

Tuesday  
29 October 2019

Volume 667  
No. 11



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 29 October 2019**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 29 October 2019*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Hearing Aids

1. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase access to hearing aids. [900193]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** In 2018, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence issued new guidance called “Hearing loss in adults: assessment and management”, which aims to improve hearing loss services, including the provision of hearing aids. The guidance brings together evidence, standards, guidance and case studies to encourage best practice across England.

**David T. C. Davies:** Does my hon. Friend agree that we in England have been cutting waiting times for hearing aids by using private companies such as Specsavers, and that that demonstrates a huge difference between privatising the NHS, which this Conservative party would never, ever support, and using private companies to provide a first-rate health service free at the point of use?

**Caroline Dinéage:** My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. We are absolutely committed to the principle of an NHS that is free at the point of use, but the NHS has, under successive Governments, commissioned care from the private sector to ensure that patients receive the treatment that they need as quickly, safely and near to home as possible. All NHS healthcare, irrespective of how it is provided, must be of the highest possible quality and improve outcomes.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): When the Government published their action plan on hearing loss in 2015, it was widely welcomed across the deaf community, as well as in the House, but there is now just a sense in the deaf community that NHS England’s commitment to the action plan is somehow waning. Will the Minister confirm that the Government are still fully committed to the action plan and will also encourage NHS England to carry on?

**Caroline Dinéage:** Yes absolutely; I can give the hon. Gentleman that clear reassurance, and I thank him for his work as chair of the all-party group on deafness.

**Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Minister will recall that in the loneliness strategy we showcased Action on Hearing Loss’s “Hear to Meet” befriending service, which connects those with hearing impairments to share experiences. Alongside the work that the Department is doing to provide good-quality hearing aids, what more is it doing to recognise that those with hearing loss, especially children, can be among the most lonely in society?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. She is absolutely right to highlight the fact that any form of disability can cause social isolation and loneliness, but hearing loss and deafness can do so almost more than anything else. I pay massive tribute to the incredible work that she did as Minister for sport and civil society to further this. I am a keen member of the inter-ministerial group on hearing loss, which does so much to further that aim and aspiration.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): North Staffordshire clinical commissioning group is the only CCG in the country to restrict hearing aids. It is about to launch its consultation to ensure that all my constituents can get hearing aids when they need them. Does the Minister agree that it should be compliant with NICE guidelines?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Lady is absolutely to raise that. CCGs are responsible for the commissioning of NHS audiology services, including the provision of hearing aids. We expect all CCGs to have regard to the NICE clinical guidance when commissioning services for their local population.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): With the Sheffield Children’s Hospital last night, I was reminded again that in childhood, dreams are made and die are cast, and through our senses, we come to terms with the world around us. As Dickens said, the best of all stories is a child’s story. Sometimes those stories are not happy ones initially, and deaf children in particular struggle and suffer as they come to terms with the world about them. Will the Minister ensure that every deaf child in Lincolnshire has not only an education, health and care plan, but all the innovations and technology that allow them to live their life to the full and cast a future as glorious as any of ours?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I certainly could not have put that more articulately than my right hon. Friend did, and he is absolutely right. In 2018, the Government provided contracts worth more than £25 million to help children with special educational needs and disability to access the right support. The Department for Education is reviewing the SEND commitment within that Department, but we are supporting it to do that in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that children get the care and support and educational support plans that they need.

**Mr Speaker:** We all noted the reference to Dickens; I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman’s record of literary and philosophical allusions continues apace.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for the response so far. Will she outline what discussions have taken place with independent groups such as Specsavers, which does excellent work providing wider access to NHS-funded tests and hearing aids, with special reference to more rural areas?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this. As I said in my first answer, it is important that we can work collaboratively with organisations in the private sector and across the NHS to make sure that patients, wherever they are in the country, in urban or rural areas, can access the right care and support when they need it.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Ind): If the Minister and other Members want to find out how to provide a phenomenal audiology service, they should come to Dudley and visit the clinical CCG buildings at Brierley Hill. It is an amazing service. When I was referred to them for a hearing aid, I could not believe the service. You ring up and say “When can I come in?”, and they say “When would you like to come in?” “Could I come in tomorrow?” “What time would you like to arrive?”—no waiting lists, an absolutely phenomenal service. I was worried—

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Minister.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Ind): I was worried that I was getting special treatment because I was the MP, but I was not; it is just an absolutely fantastic service, and I want to commend the brilliant men and women who provide it. It would be great if the Minister came to see them.

