fragmented care that many are receiving. Thirdly, we are asking for the ability to access medical support where needed for services such as physiotherapy, without the need for a new referral. Each time a course of physiotherapy is required, people currently have to go back through the process to be referred for it. Fourthly, we would like to see the use of technology, such as video or telephone appointments, to access medical professionals. This would help people to better manage fatigue by removing the requirement to be physically present at the appointment. Finally, we would like improved communication, co-ordination and information sharing between health and social care, either as part of a specialist service, as we have discussed, or simply just as good practice.

Some of those suggestions regarding better care, such as digitalisation and integrated care, fit very well with the NHS long-term plan. It is very clear, however, that other additional actions are required to improve NHS care for this group of patients. It is important to remember that the vast majority of people who responded to the Healthwatch hypermobility syndromes survey are not those who are referred to the specialised rheumatology services, which are commissioned by NHS England. They have hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome or what is known as hypermobility spectrum disorder. They are specifically excluded from the Ehlers-Danlos

national diagnostic service and, at present, have very poor experiences of that NHS care, which, they report, impacts incredibly negatively on their lives.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your time this evening, and I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's response.

9.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) on securing this debate on such an important issue, and for taking the first step to bring the broader element of education and communication to the Chamber tonight by outlining the report from Healthwatch Calderdale on hypermobility syndromes. I join him in commending the work of local Healthwatches in championing the patient voice and in doing all that they do.

My hon. Friend has rightly highlighted how critical it is for those living with hypermobility syndromes to be able to obtain the right diagnosis and sometimes how challenging that is, because of the nature of all the different elements of the syndrome involved. This is also about people having their symptoms taken seriously by healthcare professionals. As he and the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Halifax (Holly Lynch) outlined, sometimes just being taken seriously is the first step on the path to accessing the relevant treatment that they need. Those professionals need to be aware of the spectrum of the condition. All those things are incredibly important so that patients can access the right care at the right time. For example, someone may access physiotherapy if they feel particularly unwell, but if they then feel like they have to go back down the snake, it can often seem like more of a fight, as the hon. Member for Strangford alluded to, so making sure that pathways are streamlined is exceedingly important.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley will be aware, the NHS England specialised commissioning team in Yorkshire and the Humber responded to the report only last month. I gather that the specialised commissioning team and the clinical commissioning group continue to engage with Healthwatch Calderdale on the report's findings. Ensuring that that engagement is beneficial and delivers what patients want, and that it is as broad as possible, is important. I urge both him and the hon. Member for Halifax to make sure that they are engaged with the process and with holding the CCG and Healthwatch Calderdale to account in understanding whether objectives are being met and a better service is being delivered.

We have heard from my hon. Friend that hypermobility syndromes can have devastating effects on quality of life but often go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed for many years, which also adds to the stress. This situation must improve. As he pointed out, good communication and information sharing could make a big difference to how an individual feels their journey is progressing, and I assure him that we are committed to improving the diagnosis of rare diseases and to assisting patients so that their diagnosis feels less like a fight, as the hon. Member for Strangford put it.

Craig Whittaker: One of the key problems is that the hypermobility syndromes are treated by NHS England as rare diseases. As we have heard, Healthwatch Calderdale

has 11 complaints on the books, but if we times that across Yorkshire and the Humber, it means there are several hundred complaints, and that is only people who have complained, not people who have been diagnosed. My challenge back to the Minister is this: we keep calling it a rare disease, but is it really a rare disease?

Jo Churchill: The challenge with rare diseases is that they are collectively common but rare in and among themselves. As my hon. Friend articulated, there are many different elements to this syndrome that may be diagnosed as Ehlers-Danlos or a plethora of other things. That makes treating them more of a challenge and is why there has to be communication and information sharing to make it a proper pathway for an individual. Although for each life it is really challenging, 11 is not a large patient cohort. That is one of the challenges when dealing with diseases and syndromes such as Ehlers-Danlos and hypermobility syndromes more broadly.

Improving the diagnosis using cutting-edge technology is key. The genomic medicine service, which was announced last October, aims to provide consistent and equitable access to the most up-to-date genomic testing in England, which may help, and I am pleased that hypermobility syndromes are included in the national genomic test directory, which underpins this service. That may provide more of the cohesion that my hon. Friend is looking for.

As my hon. Friend points out, improving awareness of hypermobility syndromes among healthcare professionals, particularly general practitioners, is key. It is critical to ensuring better diagnosis and treatment of these conditions and is vital if we are to build trust and confidence in the system and actually help those with rare diseases. As I say, they are collectively common—3.5 million people across the UK are affected—but there is a significant gap in our understanding of their diagnosis because of the number of different ways they can present.

On raising awareness, there is always more that can be done, and we must learn from areas of good practice. For example, Ehlers-Danlos Support UK has developed a toolkit in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners. I am pleased to hear that my hon. Friend's clinical commissioning group, NHS Calderdale, has issued the links to the EDS toolkit to its GP member practices and encouraged clinicians to consider adding this topic to their learning needs, because building awareness is very much part of the answer.

Recently, a clinical update on Ehlers-Danlos syndromes was published in *The BMJ*. That is another excellent example of how the clinical community is working to improve knowledge and awareness and help provide positive NHS care for patients by transferring that knowledge into better diagnosis.

NHS England commissions specialised diagnostic services for hypermobility syndromes, including Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, osteogenesis imperfecta and Stickler syndrome. It is currently implementing a new "rare disease insert", which aims to improve the patient experience through provision of a single person responsible for the co-ordination of care for hypermobility patients; I think that that was one of my hon. Friend's constituents' main asks. It also aims to improve the transition pathway from child to adult rare diseases services, including services for those with hypermobility syndromes.

[Jo Churchill]

Several centres in England deliver services for hypermobility, although, as we heard from the hon. Member for Halifax, not all of them are always accessible to everyone. They include two centres delivering complex EDS services, four delivering osteogenesis imperfecta and childhood osteogenesis imperfecta services, and a specialist centre for Stickler syndrome. Those centres help to co-ordinate specialist regional care and manage the transition to non-specialist NHS care. I did very much hear my hon. Friend's request for a more co-ordinated service for his constituents. I encourage him to engage with his clinical commissioning group, as the idea has much merit. It could potentially secure better diagnosis and provide a better pathway for patients through discussion of the single point of contact, giving them much-needed continuity and a timeline for provision in Calder Valley and for patients more broadly.

My hon. Friend said that he thought virtual GP services would help people with hypermobility syndromes, because they would no longer have to travel all the time. He will be pleased to hear that virtual GP services are beginning to be rolled out in general practice. That means that patients will have the right to web and video consultations by April 2021, which I hope will also be of benefit.

As was announced by my colleague Baroness Blackwood this summer, we need a national conversation on rare diseases to help to inform and communicate. We will be engaging with patients, researchers and clinicians, gathering evidence, and identifying the major challenges faced in the field. We welcome the input from the hypermobility syndromes patient cohort and from healthcare professionals, and the work that they have done on the report.

Let me end by thanking my hon. Friend, who has spoken so passionately and so knowledgeably about this issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss such an important report in the Chamber. We are dedicated to trying to improve the lives of all patients living with hypermobility, and, as my hon. Friend said, that is laid down in the NHS long-term plan and our implementation of the UK strategy. I hope that I have given a little reassurance to patients who are struggling for diagnosis that we are here to try to make the pathways stronger and diagnosis easier, and to improve the lives of all those affected by hypermobility syndromes and other rare diseases.

Question put and agreed to.

9.48 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 7 October 2019

[MRS MADELEINE MOON *in the Chair*]

Amazon Deforestation

4.30 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 266638 relating to deforestation in the Amazon.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I declare at the outset that I have been a member of Greenpeace for many years.

This timely debate focuses on a real and urgent concern for the environment, on a day when so many are standing vigil outside Parliament and across the capital, making their strength of feeling on this critical issue heard peacefully, calmly and, as I can hear from my office, often with gentle, soothing music—although interspersed occasionally by energetic drumming. However, that commendable gentleness should not be misunderstood. Urgent action is needed, as demanded by the many people who signed the petition.

The petition, which currently stands at more than 122,500 signatures, including more than 500 from my Cambridge constituency, reads as follows:

“Demand the EU & UN sanction Brazil to halt increased deforestation of the Amazon. The government of Brazil led by Bolsonaro favour the development of the Amazon rainforest over conservation, escalating deforestation. Deforestation threatens indigenous populations who live in the forest, loss of a precious and complex ecosystem and a vital carbon store that slows global warming. Indigenous people have called for the EU to impose trade sanctions on Brazil to halt the deforestation because they fear genocide. Also, the UK parliament has recognised a climate emergency. Since the Amazon rainforest is an important carbon store, absorbing huge volumes of CO₂ each year, its deforestation is of global significance. The intrinsic value of the rainforest should also be recognised. Trade sanctions are used elsewhere for important issues as an effective means to force action.”

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to mention Brazil, but I understand that it is responsible for about half the deforestation of the Amazon, and that countries such as Bolivia and Peru are also significantly involved. For accuracy, could he include those countries and all others that are involved in this important issue in his remarks?

Daniel Zeichner: I will come to the definitions in a little while; the hon. Gentleman has pre-empted me.

Climate change and environmental issues have shot up the political and public agenda this year—we should all be thankful for that—due in no small part to young people, the school climate strikes and Greta Thunberg, and to various campaigns that have led to long-overdue media attention. In my city of Cambridge, some 3,000 people took to the streets a few weeks ago to support the school children, and today thousands are taking part in the Extinction Rebellion protests. Protecting our natural environment has captured the public consciousness and cannot—indeed, must not—be ignored by politicians.

What a natural environment this petition refers to. The Amazon rainforest is 5.5 million sq km of rainforest surrounding the Amazon river. Some 60% of it is contained in Brazil, as the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) indicated. It is home to about one quarter of the world’s species, it accounts for about 15% of terrestrial photosynthesis and it is a major carbon sink. The World Wildlife Fund reports that it is home to perhaps 34 million people, including 385 indigenous groups. It is integral not just to the habitats of the people, plants and animals to which it provides a home, but to the global ecosystem, so it is very precious.

The Amazon rainforest has been under threat from deforestation for some years. Between 2001 and 2018, Brazil lost almost 55 million hectares of tree cover—a staggering amount.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the word “lost” makes it sound like an accident, like someone losing their specs down the back of the sofa, whereas in actual fact—particularly recently—it is due to the deliberate actions of President Bolsonaro, who wants to open up more of the Amazon rainforest? Does he agree that we should not enter trade talks with Bolsonaro unless and until he upholds strong environmental standards and stops that action in the Amazon?

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady has provided a short and precise synopsis of my entire speech. I am afraid I will continue with it anyway. She makes an important point: “lost” is perhaps not the right way to put it.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Did my hon. Friend listen to the Environment Minister from Brazil on the World Service this morning, and did his heart sink, as mine did, at his failure to answer any of the questions that my hon. Friend is addressing to the Bolsonaro regime?

Daniel Zeichner: I did not hear that exchange, but of course it is not uncommon in the political arena for questions not to be directly answered. The point I will develop in my speech is that the failure to act is devastating and dangerous.

Let me return to the 55 million hectares of tree cover, because not everyone knows what that looks like. I am reliably informed that it translates to a loss of 5.7 football pitches per minute. That is something that I can envisage. It is staggering that so many football pitches have been lost in the time that we have been speaking in this debate.

This is not a new problem. We have known about it for some time. Previous Brazilian Governments have tried to reduce deforestation through a number of measures, which have indeed slowed the rate. In 2012 Brazil recorded its lowest deforestation rate of the past 20 years. However, that has been reversed this year. The *New Scientist* reported in July that more than 3,700 sq km of forest has been deforested this year alone. According to preliminary satellite data, the losses for the first seven months of 2019 are 16% higher than the high of 3,183 sq km in 2016. There was an 88% increase in deforestation in June 2019, compared with June 2018. Those startling and worrying numbers understandably provoke strong and passionate responses from people across the world.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this extremely important debate, and I apologise for missing the first few moments of his speech. He is of course right to call attention to the vast increase in deforestation that has occurred this year, but it is also right to put that in the context—he mentioned this in passing—of the very significant reduction in deforestation. As recently as 2004, it was 10,500 square miles a year. Last year, it was 4,000 square miles. This year, as he correctly mentioned, it has gone back up again. It is right to say that the Brazilian Government have been doing their best, albeit this year there seems to have been an extremely worrying reversal.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point: there has been progress. The problem is that something has happened. That is what I will come on to.

The threat of natural loss as a consequence of these changes is very real and is under way, but the political situation that underpins this issue deserves careful and considered attention because, as the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) pointed out, something has changed. It is hard not to conclude that the environmental damage is a direct consequence of a change in policy direction and political attitudes.

That brings me to President Bolsonaro—clearly a controversial figure, although by no means the only controversial figure on the world stage at the moment—whose attitude to climate change is worth highlighting. Back in December 2018, at the 24th conference of the parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change, the Brazilian Government promised that their carbon emissions would decrease by 37% by 2025, and by 43% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels. However, since President Bolsonaro took office in January there has been a clear change. He is widely considered to be sceptical of actions to curb climate change, and in his election campaign he said he would take Brazil out of the Paris climate change accord—a note, I fear, from the Trump playbook. He has back-peddled a little and has argued that he may not do that so long as Brazil's control over the Amazon remains intact. I have to say that I do not think these are issues to be negotiated. We should all be working to preserve such an important part of our environment.

This summer the world watched on with huge anxiety as forest fires burned in the Amazon, with many attributing blame to forest clearance policies. The Rainforest Alliance says that satellite data show an 84% increase in fires compared with the same period in 2018. The Brazilian Government deny a causal link, but the disagreement has led to fierce international controversy. It was recently reported that at the UN

“Bolsonaro...launched a cantankerous and conspiratorial defence of his environmental record, blaming Emmanuel Macron and the ‘deceitful’ media for hyping this year’s fires in the Amazon. In a combative 30-minute address to the UN general assembly, Bolsonaro denied—contrary to the evidence—that the world’s largest rainforest was ‘being devastated or consumed by fire, as the media deceitfully says’.”

Similarly, *The Guardian* has reported that

“Bolsonaro is set to unveil draft legislation that would allow commercial mining in indigenous territories, something currently outlawed, despite overwhelming opposition from voters.”

Clearly there are differences of view, but I find it hard not to conclude that the Brazilian President's pro-development agenda is having a clear and dangerous impact, and that the clearing of the rainforest will be used to allow further development of mining and agriculture.

If we conclude that we all have an interest in this issue because of the impact on the global climate, the question becomes, “What do we do?” The petition calls for trade sanctions, a measure that the Government have not adopted or advocated so far. The Government state in their response to the petition:

“The United Kingdom shares concerns about deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, and the severe impact on the climate, biodiversity and livelihoods. However, key to tackling these issues is to work with Brazil to find solutions rather than imposing sanctions.”

I am afraid that I must characterise that as a “do nothing” response, or rather a “do a tiny little bit to maybe give us some cover” response, because the Government also stated:

“In response to the recent forest fires, the Prime Minister pledged a further £10 million at the G7 summit on 25 August. This contribution is an expansion of an existing project: Partnerships for Forests.”

The rainforest is burning and the Prime Minister has offered a water pistol—maybe he could have sent an unused water cannon.

Remember the scale of the challenge that we face. The Government's actions hardly equate to the “rapid”, “unprecedented” and “far-reaching” transitions that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called for in its report last year.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he think that the UK has a critical and special responsibility in this matter? Non-governmental organisations such as Global Witness have shown that much of the deforestation has been backed by companies that often have operations in the City of London, so we should really take more responsibility rather than pretending that it just affects a country many miles away.

Daniel Zeichner: My hon. Friend makes an important point on the wider context of Britain's role on the global stage. I would argue that although we are shamefully withdrawing from our positions of influence on the global stage, we remain important through many of our major companies and should use that influence and position of authority.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we are approaching a very dangerous tipping point in the context of climate change and that the wider world faces catastrophic climate change if urgent action is not taken? That action must include an end to deforestation, radical action to reduce the consumption of meat in the western world, and Government intervention in markets.

Daniel Zeichner: That is the important point: the sense of urgency. Of course, this Parliament has declared a climate emergency, not that one would necessarily guess that from the Government's actions, and actions are what count.

What a marked contrast there is between our Government's feeble response and the responses of other Governments. Our European partners have called for trade sanctions, with Austrian MPs demanding that their Government veto the EU's proposed trade deal with South America's economic bloc, which is currently composed of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. That was due to concerns over workers' rights, which is absolutely correct, but the environmental reasons are paramount. Similar concerns have been voiced by countries such as France, Ireland and Luxembourg.

Although I have been critical of the Government, I will add a rider, because as a country with an imperial and colonising past, criticism can always be levelled at the UK that, because we industrialised and polluted, it is hypocritical to blame others for doing the same. Brazil could argue that, as a post-colonial industrial country, it should have the chance to develop its economy, as the UK and other European countries did in the past, and it can point to our lack of environmental concerns during that industrialisation. Those sympathetic to Bolsonaro's argument could point to data indicating that Brazil has historically contributed to around only 1% of global emissions since the start of the industrial age.

To criticise other countries for pursuing industrial development by saying, "We benefited from that kind of approach but now we know more so you should not put your economy first" is a poor argument. However, it is possible to develop the economy in a much more sustainable way if it is not driven just by short-term profit maximisation—that is the answer to the conundrum. The way forward is through international agreements, ratified by the countries involved, to secure a better future approach. Economic avenues could be pursued more sustainably to future-proof Brazil's industry while maintaining environmental protections and regulations.

Many would argue that there is no need for self-inflicted harm. Greenpeace tells us that indigenous groups across Brazil are calling for global support to protect their rights in their struggle to safeguard the forests that they have inhabited for centuries. Greenpeace argues that environmental governance bodies in Brazil have been dismantled and weakened. For instance, the Climate Change and Forests Office and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Climate Change have been closed, which has impacted policies and deforestation prevention, as well as resourcing. Minister Salles has slashed the budget and staffing of the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources, or IBAMA. Highly trained units have reportedly been grounded, and the value of fines imposed for environmental offences has dropped by 43%. In August, the director of Brazil's National Space Research Institute was forced out of office after the President refuted data on rising deforestation.

Of course, the Brazilian Government have a different account and reject the notion that "Brazil does not take care of the Amazon, does not take care of the environment."

People will make their own judgment, but at the centre of the issue is the fact that we are in a climate crisis. If Brazil rejects the chance to reform its practice, recommit to stopping the fires and return to anti-deforestation policies, and if the Brazilian President continues to take Brazil down such an environmentally damaging path, it is right that the international community thinks hard about how to proceed to best protect the environmental jewel that is the Amazon rainforest.

That is hard because it touches on the most basic issues of national sovereignty. Brazil has reaffirmed many times that this is indeed an issue of sovereignty, and it believes that its approach to the Amazon is one of domestic policy, but we cannot look at this issue in a vacuum. As was mentioned earlier, the Amazon spans not just Brazil, but Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. It is an internationally revered natural treasure, and parts of it that are lost, including some species that are found nowhere else on earth, will not be recovered. That is a global loss.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The hon. Gentleman has touched on something so important in our current political debate: nationalism is completely the wrong answer to a global crisis. We can solve these things only if we think globally rather than just in our own national interest.

Daniel Zeichner: The hon. Lady is right. If only we could find a way of achieving that consensual approach.

This is a global loss, and many would conclude that that risk creates a global responsibility to respond. How do we solve this dilemma? Greenpeace has asked that

"all trade talks with Brazil be suspended until the Bolsonaro government changes tack and guarantees the necessary protections".

It says that should include effective support for urgent action by the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources and other agencies responsible for monitoring and enforcement, to tackle environmental crimes and implement forest protections, with guarantees of necessary funding as well as other measures to improve environmental protections. That is the tough approach.

Our Government seem to hope for the best outcome. The Minister of State has previously told Parliament:

"If we help to ensure that these sensible trade arrangements are made, those fires can be put out and they will stay out".—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 7.]

That seems to be over-optimistic at best and complacent at worst, but we will await the Minister's response. If the situation remains as difficult as it currently appears to be, I have to say, I am with Greenpeace. The Amazon rainforest is sometimes said to provide 20% of our terrestrial oxygen, or one in five of each of our breaths. Most of us now recognise that we are in a climate crisis, and that it is time for action and urgency in our approach to both domestic and international policy.

I hope that the Minister will be able to reflect a hitherto undetected ambition and urgency to do what is needed. He could start today by supporting the petitioners in their ambition to secure global action to protect the precious rainforest.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. A total of 16 Members wish to speak. I will call first the nine Members who notified me in advance.

4.51 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Thank you, Mrs Moon, for calling me so early. As always in debates, one hopes to have more time to perfect the speech that should have

[Mark Menzies]

been written last week. With your generosity, Mrs Moon, hon. Members will have to listen to what I have in front of me.

I do not think there is any disagreement among us about the importance of the rainforest, be it for the physical entity that it is or for the animal and plant species that it hosts. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) highlighted that the Amazon spans much more than just Brazil. I will concentrate on not just Brazil but Colombia next door, and I will draw some comparisons.

I refer to Brazil following my visit there—I led the Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation there two weeks ago. Unfortunately, we had to cut our visit short because Parliament was recalled. One of the key themes of our visit was to raise British views on the rainforest with the Brazilian Government, parliamentarians and non-governmental organisations. Particularly when we visited the Senate and Congress in Brasilia, it became clear how sensitive they feel to outside criticism. They certainly hear the voices across the world in response to the crisis in the rainforest. People should not think that is not the case.

I differ from the essence of the petition on the need for economic sanctions. I would like us to find solidarity and common cause with groups in Brazil who care passionately—arguably, even more so than we do, because it is their home—to find ways to collaborate to unleash the true value of the rainforest. The rainforest's value should never be in cutting down trees—that is a blind, short-term gain. The true value of the rainforest can be seen next door in Colombia, where the United Kingdom works in collaboration with GROW Colombia, using science to unleash some truly phenomenal long-term possibilities.

GROW Colombia is a UK-funded four-year collaboration involving multiple partners, including the Earlham Institute, the University of East Anglia, the Natural History Museum, the Eden project, Colombia's Humboldt Institute, the Universidad de los Andes and the University of Sydney. The project is designed to demonstrate that biodiversity conservation can drive sustainable economic growth and secure peace and prosperity—in this case in Colombia, but the same lessons can be drawn in many other areas of the Amazon.

Even though the project is in its early days, former guerrillas have been transformed into guardians of the rainforests; people with no scientific or natural background have been trained up to recognise unique species of plants and animals and what they are capable of. It has helped farmers to reform their agricultural practices and techniques to grow crops and forage varieties that can offer conservation gains. It has enabled producers to identify and cultivate wild relatives of commercially produced coca varieties to make production more profitable, eco-friendly and sustainable and less dependent on human intervention. It has taught rural communities taxonomic identification techniques, combining biotechnology resources with practical field work to catalogue species. It has assisted policymakers in analysing socio-economic models to support the ecological restoration of the rainforest. Above all, it has coached rural communities in business models for ecotourism initiatives that guarantee a genuine and lasting conservation benefit to the ecosystem. Some of those measures could

be rolled out in Brazil, in collaboration with the regional Governments—an area such as Amazonia is every bit as important as the federal Government in Brasilia. Some of that collaboration with the United Kingdom is already beginning.

I urge the Government to continue to work on pointing out to Brazil not only that it is an economic powerhouse thanks to its variety of rare species but that, if harnessed properly, as is beginning to happen in Colombia, the potential for biotech and pharmaceutical applications of some of the very complex and rare plant species could generate billions of sustainable, clean revenue that would benefit the planet in the long term while generating revenue to benefit the science community in Brazil. That would flow through to communities, particularly the indigenous communities in those areas.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is making an extremely well-informed and powerful speech. Could he tell us a little more about what enthusiasm there is in the Brazilian Government for adopting a scheme similar to GROW Colombia in Brazil? Would that be part of the answer, to make Brazil see this issue as global as well as Brazilian?

Mark Menzies: Let me again point out the importance of the federal and state Governments and legislatures. There is huge sensitivity to the criticism directed at Brazil in recent months. There is a danger that that will shut off avenues of co-operation, dialogue and discussion, preventing some of the positive things that we all want to achieve. Particularly in rural areas, people want to be better off. They want better standards of education, better employment opportunities and better prospects for their children than they had. We must show them a way to achieve that without following a path of devastation and destruction. The trees can be cashed in once, but the other possibilities I mentioned can pay dividends in the longer term.

Another reason we should not go down the path of sanctions, or the threat of them, is that Brazil is a global superpower in its renewable energy potential, both solar and wind, thanks to its enormous coast and tremendous sunshine. UK companies are the biggest investors in solar generation in Brazil. The City of London, by providing access to green finance and green reinsurance markets, is fundamental to unlocking some of that sustainable, renewable power. Many of those schemes are micro schemes, which can unlock access to affordable, sustainable energy—a problem that has often plagued Brazil—for the very people we have talked about, who live away from the coast in isolated, poor communities.