**Caroline Dinéage:** I don’t know about you, Mr Speaker, but I could listen to the hon. Gentleman talk all day. He is absolutely right to commend the wonderful services provided by the team in Dudley. I would be more than happy to visit at any time.

#### **Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust**

2. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): How much capital funding he plans to allocate to Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust in each of the next three years. [900194]

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** In addition to business-as-usual capital budgets, I am delighted that, as the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, his hospital trust will benefit from a significant part of the £2.7 billion capital funding under the health infrastructure plan—HIP 1—our deeply ambitious hospital building programme.

**Tom Brake:** I thank the Minister for that. I obviously welcome the announcement—I, local residents, councillors and indeed the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) have been campaigning on this for many years—but does he remember that in 2015 there was £219 million available for St Helier Hospital, which was then deleted from the Budget by the incoming Conservative Government? Can he reassure me that this commitment to St Helier will last beyond 9, 10, 11 or 12 December, or the date of the next general election?

**Edward Argar:** The Government’s commitment is clear. While no Government can bind a future Government, our commitment is very clear, so my advice to the right hon. Gentleman’s constituents is to vote Conservative.

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I would like to correct the record, in that my predecessor, Paul Burstow, mentioned before the 2015 election that he regretted the withdrawal of that money.

Does the Minister agree that, in giving us the money that we need for the Epsom and St Helier Trust, it is right to reward a plan that finally will save St Helier without using it as a political football and will improve health outcomes in a brand-new building that we can be proud to have in Sutton?

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for his constituents and his trust, and he is absolutely right.

**Mr Speaker:** Not just a champion but doughty!

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): This plan could see two A&Es reduced to one and two maternity units reduced to one. Have the Government taken into account the need for extra capital funding for both St George’s and Croydon university trust should St Helier place this new hospital on the Sutton Hospital site?

**Edward Argar:** The hon. Lady will know that the plans that will be brought forward will be clinically led and delivered and constructed by the trust itself, so I would encourage her to engage with the trust and with neighbouring trusts, but surely she would welcome this significant investment by the Government in her health infrastructure.

#### **Cystic Fibrosis Drugs**

3. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help ensure access to Orkambi on the NHS. [900195]

4. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What progress has been made in enabling the provision of Orkambi on the NHS. [900196]

18. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What progress he has made on increasing access to drugs to treat cystic fibrosis. [900210]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** I am delighted that a deal has been agreed to provide Orkambi and other cystic fibrosis drugs on the NHS. This deal is great value for the NHS and backed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, but crucially it will improve thousands of lives. My heartfelt thanks go out to many campaigners from right across the House who have pushed this agenda but especially to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust and the patients who, along with their families, have bravely campaigned against this devastating disease. I am thrilled that we can make this progress.

**Christian Matheson:** It may have taken a few years, but I warmly welcome the Secretary of State’s announcement and congratulate him on it. I echo his congratulations

to all the campaigners, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who has led much of the campaign.

Ten per cent. of cystic fibrosis sufferers are still waiting for approval for another critical combination therapy, called Elexacaftor. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that eligible patients will not have to wait so long for that to be approved?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course I would have liked the deal to happen sooner, but I am glad that the company has now committed itself to engaging properly in the normal processes which mean that we obtain drugs nearly as fast as any country in the world. This result—this deal—shows that the system is working to get cutting-edge drugs into the NHS at good value for the NHS pound.