However, those schemes can be unlocked only by global co-operation and the free flow of finance to ensure that there is somebody to help to finance them in the long term. Simply pulling up the drawbridge and saying, “No more co-operation; we're withdrawing from trade agreements and trade discussions with you,” strengthens the hand of the people who want to build a wall around Brazil—those who say, “There they go again: the imperialists are threatening us. We shouldn't listen to anything they've got to say. We do things our way”—and weakens the hand of those in Brazil who want co-operation and to follow a path of alternatives to deforestation.

As somebody who is passionate about Latin America—I have visited the Yungas in Bolivia, and I have visited Colombia five times in my trade envoy role—I know

very well the economic power of these rainforests. This is not just about protecting rare species and defending an ecosystem; it is also about allowing people to earn a fantastic living while protecting precious and unique environments. If we get this right, we can do both.

5.1 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Moon. I do not think it will surprise anyone that I am not going to adopt the same conciliatory tone as the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies). The situation we face is far too serious to adopt such an approach. As we heard, the Amazon is being wilfully destroyed. It remains the biggest rainforest in the world and a vital check on climate change. The seriousness of the situation cannot be overestimated and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) said, there are people gathered outside this building who want us to take it seriously.

I make no apologies for referring to a debate I led in this Chamber in March 2009 about the impact of livestock on the environment. I read my speech back and I actually think it was rather good, but the Minister's response was appalling; she went on at some length about how she really liked her mum's shepherd's pie. I would like to think we have made progress since then, but although we are talking about the issue more, we certainly have not made as much progress as I hoped we would back then.

Extensive cattle ranching is the primary culprit for deforestation in virtually every Amazon country. It accounts for 80% of current deforestation and is responsible for the release of 340 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere every year. That is equivalent to 3.4% of current global emissions. The Brazilian Amazon is home to approximately 200 million head of cattle and is the largest exporter in the world, supplying around a quarter of the global market.

The impact of cattle ranching and deforestation was first publicised by conservationists in the early 1980s—they coined the phrase “the hamburger connection”—but it was fairly small business back then. Government incentives, and improvements in the road and electricity networks and in meat processing facilities, spurred the industry on. Then, with the devaluation of the currency and much of Brazil's herd being declared free of foot and mouth disease, exports exploded, which led to the current deforestation situation.

Typically, deforestation starts not with animal agriculture but when roads are cut through the forest to open it up for logging and mining. Once the forest along the road has been cleared, commercial or subsistence farmers move in and start growing crops. However, forest soils are too nutrient-poor and fragile to sustain crops for long, so after two or three years, when the soil is depleted, crop yields fall and farmers let the grass grow and move on. That is when the ranchers move in. Little investment is needed to start raising cattle on cheap or abandoned land where grass is already growing, and the returns can be high, at least for a while. However, after five to 10 years, over-grazing and nutrient loss turn rainforest land that was once filled with biodiversity into an eroded wasteland, so ranchers have to look for somewhere else to move on to.

As we heard, deforestation causes irreversible environmental damage if it is not checked in time. The clearing and burning of forests releases billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Scientists estimate that deforestation causes roughly a quarter of all human-induced carbon emissions, and then there is the loss of biodiversity. I have not been to Brazil, but I have been to countries such as Belize; the extent to which the rainforest remains undiscovered and unexplored is amazing. There is so much more to be discovered. Forests are home to more than 13 million distinct species, representing more than two thirds of the world's plants and animals. Obviously, if their habitats are destroyed, many will be at risk of extinction. When the trees are gone, the soil becomes depleted, which often leads to water pollution as the soil gets washed away. That is something for which we in this country must accept responsibility.

James Gray: The hon. Lady is making an extremely powerful speech, with which I entirely agree. What she says about the catastrophe in the rainforest, which I have visited many times, is absolutely true. Surely, however, the point of the debate is not so much to say how awful it all is but to ask what we can do about it. The petitioners request trade sanctions against Brazil. The question is how efficacious that would be in persuading the current Government of Brazil to go back to what the Government there were doing only a year ago.

Kerry McCarthy: I will get to what I think needs to be done. Sanctions could play a part, but change in consumption habits could play a much bigger part, and that is something we each have some control over.

In their recent “Risky Business” report, WWF and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds estimate that more than 40% of the UK's overseas land footprint—nearly 6 million hectares—is in countries that are at high or very high risk of deforestation and of having weak governance and poor labour standards. The more I read about it, the more I see the links between this trade and modern slavery and human rights abuses, with people being displaced from their land, and so on; they are all part and parcel of the same thing.

WWF and the RSPB looked at seven key agricultural commodities imported into the UK: beef and leather, cocoa, palm oil, pulp and paper, rubber, soy, and timber. Of those, beef and leather account for by far the largest proportion of our land footprint overseas, despite the fact that we produce almost 80% of our own beef in the UK and import a lot from Ireland. However, the actual picture is much worse, because we must look at animal feed, too. In the EU, around 90% of soy imports are for livestock feed, so it is not just a case of beef from Argentina or Brazil being bad and British beef being fine, as I often hear people try to argue. Yes, there is a case for pasture-fed livestock—I chair the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology for sustainable food and farming, of which the Pasture-Fed Livestock Association is an active member—but that is not what we are talking about.

Every year, the UK consumes around 3.3 million tonnes of soy, more than 75% of which is related to meat consumption, either as imported animal feed or as soy embedded in imported meat products. We must also consider the feed for chickens that lay eggs, and the feed

[Kerry McCarthy]

for dairy herds, as well as soya bean oil, which is the second most widely used vegetable oil after palm oil. This has happened to me many times, but I remember the former farming Minister, Jim Paice, trying to tell me that that was all down to more people eating veggie burgers. I assure people that is not the case. That figure may have gone up in recent years, but I think it is still well below 5%—but yes, it is all the vegetarians' and vegans' fault, as usual.

It is interesting to compare what has happened with soy bean oil and palm oil. We import nearly three times as much soy bean oil as palm oil, yet it is palm oil that has tended to receive the attention of environmentalists, probably because of the orangutans. Some 21% of global palm oil production is now certified, whereas soy certified by the Round Table on Responsible Soy or ProTerra accounts for only about 2% of global production.

Wera Hobhouse: It is true that we cannot be sanctimonious or hypocritical and tell developing countries what to do, given that we deforested our country in the past, but we now know a lot more about the consequences. The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. Should not we all adopt a responsible, conscious approach to consumption, and promote that politically, rather than saying, "We don't really need to do anything about it, and it's not about sanctions"? We must all understand that we are responsible, too.

Kerry McCarthy: I think so. There have been some interesting global initiatives or attempts at global initiatives. When I was a shadow Minister in the foreign affairs team, I remember meeting representatives from Ecuador. Yasuni national park in Ecuador is almost as biologically diverse and as amazing as the Galapagos Islands, but oil has been discovered there. The representatives wanted to raise funds from across the world by saying to people, "We are a poor country. We need to exploit our natural resources. We need to get the finances in. If you don't want us to do that and you think that is appalling, then give us some money not to do it." I understand that was not a successful approach; they did not raise any money and they ended up having to exploit the natural resources.

The Seychelles issued an ocean bond, saying it would protect its marine areas and not overfish if people gave it money to do that. Although there are wealthy people in the Seychelles, there is a lot of poverty too. That blue bond was successful; we need to look at such initiatives, because it is not just about sanctions, but about working together. As the hon. Lady mentioned, I think it is the wrong approach for us to say, "You cannot exploit what you have got," when we have exploited everything we have got, and we have been to many other countries and exploited what they have as well, over the centuries."

Some 77% of UK soy imports come from the high-risk countries of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. In its recent report "Money to Burn", the NGO Global Witness identified the financial institutions behind six key agribusiness companies involved in deforesting climate-critical forests in Brazil, the Congo basin and New Guinea. It revealed that UK-based financial institutions were the second biggest source of financing, providing \$6.5 billion, so the UK has a huge responsibility to take action to tackle the source of financing for deforestation.

I urge Members to read the report, which is powerful. We must have due diligence regulation across sectors and throughout the supply chain, so people know what their money is being invested in. That would send an important message to businesses, and companies would change the way they operate.

In 2009 I held a debate in this Chamber that was prompted in part by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's report "Livestock's Long Shadow", which was released in 2006. It made a compelling case for action to tackle the consequences for the climate and for our natural environment of the ever more industrialised and intensive livestock industry. As I said in that debate, growing animal feed is a supremely inefficient use of land; it takes around 8 kg of grain to produce 1 kg of beef, and there is a huge water footprint, too. It takes almost 21 square metres of land to produce 1 kg of beef, compared with 0.3 square metres to produce 1 kg of vegetables.

Since then, numerous other highly authoritative reports have made the same arguments. They make the headlines and most people agree that something needs to be done, and yet we seem to be no closer to action, apart from people making their own decisions about what they consume.

I finish by expressing my disappointment at the recent report from the Committee on Climate Change on how we reach net zero; it was, frankly, pathetic. At the launch, the chair of the committee said in his opening speech that his least favourite environmentalists were those who expected people to be cold in their homes or to eat disgusting food. I wondered what he meant by disgusting food, but I can guess. This was from the man who fed his daughter, Cordelia, a hamburger at the height of the BSE crisis; I think we know where he is coming from. We were then told that because people could not be expected to eat disgusting food, the recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change was for only a 20% reduction in red meat consumption, which was to be replaced primarily with pork, bacon and poultry rather than plant-based meals.

The Committee on Climate Change was meant to be looking at how deliverable net zero was, primarily from an economic point of view; for example, it was looking at whether we could afford to make the transition to electric vehicles. It also looked at behavioural change and how palatable that would be to the general public. I gather that the behavioural scientist on the committee specialises in shifts in transport, rather than diet, but it took his word on what people would tolerate.

I refer again to the people outside the building today, to people I know and to the people who have contacted me, particularly younger people. I think people are willing to play their part and want to know about the damage their consumption habits cause. It is not just a question of them being able to exercise a choice; the market needs to respond. We need more transparency, so people are educated to make choices, and we need the Government to step in to ensure people are in a position to make those choices.

5.15 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Ind): It is pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). I hope it will not be another 10 years before she makes a

speech on this subject. I enjoyed her contribution and found it educational, and I thank her for it. I thank the Petitions Committee for holding this debate—as a former Minister who responded to many Petitions Committee debates, it is nice to be on the other side—and the just over 300 of my constituents who signed the petition; I think I know them all. I thank the schoolchildren, from every school I visit and all those that visit me here, who raise this subject with me, and my own two children, who also raise it with me. I also thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for setting out the issue so clearly. I do not want to speak for long, and will make three brief points.

First, and personally, as I have droned on to anyone who will listen or who has asked me about environmental policy since I was elected, this is the issue that got me here and opened my eyes as a schoolboy, when I was no older than my eight-year-old son is now. I remember seeing it on television and protesting at the television about it, and my parents saying it was no good telling them—that I should tell someone else and do something about it. That opened my eyes to becoming an activist, and led me to a lifetime of activism. It got me to join Friends of the Earth when I was a young man and ultimately to pursue a career in politics.

Ever since I was adopted as the candidate for Winchester in 2007, I have campaigned relentlessly under the Green Winchester umbrella on many issues, but I have always returned to this subject. As a schoolboy, I wrote articles and held debates on it. I even wrote a poem on it for the school poetry competition, which the swine did not let me win. While the rates of deforestation in the '80s, when I was at school, and continuing into the '90s were deeply troubling and led to the television coverage that caught my attention and raised my ire, it seems that more recent years have given cause for hope in the Amazon.

Deforestation has been a concern in the region for some years, but I note in the excellent House of Commons Library briefing for the debate that the New York declaration on deforestation published this year said:

“Brazil lost almost 55 million hectares of tree cover at a rate of 5.7 soccer fields per minute. More than 84 percent of this loss occurred in the...Amazon...an area bigger than Norway.”

However, previous Brazilian Governments have adopted a series of legal and administrative approaches aimed at reducing deforestation, which led to a decline in loss rates. As the declaration reports, the

“Amazon has long been hailed as a success story in global forest conservation efforts. In 2012, Brazil recorded its lowest deforestation rate in the last 20 years.”

It is worth repeating that point, which was made in the opening speech.

Soy was mentioned in a previous contribution. The world's first two large-scale voluntary commitments to reduce deforestation were based in the Amazon: the 2006 sector-wide soy moratorium and the 2009 company-specific Cattle Brazil: forging public-private co-operation agreements. Nearly 50 companies have endorsed the soy moratorium covering 90% of the soy trade in the Brazilian Amazon, while 18 of the country's 22 largest meat processors have committed to at least one of the cattle agreements. These approaches were successful, yet trends in the slowing of forest loss have been reversed in recent years. In the period after 2012, deforestation has again increased, no doubt generating more young boys and

girls shouting at the television or outside in Westminster today. The reversal of the trend for the slowing of forest loss has been particularly acute this year, and that is what worries us all so much. The progress report of the New York declaration on forests, published in September, states that

“tree cover loss in the Amazon began to rise again in 2016 when it reached 3.7 million hectares. While the rate of loss has fallen in the past two years, it is still higher than it had been since 2005. For the Amazon, deforestation rates continued to rise in the first part of 2019 with an alarming 88 percent increase in June compared to same month the previous year.”

It is worth repeating the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) that deforestation is increasing in Bolivia and Peru, so it is not just a matter of Brazil—but of course it is mainly Brazil.

Secondly, lots of points have been made about indigenous peoples and ecosystems, and I am not going to repeat them. However, I am a former Health Minister and was the cancer care Minister, and it is often said that the Amazon is the world's largest medicine cabinet. That is a good point. About 25% of all the drugs that are used today derive from rainforest plants. One point that caused one of my shouty TV moments was this: logically, on the balance of probability, if such a high percentage of the things we know about have come from the rainforest, what else is out there? For those who have been involved with fighting cancer, and the loss of the fight, as many times as I and many other people in the Chamber have, it would be wonderful if we could detect more cancers earlier, as is the Government's ambition. However, as we will not do that for everyone, we will need medicines and drug treatments. For me, the great question is what else is out there.

My third point is about the response, which is obviously what the petitioners are interested in. I understand President Bolsonaro's view about sovereignty. Of course, international law would be on his side with respect to the sovereignty of his land, but I argue that sovereignty of the planet belongs to us all. Some 40 years after I was raised into political activism of some sort we are still having the same conversation—and, what is worse, the situation is getting more acute and worrying, because deforestation rates seem to be going in the wrong direction again.

I understand the argument that we need to help Brazil to trade its way out of the situation. My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) made his point well, and I listened to him carefully. He has visited the area many times. It is often said that the Amazon basin has a population living in poverty, and that is undoubtedly true, but a lot of deforestation does not stem from poverty. According to the federal Government 32.5% of deforestation in 2016 happened on big farms, and 24.5% on invaded public land, while 30% happened on smallholder agricultural land possessions and 11% inside protected areas that allow for economic activities. So much deforestation, especially on squatted land, is commissioned by people who do not live in the Amazon, including gangs of land speculators and other forms of organised crime. Most of the big farmers and land-grabbers come from São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Paraná and other southern states, attracted by the cheap land and the low level of law enforcement in Brazil. I understand the argument, but it worries me.

[Steve Brine]

As to the response to the petition, at the time of the G20 summit France and Ireland raised the prospect of not ratifying the huge trade deal with South American nations unless Brazil did more to fight fires in the Amazon. President Macron of France said that President Bolsonaro had lied to him about his stance on climate change. Our Prime Minister said:

“The fires ravaging the Amazon rainforest are not only heartbreaking, they are an international crisis. We stand ready to provide whatever help we can to bring them under control and help protect one of Earth’s greatest wonders.”

German Chancellor Merkel called the fire an “acute emergency” that was

“shocking and threatening not only for Brazil and the other affected countries, but also for the whole world”.

I agree with all those statements but, far from arguing that we should withdraw from trade negotiations, I suggest that the deal should explicitly say that countries must commit to tackling climate change. I suggest therefore that all we are asking is that the EU, of which we are still currently a member, should hold Brazil to the commitments in the emerging agreement. That seems perfectly reasonable to me.

Forty years on from the time I described earlier, we are still having the conversation. If we are still having it after another 40 years it will not be a problem but a bit of history—gone for ever. The medicines that we might have found, which might have produced cures for terrible diseases—the diseases that I have spent many hours answering debates on in Westminster Hall, and that affect our constituents—will not be found. If we were to let that happen it seems to me it would be a stain on humanity. The point about sovereignty needs to be balanced alongside that argument. I ask the Minister—he is an excellent Minister and a good friend—to set out the latest position of Her Majesty’s Government on the EU-Mercosur trade deal, from the point of view of a member state and, presumably, from 1 November, a former member state. Where do we stand? What leverage do the Government propose to put on to Brazil and the neighbouring countries that have been mentioned? I will not be here in 40 years but perhaps my son will. I do not want him to be having the same argument that we are.

5.26 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am sorry if I repeat anything that another Member has said. It has been a good debate, with excellent contributions, and I will not push too many statistics. I have always been involved in environmental issues. Early in my career, before I got into Parliament, I started the Socialist Environment and Resources Association, and the first branch of Friends of the Earth in England and Wales, in Swansea. I also started a number of organisation such as Urban Minds. So I “do” the environment, in a sense, but I have obviously not done it very effectively. I have been in this place for 40 years and we have not woken up to the fact that we are destroying our fragile planet. We seem to be hell bent on destroying it.

I support most of the petition, but I think that the question is multifaceted. I have worked with Brazilians and other South Americans. I used to co-chair the British-Brazilian all-party parliamentary group, and I

started a charity in Peru working on rural and urban development, giving jobs to young people in Lima and the countryside. I know that those are not primitive, backward people. They are highly intelligent and clever. Often they are absolutely let down by bad governance, but they are talented. They have talented scientists. Some of the best technological and scientific innovation takes place in Brazil. It was one of the best competitors in the aircraft industry—a pretty sophisticated industry. Brazil has enormous talent and I sometimes wonder why we do not reach out to that talent more effectively.

I get fed up, and I think the time is coming when the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association must wake up to the fact that getting on planes and going to visit and talk to other parliamentarians is something of the past. Some colleagues will not like that, but we must develop new techniques for parliamentarians across the globe to work together. We can do it by clever video conferences and the social media potential is enormous. We should reflect on that as parliamentarians. We often say “It’s the Government.” In an intervention on the very good speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), I mentioned the appearance of the Brazilian Environment Minister on the BBC World Service this morning, which I thought was very poor. However, other major influences are also poor. I work with a number of Brazilian legislators on reducing road deaths in Brazil—a very big killer—so I know about international working.

Mark Menzies: What a great and powerful contribution from the hon. Gentleman. I encourage him to renew his interest in not only the IPU, but the all-party parliamentary group on Latin America, because we engage on many of the issues that he has talked about, and with that knowledge and expertise he would make a very valuable new member.

Mr Sheerman: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much; I will revisit my level of activity in the group.

When I speak to clever Brazilians, they say to me, “But look what you’ve done to the world. You’ve deforested Europe. At present you are probably despoiling the quality of soil right across Europe and in the UK. You are doing dreadful things that are awful for the environment as well.” When we look at the facts of the matter, we are exporting some of the worst chemicals for people all over the world to put on their land. Indeed, in my own constituency, Syngenta makes weed-killers that it cannot sell in Europe, but it exports them beyond Europe. We should have a conscience about what we are exporting, the soil degradation that we are causing and the fact that we must prove to the Brazilians that we are concerned about climate change worldwide.

I have been inspired by the young people. I have 12 grandchildren. Four of them live in Cambridge and a couple of them have been leaders in the climate change campaign. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge brought one of my granddaughters, Lola, up to meet the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). That shows how active we are on a cross-party basis.

I am inspired because young people have got it. Greta Thunberg, who we invited to this place, has galvanised the level of activity and interest. On the other side, I am

inspired by the young people coming out. In Huddersfield the other day, we had a wonderful event in St George's Square with great speakers. They were young people. It is young people who excite me, because they have got it, and things are changing.

Young people are changing what they eat, so there are more vegans. Two or three years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) got me to join the all-party parliamentary group on vegetarianism and veganism. I do not know that I am as good at pursuing that as she is, but I helped the group to be quorate on a particular day. The fact of the matter is that young people's habits—what they eat, what they do, their impact on the environment—are changing fast.

My other inspiration is Professor Steve Jones of University College London, who has produced a book that I have just finished reviewing, "Here Comes the Sun". If people want to know the real science, he is a Reith lecturer and one of the leading experts in the world. I say to hon. Members, "Read it. It is a hard read, but it tells the unvarnished truth about how we are destroying the climate." This is not just about the species and the wonderful flora and fauna of the Amazon, but about the fact that the Amazon rainforest helps to regulate the weather globally. When are people going to wake up to the fact that these changes—these fires, these droughts, these floods—are related to climate change?

Of course, if we want to pick on anyone big and say, "It's your fault, mate," we should not pick just on the Brazilian leadership. We should look at north America and President Trump. If we want to know what has changed a lot of the attitudes in South America, it is the attitude of the President of the United States, which has changed dramatically from Obama to the present President.

Let us, first, recognise that our delicate, fragile planet is desperately in trouble, and that we will not hand on anything to our children and grandchildren if we do not act now, and act positively. That means sharing technology, science and innovation—including giving it to the Chinese. We do not do anything about the Chinese. The Chinese no longer have any bees. Their agriculture has been so intensive that they have to hand-pollinate, because they have killed all the bees in China. In north America they have killed most of the songbirds.

We must wake up to the urgency of what we face, but not then despair and say, "Oh, it's all too difficult for us, we can't tackle this." We need good science, good technology, sharing of information, sharing of new methods of agriculture and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East said powerfully, new ways of consuming.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Sheerman: I was just going to finish, but I will give way.

Matt Western: My hon. Friend makes a powerful speech. Had I appreciated that he was coming to the end of it, I would have backed off. He made the point about how informed young people are about consumption. He was talking about his grandchildren, and I am sure he is struck by how knowledgeable they are and how that knowledge and information is informing the decisions

and choices that they make. That should be inspirational to all of us, as he suggests. Visiting various primary schools, I was amazed that so many children said, "We don't eat those biscuits, because they have so much palm oil." We are talking about Brazil and the impact on the rainforests there, but if we look at the rainforest fires in Indonesia, where there is widespread devastation and clearance for palm oil, which goes into so many of our foodstuffs, does he agree that this is a massive, global issue? Obviously we are talking about Brazil, but it is a wider thing across our globe.

Mr Sheerman: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. I will reiterate that my Bible has become Professor Steve Jones. Interestingly enough, he has been almost banned by the BBC. He told me that the trouble is that we cannot get a decent debate on climate change on radio or television, because the BBC has this daft idea of balance. Steve cannot get on, as a leading professor and scientist, because apparently they cannot find anyone better qualified than Nigel Lawson to provide balance. He is almost banned from the BBC because he knows too much. What a crazy world! The fact of the matter is that we know what is happening, we know about the science and we know that we have the keys if we share information.

We as parliamentarians are too often lazy. We should not be getting on planes. There is a group of us who are working together on how, deep into the 21st century, we can communicate with other legislators around the world in a positive and supportive way. If anyone would like to join that group with me, I will be holding a meeting this coming Wednesday.

5.37 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Moon. I congratulate the more than 100,000 signatories to this petition, because it seems that more and more it is the people outside who bring the most pertinent discussions to this House.

We are having a good discussion. I am happy to acknowledge what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), and his enthusiasm, which I share, that if we put our mind to it, there are solutions to the climate crisis and we must not be gloomy. We hear increasingly about people who get really depressed about the future, especially young people. That, on top of the challenge that we have, will be devastating if we allow it to continue. The hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) is leaving the Chamber, but it was a particular pleasure to listen to what he was saying.

One of my favourite films is "Monty Python's Life of Brian". Hon. Members may remember how, at the end of the film, the committee is still debating and Brian is already on the cross. That is what we often do: we debate and debate, and we do not acknowledge the emergency that is actually before us. I share the impatience of everybody who has been demonstrating today and who will continue to demonstrate outside with Extinction Rebellion.

Like the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), I became a member of Greenpeace—more than 30 years ago, in Germany. This is not a new thing. We knew about it, yet what have we done about it? If anything,

[Wera Hobhouse]

we will have to justify to future generations the fact that we knew about this. The chair of the Committee on Climate Change said that we have a “moral duty”, because we know what to do about it, so let us do it.

That is the impetus, and that is the response that I would like to see from the Government. There is an emergency. We know what to do about it. Let us not just say, “Well, we have already done quite a lot.” We have definitely not done enough. That is what these debates are all about. I hope that we can find a cross-party consensus on the fact that it is an emergency and that we need to do a lot more. It is a massive challenge; young people are reminding us how big the challenge is. We do not want to be depressed about it, but we need to do a lot more.