I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), and to other Members in all parts of the House who have campaigned on this issue. It is great to have made some progress.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I am obviously delighted by this news, and the Secretary of State will know how delighted my family were, because when the news broke I showed him the family WhatsApp with lots of exclamation marks and happy smiley-face emojis. As I have told him, my constituent Jake Ogborne, an 18-year-old boy, was in a similar situation earlier this year when he thought that he had been approved for the drug Spinraza—there is an online video of him having a cake and a celebration—but then he found that according to the small print he was not eligible. I want his family to be as happy as my family are now, and I hope very much that the Secretary of State will be able to look into his case.

**Matt Hancock:** Absolutely. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady, who raised that case with me last night and gave me advance warning that she would raise it in the House today. I shall be happy to ensure that the relevant member of the team meets her with her constituent, if appropriate, so that we can get to the bottom of this.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I want to associate myself with the thanks to all the campaigners who worked so hard to ensure that these drugs would be available in England as well as Scotland. I never doubted that my Government would press and press, and I am delighted that the Secretary of State's Government have followed suit. However, there are still great Brexit uncertainties. Given that people fought for so long, what reassurances can the Secretary of State give those who will obtain these life-saving drugs that they will be possible, affordable and sustainable?

**Matt Hancock:** The agreement that the hon. Lady's Government—the UK Government—reached with Vertex means that this drug will be available in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. It is true that Scotland chose to go it alone and as a result has not received such good value for money, but what really matters is that the drug is now available throughout the United Kingdom.

**Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will the Secretary of State pay tribute to campaigners in my constituency such as Matthew Dixon-Dyer, who

campaigns very strongly and lobbied me very effectively? Will he also illuminate the House on how, in future, we can have smoother access to drugs such as Orkambi on the NHS?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend has campaigned long and hard and has talked to me an awful lot about how important it has been to obtain Orkambi and the other cystic fibrosis drugs that will save lives, and I pay tribute to his campaigning. As I have said, we now have a system that allows access to drugs for the NHS at some of the best value in the world, and that system is working. It is clearly getting the drugs that are needed into the NHS, and I think that we should all get behind it.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Children and their families throughout the UK will be saying a huge thank you for Orkambi. Will my right hon. Friend now turn his attention to phenylketonuria, or PKU, and the drug Kuvan, so that children like my constituent Cait, who is now 11, do not need to wait any longer?

**Matt Hancock:** I can assure my hon. Friend, who has campaigned long and hard on the issue of access to Kuvan, that we are working on that as well. I hope very much that we can come to a positive conclusion.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The system did finally work, but did it not take far too long, and is it not time to introduce transparency into this opaque system, particularly when the Americans are waiting to pounce on our pharmaceutical industry?

**Matt Hancock:** The NHS is off the table in trade talks and pharmaceutical pricing is off the table. Transparency over pharmaceutical pricing would not benefit this country at all because we get the best deals in the world because we can keep them confidential, so it is a slight surprise to hear a Labour Member argue for what would effectively lead to higher prices for drugs in the NHS. Instead, we will protect the NHS.

## Genomics

5. **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the merits of using genomics in healthcare. [900197]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** We are world leading in genomics and should celebrate that. A recent trial at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge provided whole genome sequencing, identifying underlying genetic conditions for babies and children in intensive care. As a result, three quarters of those young patients received changes to their care. The NHS genomic service is working to embed genomics in routine healthcare. Later this year, the national genomic healthcare strategy will set out the ambitious programme for the next 10 years.

**Bill Grant:** With increasing direct-to-consumer genomic testing by private companies, can my hon. Friend advise what assessment has been made of the potential impact of self-referrals on NHS services?

**Jo Churchill:** Patients who need a genomic test from the national genomic test directory will be referred to the NHS genomic medicine service. However, I recognise



that some patients may contact their GP for advice after taking a commercial test. NHS England is working with partners to ensure that GPs receive training to help them respond correctly. Public Health England and the National Screening Committee have also published guidance on private screening.