I must say that I take a slightly grim view of the Brazilian Government. As the hon. Member for Winchester said, deforestation actually slowed down between 2004 and 2014, or 2013—I cannot quite remember the figures—but it is increasing again, which is disappointing. If we could do that between 2004 and 2012, we need to look at why it has gone backwards. These are the questions that we have to ask ourselves.

Deforestation in the Amazon is a global crisis. The Amazon is the largest carbon dioxide sink in the world; it captures and stores a huge amount of CO₂, doing the heavy lifting for all of us in the fight to stop the looming climate crisis. During the summer, reports emerged about the huge expansion of Amazon rainforest fires. Although wildfires are seasonal and play a role in regenerating wildlife, the fires raging in the Amazon rainforest were much larger than usual. If the Brazilian Government continue to ignore the extent of the damage, those fires will pose a serious threat to the Amazon biome.

I understand the argument that it is a bit rich for us to pontificate if we have, in the past, also deforested and if our economies ultimately profit from what is happening elsewhere in the world. However, responsible Governments see that there has to be something like a carrot and a stick, and I think we need to apply a bit of a stick, not just a carrot. We need global co-operation if we are to have any chance of keeping the rise in global temperatures below 1.5° C. If we continue on this trajectory, global temperatures are currently predicted to rise by about 3° C. That is just not acceptable, and we cannot be complacent. If we fail, we will face an irreversible climate crisis, which evidence suggests will destroy ecosystems, cause the extinction of thousands of species and displace much of the world’s population.

This is one of the wider political problems. The climate crisis and catastrophe will affect the world disproportionately. Some countries, particularly in the northern hemisphere, will be okay—Britain will probably be one of them—but what about Africa and the southern hemisphere? If we think globally, and if we believe that we cannot just let other countries sink into the ocean or have intolerable temperatures so that they cannot sustain human life, our response has to be urgent. It is our global moral responsibility to act, and so far I do not think that the Government have really woken up to this emergency.

The only way we can stop this is by everyone, on every level, doing their bit, from individuals to international bodies that represent groups of nations. Brazilian President

Bolsonaro, it seems, has so far shown no interest in averting the climate catastrophe or in putting forward some climate action. I will be very political here: he is a populist leader who uses environmental chaos, social instability and economic disruption for his own political gain. He has no regard for the long-term implications of rainforest destruction. It would be naive to think that Bolsonaro turns a blind eye only for short-term financial success. Burning down the rainforests and literally fuelling the climate crisis is consistent with his disruptive political agenda. It matters that we stand up to these populist leaders who seek to divide people, not only for the people of this world but for the planet.

I fully agree with the petition, signed by 122,578 people across the UK. We cannot afford to sit on the fence and let other countries do the work. If the Government are serious about reaching net zero and about preserving our environment for future generations, we must do more now. Liberal Democrat MEPs have been playing a central role within the EU in challenging Mr Bolsonaro’s policy and in working with other EU partners to figure out how to challenge his destructive agenda. I take the point of the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) that it is no good only to impose sanctions. However, the European Union, which is usually very good on international co-operation, has proposed this path, and I believe that the British Government should fall in line and do the same and really put some stick into their actions towards the Brazilian Government.

International pressure is the way to build incentives for Brazil to protect its rainforest and step up in the fight against the climate crisis. This is where our membership of the EU is central, allowing us to lead the fight against populism and climate destruction. By promising to leave the EU on 31 October, the Government are recklessly putting the UK out into the cold, where our power and influence will be much diminished. The fight to reach net zero and save our planet for future generations will be the biggest challenge we have ever faced. We owe it to future generations to act and do something now.

Matt Western: The hon. Lady makes some powerful points. Does she agree—the point was made by the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine)—that this is almost like a double whammy? It is not just the fact that we depend on these international organisations to oversee and to show responsibility for these challenges, which are multinational, not national, and that leaving the EU will make things so much tougher for us. To underline the point, as the hon. Member for Winchester was saying, it is also about where we see ourselves, and the opportunities and challenges, and perhaps the threats, of doing global trade deals and free trade agreements with countries such as Brazil when we are in a weaker position. There will be a hint of desperation about our trying to strike an early deal with them. We may seek to get exports to them, but are we prepared to take more beef from them, which of course comes at the expense of the rainforest? Does she agree that it is not simply about international organisations but also our future trade arrangements and the power we have or do not have in them?

Wera Hobhouse: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. Again, who do we see ourselves to be in the world? Will we support nationalist Governments who,

ultimately, when it really becomes difficult, will put up fences, pull up the drawbridge and not let people in anymore, saying, “Well, we are okay; sod everybody else”? Sorry, Mrs Moon.

International solidarity and our humanity demand of us to act globally and not just to do things in our national interest. I have always believed that being a member of the European Union is part of that attitude of being global and thinking co-operatively, not only in our own national interest. Of course, national interest matters, and everybody can discover their national interest at some point, but it is very dangerous to think in that way. We have to solve global challenges globally and be a good global player, and wow, hasn't Britain been leading the way internationally for so many decades? I have become a proud British citizen because I believe in that sort of Britain, not in a small-minded, narrow Britain.

We cannot get there without global action, and we must respond with one voice when a leader like Bolsonaro fails to take the climate crisis seriously. I hope that the Minister will take on board what has been said so far this afternoon.

5.47 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. As we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) and for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and the hon. Members for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and for Winchester (Steve Brine), we have a real crisis on our hands.

Although Parliament did declare a climate emergency, “emergency” seems to have slipped from the lexicon, so it is really important that we in the debate ensure that the Government hear very clearly their responsibility not just for our generation but for future generations, and not just for our nation but as a global partner, to ensure that we get this right. After all, it is only a fleeting time that we are on this planet, and we therefore carry such a huge responsibility, not least in being elected to this place, to ensure that we do absolutely everything within our power to make sure that we address the climate injustice that we see at this time.

As has already been described, the Amazon basin sits there as home and habitat to unique biospheres, and the accelerating pace at which it is being degraded, under the leadership of Mr Bolsonaro, is of real concern. I therefore believe that we in Parliament have a responsibility to put pressure on leaderships where they fail. We speak so much about how we have such global influence—I have heard it in debate after debate since being in the House—but unless we use it, it is futile.

We recognise the progress that Brazil has made in setting stringent targets for itself and moving towards those. However, if it is now regressing, as seems to be the case, all of that is tokenistic and we therefore have a serious responsibility not only to get to grips with the issues before us, but to ensure that other countries do likewise, in solidarity with us, and to apply the appropriate pressure—leverage—and put our power in the right place to ensure that Brazil falls into line. The same applies to many other countries where we are also seeing deforestation.

We must remind ourselves that of the 7 million sq km of the Amazon basin, 5.5 million sq km are covered by rainforest, of which 60% is in Brazil, so Brazil is significant in this debate. One in 10 species lives in the Amazon, and a quarter of terrestrial species. It accounts for half the world's tropical forest area. Thirty-four million people also live there, and 385 indigenous groups depend on its resources. We have not heard about the people in this debate, but it is vital that we protect their environment, the environment in which they live, as opposed to seeing them moved out of places where for generations they have respected and treated with such kindness and diligence their local environment.

Of course, South America is such an incredible carbon store but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge said, we are seeing the loss of the equivalent of 5.7 football pitches every minute. That must wake us up. It is worth repeating until they are etched on our minds the statistics for the scale of devastation that we are seeing.

That is why Brazil's commitment at COP 24 was so significant. It stated that carbon emissions were to decrease by 37% by 2025 and 43% by 2030. It is extremely alarming that we have heard that President Bolsonaro wants to withdraw from the Paris agreement. At COP 24, it was stated that 94 million more hectares in the key biomes would be protected; that was on top of the 335 already protected areas.

We are seeing regression. We are seeing Bolsonaro looking the other way. The first part of 2019 has seen an 88% rise in the rate of deforestation. The *New Scientist* reported that in July alone—just one month; 31 days—3,700 sq km were lost. And there has been an 84% increase in fires compared with the same period just one year previously—77,000 fires have been recorded in satellite data.

We have not taken our eye off the ball, but we cannot do nothing at this time and just comment, as we are doing today in this Chamber; we have to act. The facts can no longer be hidden. We see the propaganda machines come out to challenge the figures, but technology itself is telling the story for us.

We have seen the rise in agricultural activity, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East highlighted. I am referring to the beef industry, soy, logging, mining, land speculation—the buying up of this vital habitat—and urban development on core sites. Of course, this is driven not just by internal politics, but by international trade, financing and political determinations. And it is all happening at a time when enforcement agencies in Brazil are being stripped of their funding and their ability to act.

Matt Western: May I intervene on the point about international agencies and enforcement? My hon. Friend mentioned logging. Does she share my concern and my belief that at this time there is an opportunity through the United Nations and CITES—the convention on international trade in endangered species—to ensure that there are greater controls over not just the logging, but the markets and the opportunities to sell the timber products around the world? We are seeing rosewood, teak and so on being lost, for all sorts of things—garden furniture and other products—which is really unnecessary in this era. Does my hon. Friend share my concern and my belief that through the UN and CITES we should be putting an absolute stop to that, so that there is no market?

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the role of CITES and the UN. I shall highlight some other ways in which I believe we could bring pressure to bear in order to protect this habitat. The fact that goods can be traded, and across the agricultural sector as well, means that we have a serious problem. When we start seeing the label “Brazil”, we have to be able to make inquiries as to where things have been sourced. The same applies to places elsewhere in the world. When I was a shadow Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister, I was looking at the labelling that we have on all our products, because the right labelling is essential. Our inquiring minds should not have to go and research everything that we purchase; we should be able easily to access data to understand the source. We might make different consumption choices if that were the case.

This is not just another problem in another country on a far-off continent; this is where 15% of global terrestrial photosynthesis takes place. We think of the rainforest as the lungs of our planet, sequestering carbon and driving climate, precipitation and weather systems. Our battle with climate deterioration is caught up in the Amazon story. Events that happen in the UK are the result of what is happening across the Amazon, so our actions at this time really matter. Whether in the Amazon, Borneo and Indonesia, west Africa or the US, the pace of deforestation is alarming, and actions to respond to that will provide real resistance to climate degradation.

COP 24 was a hopeful moment. However, we are all realistic enough to know that unless we see global action taken, the Paris accord will be futile. I do not belittle the agreements, such as the tropical forest alliance, to which the UK is a signatory, and I urge the Government to use greater influence within these alliances for global action. Nor do I belittle the drops of money that we have placed in the ocean needed to tackle the global climate catastrophe. But it is clear that the political and financial relationships of the UK and global partners also have a significant role to play.

As the UK this summer launched a new trade facilitation programme with Brazil to support exports to the UK, I ask the Minister how that has specifically brought pressure to bear on Mr Bolsonaro to change his approach. What efforts are being made in the City and, no doubt, UK pension funds and investments to withdraw from companies exploiting the Amazon region? Where is the market transparency? Where are we seriously lessening the demand for products, ranging from minerals to meat, to take away the case for destroying our rainforests?

Mark Menzies: Does the hon. Lady agree that it is really important that we encourage the City of London, for example, to invest in ethical funds, particularly those seeking to unleash the huge potential that I alluded to in my speech with regard to renewable energy, particularly offshore wind, for which Brazil’s coastline is unmatched in terms of ability to produce?

Rachael Maskell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I listened carefully to his speech. Across the globe there is so much untapped resource with which we could transform our energy market. It is really important that we look at that seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield referred to the talent within Brazil to bring about such a transformation.

It does not necessarily have to come from the UK; it could come from Brazil as well. It could bring transformation to the whole region. I agree that there are real opportunities. As we look to green new deals, we do not want to see them just in the UK; we want to see them spring up across the world.

However, we do have a role in applying leverage over the protection of natural resources; otherwise, our battle with the climate will be lost. Real climate justice must be rooted in making the connection between politics, finance and climate change. Where harm is occurring in one corner of the world, the consequences will be felt by us all, and of course the least resilient will feel them the most. Therefore, we cannot deal with this issue just as nation states, or see it as our responsibility just to have jurisdiction over our country. These are global issues, and as internationalists it is vital that we address them globally.

We cannot afford not to apply that leverage. The cost of climate degradation to the UK and to developing countries—through global inequality, population migration, flood and famine—is too great. The UK boasts of its place in the global economic market, but unless we use our power to force change, we will be complicit with the actions of Bolsonaro.

This petition, signed by 303 of my constituents, calls for trade sanctions, one measure among many to pressurise the Brazilian Government. The Government’s response to the petition was woeful. It stated:

“The United Kingdom will continue to monitor the situation in the Amazon closely”.