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Health service professionals in the Black Country are concerned that the removal of local funding for in-house molecular testing for cancer in April in favour of regional genomic laboratory hubs could in certain circumstances cause delays in diagnosis and be more expensive. Will the Minister look at this again in order to refine the processes to address these particular issues?

**Jo Churchill:** Clinicians should be in charge of the process, and I have been assured that the change, using genomic testing, is better for patients and better for outcomes, but I would of course be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and discuss it further.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I commend the Minister for the progressive approach the Government have taken to genomics, but for a large number of genetic diseases the symptoms do not manifest themselves until after developmental damage has been done. Will the Government consider whether we should extend genomic testing to all neonates—all newborns—at some point in the future?

**Jo Churchill:** The Government are very open to such an approach. Genomics is transformative, and the early detection of disease means that we can treat patients from birth better and more efficiently.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Surely all this must be put in the context of the Topol review, with so much innovation and not just in genomics? There is so much innovation going on in the health service, but we have to make sure that there are well-managed and efficient hospital trusts running these programmes. Many are not like Huddersfield and are not up to speed, and we have to get hospitals up to speed in using the new technologies.

**Jo Churchill:** I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman, and my constituency neighbour, the Secretary of State, is totally on this programme.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): In January, the Secretary of State announced that genomic testing would be provided in NHS England to healthy subjects for a few hundred pounds. This ill-advised plan, which would have widened health inequalities, seems to have gone quiet, so can the Minister confirm that the Government no longer plan to sell genetic testing and genomic testing in NHS England?

**Jo Churchill:** As the hon. Lady knows, because we have worked together on this agenda, it is never about selling the product; it is about better patient care and ensuring that we get technology to the patient as speedily as we can for better and appropriate diagnosis.

## Bedrolite

6. **Margot James** (Stourbridge) (Ind): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Bedrolite in treating (a) multiple sclerosis and (b) other neurological conditions. [900198]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** We have changed the law so that specialist doctors on the GMC's specialist register can now prescribe cannabis-based products. I have asked the NHS to undertake a rapid review of how this is working, and my Department is now working with delivery partners to implement the report's recommendations.

**Margot James:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, and for his work in this area, but leaving the decision to prescribe cannabis for medical use to individual doctors while NICE is saying that more evidence is needed risks the inertia that has led the MS Society to conclude that not a single person has yet benefited from the legalisation of cannabis for medical use, except those who are able to pay up to £1,000 a month. Will my right hon. Friend meet the MS Society and me to discuss more ways of accelerating the uptake of Bedrolite among patients who have a reasonable expectation of benefiting from it?

**Matt Hancock:** I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend and colleagues from the MS Society. She is right to say that we need to ensure we get the evidence that the clinicians understandably want, and in fact we have committed public funds, through the National Institute for Health Research, to establish clinical trials to develop that evidence base.

## End-of-life Care

7. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What steps he is taking to support end-of-life care. [900199]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinagen):** We are absolutely committed to supporting end-of-life care, not only through £4.5 billion-worth of investment in primary and community services but through providing an additional £25 million to palliative care and hospices in 2019-20. Today, I am in a position to announce how the geographical spending of that money will be allocated, and I will be putting the regional breakdown in the Libraries of both Houses this afternoon.

**Fiona Bruce:** What are the Government doing to better resource support for children's palliative care, including addressing the shortage of specialist doctors and hospice nurses needed to care for children with life-limiting conditions?

**Caroline Dinagen:** We care passionately about the way in which children's palliative care is delivered. That is why we have increased the children's hospice grant from £12 million this year to £25 million in 2023-24. We have also seen a nearly 50% increase in doctors working in palliative care medicine since 2010, but the interim NHS people plan will set out actions to meet the challenges of workforce supply and demand.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Last week in the Queen's Speech debate, I mentioned a constituent of mine, Liz, who had declined the offer of palliative radiotherapy treatment simply because it would involve a four-hour round trip to get from the Lakes to Preston. Does the Minister agree that it is wrong for cancer patients to be forced to choose shorter lives because they cannot cope physically with the longer journeys?