How will that help? They talk about “dialogue with Brazil”—really? We are currently part of the UN and the EU. How are we using our leverage to ensure that those responsible for not only Amazon deforestation but the wider global climate crisis are held to account?

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Paris was a landmark agreement, but with Bolsonaro wanting to withdraw, and the UK Government well off target for meeting their fourth and fifth carbon budgets, it is clear that declarations are not enough; global leverage is now needed. When atrocities are committed, we have an international process of justice in The Hague to deal with those responsible through the International Court of Justice. However, the millions who are affected by climate degradation have no such seat of justice.

If we leave the EU, we will see the powers of the EU courts removed and, short of the environment Bill filling the deficit, accountability over pollution and environmental destruction will be severely weakened. The UN may pass resolutions, which are valued, but the leverage it applies is all too weak. The likes of Bolsonaro will be able to laugh at the UN, the EU and the UK, unless we first apply a comprehensive approach of political, trade and financial sanctions.

Further, in the light of the climate crisis, we must seriously explore the leverage we can apply through a system of global justice to those who breach global agreements, whether a signatory to them or not. The level of devastation to our climate is so significant that it demands an international judicial approach, with powers to strip assets from companies that breach international agreements and political Administrations

that enable them to do so. We have a role in shaping the future and leading the world in these matters, and I want to hear what the Minister will do to that end. I know that we cannot sit back and wait. We need innovative and harsh solutions to tackle the crisis that we are facing.

I want to end by reflecting on the climate strikes, and the words of one boy who spoke in York. His speech was very short. As he got up and left his class to join the climate strikers, his teacher called out, "What difference are you going to make as one person?" He said, "Let's see" and walked out of the room. He spoke at that climate strike and I spoke to him. I am now speaking to the Minister. Let's see what difference that boy can make, as well as the thousands of young people who have come out on to the streets, the people protesting from Extinction Rebellion and the global movement that is building today. Let's see how the Minister responds. Let us hope that we can really address this climate emergency and put real measures in place that will transform this very serious situation today.

6.3 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Members who have spoken in favour of this motion. I was particularly taken by the speeches made by my hon. Friends the Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) and for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), as well as the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse). They all spoke eloquently about the need for urgent action, and I agree wholeheartedly with their support for the petition.

I would like to address two key points, which have been mentioned but perhaps need some further emphasis: first, the scale of the challenge; and, secondly, the need for an urgent response. It is vital to consider where we are with climate change, to look at the term "climate emergency" and consider what it really means, and then to look at the range of potential responses available to Governments around the world.

Regarding the science of climate change, it is fair to say—without being an expert, but as a relatively well-informed observer—that we are approaching a serious tipping point. I do not say that lightly. It is really clear from the evidence from the UN reports, and other independent science from a range of universities and other scientific bodies around the world, that the climate faces a tipping point.

That is not a small tweak or a little change, but a fundamental change. It means that we are on a path to the destruction of humanity on this planet, because of the rising proportion of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere which cause or facilitate climate change. As humans, we are ultimately responsible for that process. The data is clear on the number of warm years recently, and the amount of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere, which has been measured since the 1950s. The link with climate change is clear.

We now sit on the edge of the abyss, and we have to do something about that. I think that it is perfectly reasonable and responsible to do so, given the situation that we now face, which is demonstrated by the melting and the threat of melting of great ice sheets—not just of relatively modest areas of ice, but of the West Antarctic

ice sheet and the Greenland ice sheet—which would dramatically increase the sea level around the world, and which would lead to large parts of the planet being uninhabitable, including in parts of Great Britain. Many coastal cities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and towns next to rivers, such as Reading and Woodley in my constituency, could be very seriously affected by this level of change. Admittedly, that would be over many decades, but it would mean saying to our children in our old age, "We failed, and we failed very seriously."

In that context, I think it is perfectly reasonable for protestors outside, and for us in this House, to use the term "climate emergency". We should not shy away from it. I am sure the Minister will address that with the level of gravity that this serious situation demands. That is my first point. I am grateful to colleagues who made points clearly in support of that and highlighted the particular issues in Brazil, where the Amazon is greatly important. It is a huge carbon sink, but it is under threat from the dreadfully irresponsible fires, which the Government of Brazil have so wrongly allowed to take place.

My second point is on a different note, but it addresses the first one. There is a need for urgent and sustained action. It is the duty of all Governments around the world, of whatever political colour, to join together and take that action now. The same goes for private individuals, companies, charities and schools. In whatever human organisation, we need to change our behaviour, whether that is by eating less meat, driving less or cycling rather than driving. There is a series of measures that we can all take in our daily lives.

As people in the developed world, we should not shy away from taking a clear stance with people in the developing world, however awkward that might seem. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) about the need to engage with civil society in Brazil, but we can do that by reinforcing the voices of those in Brazil who are calling for change and addressing the deep mistakes of that Government. In that context, this petition is absolutely right and we should take it seriously. I hope the Minister will address it and take it on. I urge him to take the matter very seriously, to leave no stone unturned and to consider this form of action. We should not take this potential policy lightly; it is necessary, given the situation, and I urge him to address the matter clearly.

6.8 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank all who have spoken. Everyone pointed in the same direction: urgent action is needed now. I thank those who initiated and added their signature to this petition. I believe there are more than 122,000 signatories, many hundreds of whom are from my city of Dundee. They have enabled us to have this important debate. I thank the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) for his insightful and informative speech, which opened the good debate we have had so far.

As many other hon. Members have noticed, it is particularly fitting that we are having this debate as Extinction Rebellion begins its two-week protest in and around Westminster. Last Friday, a couple of its members

[Chris Law]

came to see me to discuss what they should do while they are outside this week. I said, “The most important thing is to pressurise each and every one of your MPs to speak,” but I am afraid to say that although there are great speakers here, this Chamber is frankly not as ram-packed as it should be.

Extinction Rebellion has been clear that human activity is causing irreparable harm to life on this planet, and that we face a global climate emergency and mass extinction as a result. That is happening both here in the UK and across the planet, and the current situation in the Amazon is a sad illustration. The continued deforestation of the Amazon rainforest will only exacerbate the climate emergency that we face and accelerate the loss of species that we should be protecting.

The protection of the Amazon rainforest is of global importance. In simple terms, the Amazon rainforest serves as the lungs of our planet. It accounts for 15% of global terrestrial photosynthesis, absorbing huge amounts of carbon dioxide every year. At a time when we are acutely aware of the need to remove CO₂ from our atmosphere, it is dangerously counterproductive to risk the future of our planet by recklessly damaging a vital global resource.

More than 30 million people live in the Amazon, including between 300 and 400 indigenous groups. After my university studies in social anthropology, I had the opportunity to spend some time in the Amazon and listen to some of the many secrets and lessons that people have learned from living there. For many of them, the rainforest is not just their home; it is the home of their ancestors, it defines their daily lives and it is integral to their culture. Those people, who have lived and breathed the Amazon for generations, are the most likely to suffer as their needs are overlooked and their environment is destroyed in favour of the interests of those pursuing profit and economic growth regardless of the consequences.

Furthermore, the Amazon has an incredibly rich ecosystem, which we have a duty to protect. The rainforest contains one in 10 known species on Earth, including 40,000 plant species, 3,000 varieties of fish, and 1,300 types of bird. As the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) mentioned, there are medicines there waiting to be discovered, many of which may be life-saving. All of that is under threat from deforestation. The simple but sad fact is that once we destroy these species, we will never get them back. We must not let that happen. It should be unthinkable that future generations will grow up without such biodiversity in one of the world’s natural wonders, but without serious action we risk losing this vital asset, with devastating consequences.

We will have all seen the shocking images of fires in the Amazon rainforest over the summer; more than 30,000 were recorded in August alone. That has prompted much of the recent discussion on deforestation—a huge problem in the Amazon over the past 50 years, during which 17% of the forest cover has been devastated. We are all familiar with the reasons for deforestation: the expansion of extensive cattle farming and timber plantations, the increase of oil, gas and mining operations, and the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects such as big dams and roads.

Between 2004 and 2012, large-scale voluntary commitments, regulatory reforms and the creation of protected areas helped to result in a dramatic drop in deforestation in the Amazon; in 2012 Brazil recorded its lowest deforestation rate in the past 20 years. That would have been something to be proud of if the trend had not reversed since then, troublingly: deforestation began to rise again in 2016, and the rate of damage and loss over the past two years is higher than it was 20 years ago.

It is clear that we have not been vigilant enough in protecting our rainforests, and it appears that 2019 has been a particularly bad year. Deforestation rates in June were 88% higher than in June 2018, and according to preliminary satellite data, the losses in the first seven months of 2019 were 16% above the recent high of 3,183 sq km lost in 2016. We are witnessing disaster unfold before our eyes.

What is most troubling is the attitude of the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro. We know that he is sceptical about actions to curb climate change and that he wanted to pull Brazil out of the Paris climate change accord. He has spoken of the Amazon as a “virgin” that should be “exploited” for agriculture, mining and infrastructure projects. When Brazil’s institute for space research revealed the extent of deforestation this summer, he said that the numbers were fake, dismissed international concerns as sensationalist and sacked the head of the institute.

Bolsonaro’s stripping back of protections and anti-environmental rhetoric have clearly encouraged those who wish the deforestation of the Amazon for their own gain. Worryingly, they appear to be becoming something of a global pattern, with Bolsonaro following in the climate change-denying, anti-environmental footsteps of President Trump. Each President scorns the need to protect the environment, undermines the Paris agreement and is willing to sacrifice precious resources, which will only embolden the next populist leader elsewhere intent on dismissing the scientific evidence in front of us, turning their back on collective responsibility and refusing to take on the environmental challenge that we all face in favour of furthering their own short-term, narrow interests regardless of the consequences.

We must have a means to fight back against those attitudes and actions. Trade wars are in no-one’s best interest, but we must keep every option open to combat deforestation and the climate emergency. My SNP colleague in the European Parliament, Alyn Smith, has joined other MEPs across the member states in writing to the European Commission to urge it to make implementation of the Paris agreement on climate change a precondition for any country that wants to conclude a trade agreement with the European Union. Additionally, Ireland’s Taoiseach and France’s President have said that they will attempt to block the Mercosur trade agreement if Brazil continues to ignore its environmental commitments.

The UK Government should listen seriously to those words. They cannot continue with business as usual while Bolsonaro presides over the destruction of the Amazon. The deforestation of the Amazon is a global issue that requires a global response. It is evident that economic development will always trump environmental protection in the eyes of Brazil’s current President, and the UK cannot indulge and seek to benefit from Bolsonaro’s desire for growth and trade while the Amazon rainforest is sacrificed. In any future trade talks with Brazil, what

provisions will be made to disincentivise deforestation and ensure that goods that originate from illegally cleared land in the Amazon do not form part of any trade deal or find a way into the UK? We need a crystal-clear answer from the Minister today about the UK Government's plans.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we act not only as defenders of the environment, but as defenders of human rights. Bolsonaro has stated that "not a centimetre" more of land will be demarcated for indigenous reserves, and has transferred responsibility for delineating indigenous territories from the Justice Ministry to the Agriculture Ministry, which means putting people among cattle as if they were one and the same. That was seen by many people as a concession to the agriculture industry and an expression of his desire to pursue the expansion of agriculture at the expense of the rights of indigenous people—one lawmaker described it as "letting the fox take over the chicken coop."

Ensuring the territorial rights of indigenous peoples is an urgent imperative. What efforts are the UK Government making to ensure that those rights are protected? The protection of the Amazon cuts across foreign policy, trade policy and international development policy, so there must be coherence among the relevant Departments in how the UK tackles the ongoing problem of Amazon deforestation and of global climate change and environmental degradation more generally. As we know, policy coherence across the UK Government has been left wanting, so what steps are being taken to ensure policy coherence to tackle this hugely important problem in the short and medium term?

Throughout this debate, I have been reminded of the passionate words of Greta Thunberg at the UN last month:

"People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth."

Nothing exemplifies that more than the deforestation of the Amazon. It is one of the great tragedies of our time, and we must do everything we possibly can to stop it spiralling out of control.

6.18 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): It is very nice to see you in the Chair, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on his excellent and comprehensive introduction to the debate.

I am grateful to everyone who initiated and signed the petition, because it relates to a crucial problem for us all. As colleagues have said, it is appropriate that we are debating it while Extinction Rebellion is demonstrating outside. I find it incredible that some people seem to think that the big problem is that Westminster bridge is blocked. The big problem is that the Amazon has been on fire! We need to get these things in proportion.

The Amazon fires over the summer were not accidental or natural. They were lit deliberately, and they destroyed 7,000 square miles of forest. The situation is particularly worrying because once a large amount of forest is destroyed, we will get feedback mechanisms and we will not be able to control what goes on. Avoiding such a feedback mechanism here is one of the most important

things that we must do, because every year the Amazon rainforest absorbs a quarter of the carbon dioxide emitted across the whole world. That tells us that fires in the Amazon are not a Brazilian problem or a Latin American problem; they are our problem and everybody's problem, and we need to own the problem and tackle it in that spirit.

I am disappointed with the Government's tip-toeing approach, which suggests to me that they do not really understand the seriousness of the problem. I do not know why Government Ministers do not understand it; my constituents do. Di Murphy, who has set up Bishop Auckland Climate Action, understands it. Even 10-year-old Meredith Lambert Sams, who invited me to her primary school last week, understands it.

I went to Cotherstone Primary School on Friday and I was asked a lot of questions by the extremely well-informed children. The most worrying question came from a boy who said to me, "What I don't understand is why proper action hasn't been taken already." I have to say that I was quite stumped by that, because it is not as if we have not known about this situation for 10 years, 20 years or 50 years. How bad does it have to get before we take proper action? There is absolutely no longer any room for complacency whatsoever. We only have 12 years now, and we have to sort this out.

We are really concerned about the Amazon because of the impact it has on the climate, and that is the priority. However, I will just remind people of the Amazon's biodiversity, because we do not inhabit this globe alone; we do so alongside other species. The Amazon is one of the Earth's last refuges for jaguars, harpy eagles, pink dolphins, two-toed sloths, pygmy marmosets, saddleback and emperor tamarins, and Goeldi's monkeys. There are also thousands of birds, butterflies and other insects there. When we think about looking after the planet, we have to do so not only for ourselves, but for all the marvellous range of biodiversity that currently exists.

I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) has left the Chamber. He said that he was very concerned and that we should not implement trade sanctions, because we should have a more collaborative approach with the indigenous people. I think he has not read the petition, which says:

"Indigenous people have called for the EU to impose trade sanctions on Brazil to halt the deforestation because they fear genocide."

The indigenous people of the Amazon have been living there in a sustainable way for generations. The hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) is right that with modern science we can use the resources of the Amazon in new and creative ways, particularly in medicine. However, we need to be very careful about behaving as if we are the experts and the indigenous people do not know what they are doing, because it is clear that their way of life does not destroy the Amazon in the way that ours does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made an excellent speech about the exploitation of forests and the urgent need for us to cut our meat consumption. When she and I first discussed the issue three years ago, I thought she was being a bit zany, but I have been totally persuaded that she has a strong case and that we need to think about this issue and act on it,

[Helen Goodman]

both as individuals and as a nation. We need to move from talking about the situation to taking action, and some actions are particularly pertinent in this context.

The petition calls for trade sanctions, and we have had quite a lot of debate about whether we need to collaborate or have trade sanctions. I am not sure that that is necessarily a choice. Let us look at a connected area of public policy. Of course we put money into universities to finance research and development, but we also have laws to protect people's intellectual property. We can have a "both/and" approach. We can collaborate, but we need to have sanctions for when things go wrong.

As my hon. Friend did, I will refer to a debate that I initiated a few years ago and a speech that I made at that time. We had a debate before the Paris summit; it was a Backbench Business Committee debate in the main Chamber. Everybody was saying, "Oh, it's all going to be absolutely marvellous, because everybody's going to turn up and they will volunteer their contributions, and that's the way to get everybody on board, and it will all be absolutely marvellous." I stood up and said—I am afraid that people thought I was zany then—"This is no good, because these commitments are not legally binding, and if they're not legally binding how can we be confident that we are going to meet the targets that we have to meet? The science is not going to change, and we know how much carbon we must not burn. Therefore, we need to make commitments that will achieve the scientific objective, and they need to be legally binding." Legally binding commitments mean that there is a penalty for countries that do not abide by them.

We should think about other areas of international law where there are penalties for countries that do not fulfil their obligations, and we should borrow our experience from other areas of international law and—"adapt" is not the right word—use them in the area of the environment. I will give an example. When Russia invaded Ukraine, we imposed sanctions. We were appalled by that invasion, and we thought it was absolutely dreadful. However, when Canada left Kyoto, we took no action whatsoever. Now Bolsonaro is behaving in an utterly irresponsible way, as hon. Members have set out, but we are proposing to take no action. That is not serious, and we need to get serious about this issue. We need to have legally binding international agreements.

One of my asks of the Minister today is this: before Ministers go to Chile for the next round of international negotiations, and while they are considering what the format and structure should be, we need to have a proper and clear legal base. We need to move away from voluntarism and towards legally binding treaties.

As colleagues have already said, the danger in the Mercosur deal is that if we cut tariffs on beef, we incentivise the destruction of the rainforest by Brazil and the other Latin American countries, so that we become complicit in that destruction. I raised this issue with the Minister in the main Chamber at Foreign Office questions. He said that he did not think I was right about this issue, because he thought that cutting tariffs was good for the poorest people, including farmers on the lowest incomes, in Brazil. I am afraid I do not believe that argument, because we see in this petition

that the indigenous people—they are the poorest people in Brazil—want tougher action. We have also seen that with large-scale ranching, large agribusinesses and multinational companies make the profits. The Minister really needs to rethink that argument. We need to line up with France, Ireland and other countries, and say no. A trade deal must be done on the basis that it is consistent with Brazil's—

Kerry McCarthy: My hon. Friend is making a great and passionate speech. According to figures I have seen from the International Labour Organisation, some 62% of slave labour in Brazil is employed in livestock farming-related businesses. As she says, it is not the indigenous people who are benefiting from the trade, and people are being grossly exploited at its heart.

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and she brings me on to my next action. The fact of the matter is—we see this all over the world—that environmental destruction and human rights abuses are often going on in the same places at the same time, all jumbled up. We are seeing that here, too. That is one reason why I hope the Government will take a more sympathetic view than they do currently to the ongoing negotiations in Geneva on the UN binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights. That treaty would put obligations on transnational corporations to respect human rights, and we could extend that to respecting environmental rights, too.

The No. 1 priority is not to sign a trade deal that will incentivise further destruction of the rainforest, but there are a range of things that the Minister could do. We are discussing the issue here, and the Pope is holding an Amazon synod in Rome. I was struck by what he said in opening the meeting on Saturday; it was appropriate and it set the problem in its context. In Rome, he has groups representing 400 indigenous communities alongside him. He said that we have to stop

"the greed of new forms of colonialism."

6.31 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Christopher Pincher): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to attend this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on introducing it, and I congratulate all Members who have contributed on what they have said. It may be that we disagree on some of the solutions, but I do not think anyone will disagree with the passion and expertise that has been brought to the Chamber today. I will try to address as many as I can of the points that Members have raised, but to begin I will draw out two points.

The first relates to something that the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) said. She mentioned some interesting diversification initiatives, and I am happy to talk to her about some of those. I was on the Energy and Climate Change Committee between 2010 and 2015, and I remember looking at the question of how best to increase awareness and change the choices that drive carbon emissions. We looked at whether it was possible to measure carbon emissions by production or whether it was better to do it by consumption, which Members have mentioned today.

The Committee's finding was that to go down the route of measuring carbon emissions by consumption and imposing penalties or sanctions or modelling policy around that approach might risk trade conflict, which

would hurt not only those who are consuming the goods, possibly in the west, but those who are producing them in low-wage developing economies. That was the view at the time.

I was also struck by the speech of my hon. Friend—I call him a friend—the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who gave a sad story of his poetic limitations. In fact, I thought he had gone away a moment ago to write yet another poem. He made reference to what our policy will be in the future, and he made a veiled reference to Mercosur and our attitude to it, which the hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) also referenced. Mercosur will not be signed any time soon, and by the time it is, we will be out of the European Union and it will not be a trade agreement for us to sign. We will be free to develop and model our own trading agreements and arrangements, and how they look, what they feel like and what they smell like will be a matter for the British Government.

Whether there are environmental elements in those trade deals is still to be determined, but I believe—here, again, I take issue with the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland—that when tariffs are imposed or are not removed, we hurt poor people. Tariffs on food tend to hurt the poorest, so I would support a wide-ranging free trading policy. I discourage her from channelling her inner protectionist and pursuing a policy that would hurt everybody, including her constituents and indigenous communities in the rainforest.

Steve Brine: Will the Minister give way?

Christopher Pincher: Yes. I have only just begun; I have not even got on to my speech proper, rather like the hon. Member for Cambridge.

Steve Brine: I thank the Minister for addressing my point. I will not say this in prose, but obviously we will be outside of being a member state and that trade deal will be signed by the remaining members of the European Union. Were the Government to consider a trade deal with Brazil in the future, does the Minister agree that Brazil's approach to tackling climate change should be a consideration that would be discussed by his colleagues in the Department for International Trade?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. He said he will not speak in prose, but I will speak in plain verse: it is for Britain to decide what its trade policy and the models it applies in free trade agreements will be. That is a future decision for the Government to take. I am sure there will be debate on the matter across the House and through Government.

Matt Western: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Christopher Pincher: I will give way on that point, and then I really have to get into my speech, otherwise we will be here until 7.30 pm.

Matt Western: I thank the Minister for giving way specifically on that point. He will know, as will others in the Chamber, that a Trade Bill has been sat on the shelf waiting for more than a year. I sat on the Trade Bill Committee. That Bill included certain protections, certain measures and certain bodies that would have had some say in how we should be constructing our trade deals, whether that was on an ethical basis or through such

bodies as the trade remedies authority. Those sorts of things would have come into play. The concern that most people in this Chamber, in Parliament and across the country will have is that those sorts of protections will not be available because the Trade Bill will no longer exist.

Christopher Pincher: Assuming that Prorogation takes place tomorrow, the hon. Gentleman is right, but there will be a trade Bill or trade Bills in the future, where I am sure those issues can be re-addressed.

The fires that ravaged the Amazon rainforest over the summer were not only heartbreaking for the people of the region—we have heard some of the stories this afternoon—but were and are a concern for all of us who care about biodiversity and climate. In some places, the devastating surge in fires has followed a sharp rise in deforestation rates this year. As has been pointed out already, deforestation has been on the increase not since 2015, which is what I said in the Chamber—I must correct the record—but since 2012, which of course predates the Bolsonaro Government. It is clear that although the recent fires may have been exacerbated by low rainfall and in some cases by strong winds, a key cause remains the use of fire to clear the rainforest for agriculture.

In Brazil, as we have heard, record numbers of fires have occurred during this year's dry season, prompting international concern and prompting President Bolsonaro to send more than 40,000 military personnel to the Amazon to bring the fires under control, but the effect remains unclear. It is worth pointing out something that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) alluded to: Bolivia has suffered a similar fate this summer.

Fires since August have destroyed nearly two million hectares of Bolivian forest, including in the Chiquitania, the largest dry forest on Earth. In response, President Morales and opposition parties suspended campaigning activities for their October presidential elections and the Government set up an emergency environmental cabinet in the affected area. Europe, the United States, Russia and Bolivia's neighbours have provided the most help to bring the fires under control. British experts were among the first to offer assistance and to be deployed. Rains in the past week have begun to extinguish the fires. I mention Bolivia simply to remind all hon. Members that the problem is not simply a Brazilian one, so we cannot lay the blame at the door of the Brazilian Government and President. There are other reasons for the problems that the rainforest faces.

We respect absolutely the sovereignty of the countries of the region over the rainforest, but that sovereignty comes with a responsibility to protect and preserve that precious resource. Although it is regrettable that some Governments initially sought to play down the extent of the problem, we welcome the current and historic leadership shown by the region to address the fires: for example, the creation of the forest codes in Brazil, which legally require landowners in the Brazilian Amazon to maintain 80% of the land as forest. It is also worth pointing out that on 27 August, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Brazilian Foreign Minister, who made it clear that anyone setting fires in the rainforest will be prosecuted. In fact, prosecutions are under way and the penalties for such fires include imprisonment.

[Christopher Pincher]

Last month at the regional summit hosted by President Duque of Colombia, seven regional leaders signed the Leticia pact for the Amazon. Leaders pledged to improve co-ordination to prevent and manage forest fires, share best practice, and develop initiatives to accelerate reforestation and build sustainable forest economies. We fully support that regionally-led initiative and stand ready to help. The United Kingdom Government are committed to working with Amazon countries to support efforts to protect and restore the Amazon rainforest. Over many years we have partnered with communities, businesses and state and national Governments in Brazil and the wider Amazon region to preserve and restore rainforests for the benefit of people and nature, and for our collective effort to tackle the threat of climate change. Since 2012—this is another point I made in the Chamber during Foreign Office questions—the United Kingdom Government have committed £120 million in international climate finance programmes operating to reduce deforestation in Brazil and a further £70 million in Colombia. That suggests we are doing a lot more than nothing. That investment generates benefits for the local environment, for local communities and for the global climate.

At the G7, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—helpfully trailed by the hon. Member for Cambridge—pledged a further £10 million for our international climate finance work to support the longer-term efforts to tackle deforestation in Brazil. That will expand an existing programme that supports the protection and restoration of Brazil's rainforests, including areas affected by the recent fires.

Matt Rodda: I thank the Minister for giving way on that point. It is interesting to hear him tiptoe around some of the issues in this important debate. Given the scale of the challenge that we face across the world, does he feel that £10 million is enough money to deploy on this important issue?

Christopher Pincher: We are spending £120 million, not £10 million. The hon. Gentleman is a little ahead of me, but I will mention some rather larger figures as my speech develops.

It is important to build an international coalition around our ambition, so we have worked with Germany and Norway to mobilise \$5 billion—there is the big number—between 2015 and 2020 to help reduce tropical deforestation in developing countries. Our support helps to improve the capacity of national and regional Governments to reduce deforestation. It incentivises the protection of forests, conserves a way of life for many unique indigenous groups, and enables businesses and communities to build sustainable economies without destroying tropical rainforests, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) eloquently described. He has now gone off to a Delegated Legislation Committee, which is why he is not here for the wind-ups.

One of our programmes supports indigenous Brazil nut collectors to cut out the middleman and sell directly to mainstream buyers. Perhaps that is not such a difficult nut to crack. Furthermore, as a result of our Cerrado programme in Brazil, 38,017 farmers were

enrolled onto the rural land registry, representing some 861,000 hectares of land where sustainable practices have now been adopted.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the Minister really believe that the young impatient people out there, and the older impatient people, will find what he has said to be a satisfactory answer to all that we have just heard about this year being the most devastating for deforestation in the Amazon? The Government really need to do better. Does the Minister really think that the people out there who have been campaigning, and who will campaign for the next two weeks, will be satisfied with what he has just said?

Christopher Pincher: I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the people out on the streets of London campaigning about the impact of climate change, but it is better for us to work with economies such as Brazil's, the ninth largest economy in the world, than to work against them in order to achieve the objectives that we all want, which is to see carbon emissions reduced, the rainforest restored and the poorest people get richer.

The United Kingdom is leading the world in the fight against rising temperatures, reducing our emissions by over 40% since 1990 and legislating for net zero emissions by 2050. We were one of the first major economies to do so. Since 1990, our economy has grown by 66%, so I disagree with those who suggest that there is a conflict between better trade, growth in economies and environmental concerns and calls for action.

Kerry McCarthy: Can I ask the Minister how this works in terms of co-operation between Government Departments? The other day in the Chamber, I asked the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about the things I highlighted in my speech today and she basically said it was an issue for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and not anything to do with her. I said, "It is because it is about climate change and that is your brief." We also hear reports of Ministers in the Department for International Trade lobbying on behalf of BP at meetings in Brazil. On the other hand, we talk about reducing our fossil fuel use in this country, so there does not seem to be much joined-up working.

Christopher Pincher: That charge can be levelled at Governments of all stripes down the ages. Government Departments work together to try to achieve the right result in this arena. For example, BEIS officials are embedded in the COP 25 plan, and in that meeting, to ensure that it is handed over to us smoothly at COP 26, with objectives that can be taken up in the Italian-British conference of the parties.

As we have all alluded to, we cannot tackle this threat to our very existence on our own. Only through international co-operation can we protect our precious planet, and protecting forests is essential if we are to meet our global climate change goals. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change special report on global warming makes it clear that the preservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests is critical for limiting global temperature rises to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

Our global leadership on climate change helped us to win our bid to host COP 26 next year. We will make telling progress towards carbon-neutral global growth only if we act together as a global community. That means that we need to have all the countries in the Amazon onside. Brazil is particularly important on climate change and deforestation, and has a critical role to play as a partner. We must work together to find solutions, which is why we have an ongoing dialogue with Brazil on these issues at ministerial and official level.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met last week with Brazil's Environment Minister, Ricardo Salles, and she stressed the importance of efforts to halt deforestation. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to the Brazilian Foreign Minister, and I have met the Brazilian ambassador, Mr Arruda. We are committed to working with Brazil and other Amazon countries to tackle climate change and deforestation.

Rachael Maskell: I am listening carefully to the Minister's speech, and to the diplomatic channels that the Government want to pursue to influence Brazil's response to deforestation. However, could the Minister set out exactly what sanction or leverage they will apply? If talk is not enough and Brazil is determined to do something different, it seems that the exercise is quite futile.

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I do not think that talk of sanctions will help the cause. Threatening Brazil will not encourage President Bolsonaro or his Government to talk with us about how we can collaboratively tackle the problem. It is better that we engage sensitively and sensibly than engage in megaphone diplomacy from afar.

We all care deeply about the future of our planet, and we are determined that COP 26 will deliver a greater ambition. It will promote tangible action to deliver the transformational change required by the Paris agreement. We are working closely with Chile to ensure a smooth handover from COP 25, as I described, and we firmly support Chile's desire for an ambitious, blue COP 25 with a strong focus on oceans.

We remain committed to supporting the countries of the Amazon to tackle deforestation. Those countries will be vital allies in the fight against climate change. Brazil particularly, as home to 60% of the Amazon and 12% of the world's forests, has a crucial role to play if we are to achieve our climate ambitions at COP 26 and beyond. If future climate negotiations are to succeed, we need to engage with Brazil and her neighbours positively and maintain a constructive dialogue, not shout at them from afar.

At the same time, the United Kingdom Government will continue to raise our concerns about deforestation and to support initiatives that protect the Amazon rainforest. Only through partnership and dialogue will we be able to preserve those precious tropical forests and avert the gravest forecasts of climate change. That is the responsible approach, the approach that will address the passions of the people outside the Chamber as well as within it, and the approach that the Government are determined to take.

6.55 pm

Daniel Zeichner: Thank you, Sir Roger, for chairing the debate. We have had a full debate, during the course of which we have heard from, I think, five political parties. For much of the debate, I was greatly enthused and encouraged, because there was seemingly a lot of common ground. Some thorny issues, such as sovereignty, were raised by a number of people, including the hon. Members for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and for Winchester (Steve Brine). I think the emerging conclusion was that this is a global crisis and a global responsibility, in which we all have a role to play. Both Front-Bench spokespeople made powerful speeches with which I strongly agreed.

I was hoping that I would hear a positive, civilised and courteous response from the Minister, but I have to say that in policy terms, for me and I suspect for others, it was profoundly disappointing, not least because when invited to suggest that in future trade deals environmental considerations would be a key part, there was a stunning silence. The Minister said only that there would be trade deals. Well, they will not be very quick—we know that for sure—and we also know that there is an urgency about everything.

I did not hear even a suggestion of criticism of the Brazilian Government, which would not be very hard to do given their record. Of course, they will watch the debate and hear what we say, so it is important that our contributions are measured and constructive. However, we must also say very clearly to people on the global stage who are damaging our climate and planet that that will not go unchallenged. Frankly, I am deeply disappointed, as the petitioners and the people outside surely are, to hear that our Government are so weak in their response. The conclusion I have come to is that the Government are not part of the solution; frankly, they are part of the problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 266638 relating to deforestation in the Amazon.

6.57 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Petition

Monday 7 October 2019

OBSERVATIONS

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union

The petition of Residents of Corby and East Northamptonshire, and the surrounding areas.

Declares that the Brexit that the petitioners voted for should be adhered to and delivered in full by Her Majesty's Government; notes that the free-movement of people from the EU should be ended; further that immigration should be better controlled and the system fair; further that the United Kingdom should stop sending billions of pounds each year to Brussels; further that the United Kingdom should be allowed to make its own laws in our own country; and further that those laws should be judged by our own judges.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Prime Minister to take into account the concerns of petitioners and deliver the Brexit which the British people voted for.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tom Purslove, *Official Report*, 22 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 1165.]

[P002495]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge):

The Government are committed to delivering Brexit, and will not be deterred from delivering the will of the people and leaving the European Union on 31 October.

The Government must fulfill the repeated promises of Parliament to the people by coming out of the European Union. The people gave their instructions to Parliament in the referendum in 2016, both main parties pledged to respect that result in the election in 2017, and now we must deliver on that pledge. Politicians cannot choose which public votes to respect.

Leaving the EU will mean we have control of our own trade; we will no longer have to make financial contributions to the EU budget; our own laws and courts will be supreme within the UK; and only our Parliament will have the power to set our taxes.

When the UK leaves the EU, free movement as it currently stands will end. As we leave the EU, there will be a transition to a new points-based immigration system, built around the skills and talent people have, not where they are from. The new points-based immigration system will be introduced from January 2021. Until then, much of the free movement migration framework will remain until the UK Parliament passes legislation to repeal the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2016. Ahead of that, the Government will introduce some changes to that framework to reflect that the UK is no longer part of the EU, to increase security and better protect the UK public.

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 7 October 2019

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Women's Mental Health

The following are extracts from the debate on Women's Mental Health on 3 October 2019.

Ms Dorries: On the maternal six-week check, we hope to ensure that that happens in all our GP contracts going forward.

[Official Report, 3 October 2019, Vol. 664, c. 1441.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries):

An error have been identified in my winding-up speech during the debate on Women's Mental Health.

The correct information should have been:

Ms Dorries: On the maternal six-week check, we **will look at that happening** in all our GP contracts going forward.

Ms Dorries: The Government fully supported the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill—a private Member's Bill that became an Act of Parliament on 1 November 2018. The Act imposes requirements regarding the use of force, the publication of data, and how and when physical, mechanical and chemical force is used, as well as requirements for improved staff training. We want to end restraint. We know that it continues to be a routine occurrence on many wards, affecting women and girls disproportionately. That has to end.

[Official Report, 3 October 2019, Vol. 664, c. 1443.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries):

An error has been identified in my winding-up speech during the debate on Women's Mental Health.

The correct information should have been:

Ms Dorries: The Government fully supported the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill—a private Member's Bill that became an Act of Parliament on 1 November 2018. The Act imposes requirements regarding the use of force, the publication of data, and how and when physical, mechanical and chemical force is used, as well as requirements for improved staff training. We want to **minimise the use of** restraint. We know that it continues to be a routine occurrence on many wards, **with prone restraint** affecting women and girls disproportionately. That has to end.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 7 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
WORK AND PENSIONS	1477	WORK AND PENSIONS—continued	
Child Poverty	1493	Terminally Ill People	1477
Contracted-out Health Assessments	1478	Topical Questions	1494
Disabled People	1491	Universal Credit: Disabled Claimants	1480
Employment: Young People	1485	Universal Credit: Financial Resilience	1481
In-work Poverty	1484	Universal Credit: First Payments	1489
Spending Round 2019	1490	Universal Credit: Identity Verification	1492
State Pension: Women	1487	Universal Credit: Wages	1488

PETITION

Monday 7 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	13P	
The Exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union	13P	

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 7 October 2019

	<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	11MC
Women's Mental Health	11MC

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**not later than
Monday 14 October 2019**

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CONTENTS

Monday 7 October 2019

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1477] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

Withdrawal Agreement: Proposed Changes [Col. 1501]

Answer to urgent question—(James Duddridge)

No-deal Brexit: Schedule of Tariffs [Col. 1518]

Answer to urgent question—(Conor Burns)

US Tariffs: Scotch Whisky [Col. 1531]

Answer to urgent question—(Conor Burns)

Operation Midland Independent Report [Col. 1553]

Answer to urgent question—(Kit Malthouse)

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe [Col. 1563]

Answer to urgent question—(Dr. Murrison)

Speaker's Committee for the IPSA [Col. 1576]

Motion—(Jeremy Quin)—agreed to

Northern Ireland [Col. 1581]

Motion—(Mr Robin Walker)—agreed to

Census (Return Particulars and Removal Of Penalties) Bill [Lords] [Col. 1588]

Considered in Committee; not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed without amendment

Petition [Col. 1598]

Hypermobility Syndromes: Healthwatch Calderdale's Report [Col. 1600]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Amazon Deforestation [Col. 425WH]

General Debate

Petition [Col. 13P]

Observations

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 11MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