**Caroline Dinanage:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this matter, and I know that he is meeting the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), shortly to discuss the details of that individual case. More broadly, the long-term planned commitment to spend that additional £4.5 billion-worth of investment in primary and community health services will definitely help those services to be delivered much closer to people's homes.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Hospice in the Weald is building the UK's first cottage hospice, and I viewed it on Friday. It allows family members to care for and stay with their loved ones until the end of their life, and it is absolutely fantastic. The cottage hospice is looking for a Minister to come and open it. I know that there is an election coming, but will a Minister from the winning Front Bench come and do that honour for us in East Sussex?

**Caroline Dinanage:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that brilliant initiative. I think we will probably be falling over ourselves to volunteer to do the honours, but I would be very happy to put myself forward for that.

**Mr Speaker:** Not least due to the charm and courtesy of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), quite apart from the magnificent facility that he has just been busily championing.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): The Minister will know that her colleague, the Justice Secretary, has declined to proceed with a call for evidence on the sensitive issue of assisted dying. Would it not be appropriate for her Department to gather evidence from the professional bodies involved in end-of-life care, to ensure that legislation is evidence-led?

**Caroline Dinanage:** You will know as well as everyone in the House, Mr Speaker, that that is a sensitive matter on which Members have contrasting views. The right hon. Gentleman is right to continue to raise the issue, but the legislation surrounding it continues to lie with the Ministry of Justice.

### Mental Health Services

8. **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the adequate long-term provision of mental health services. [900200]

20. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the adequate long-term provision of mental health services. [900213]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ms Nadine Dorries):** By 2023, an additional £2.3 billion a year will flow into mental health services across England. Our long-term plan for that increased investment will ensure that more adults, children and young people than ever before are able to get mental health support when they need it. Increased funding will also support further improvements in quality of care and patient experience.

**James Cartlidge:** I welcome my hon. Friend to her position. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be more than familiar with the long-running problems at the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, which is our county's main mental health trust. There is a huge effort to try to improve it, but I know from constituency cases that significant problems still exist. Will Ministers update us on what progress they think has been made at NSFT?

**Ms Dorries:** My hon. Friend works tirelessly on his constituents' behalf. In fact, I think I am meeting some of his constituents tomorrow. I will look into the issues he raises, but the trust has been working since May 2018 on delivering the immediate improvements suggested by the Care Quality Commission, and leadership support has been provided by East London NHS Foundation Trust. I promise to look into the situation to see where the trust is at this point and what improvements have been made, and I may have that information to feed back to him tomorrow.

**Jack Lopresti:** I welcome the Minister's recent announcement of greater support for people affected by the suicide of a loved one, but what form will that additional support actually take?

**Ms Dorries:** It goes without saying that anyone affected by a friend or family member taking their own life will be absolutely devastated. We made an announcement at the weekend of nearly £1 million of funding to target 10 areas to help to provide assistance and support to the bereaved. We will assess those 10 sites to see what is delivered and how it works, and we will hopefully be able to roll the scheme out across the UK in the future.

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The time in a woman's life when she is most likely to struggle with her mental health is when she is pregnant or shortly after delivery, but half of all women with depression during that period say that their problem remains unidentified by the NHS. Does the Minister think that it is time for all women to get a postnatal check from their GP as part of the GP contract?

**Ms Dorries:** We are looking into that. Perinatal support is provided to women across the UK. We have been pushing this from the Department. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that this is a time in a woman's life when she may suffer from poor mental health or a mental health condition that is directly related to her pregnancy, and that is when women need support most. We are looking into this, we are pushing this and we are looking into providing that, hopefully as part of the GP contract.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): People outside the House will have listened to the Minister's warm words, yet we know that still far too many people right across our country are having to travel hundreds of miles to access services. Young people having to travel 300 miles to get a bed is unacceptable. Will the Minister tell us whether the investment she outlined will be ring fenced, because it has not been thus far? Will she also be investing specifically in young people's mental health services?

**Ms Dorries:** That is a big question because it covers two areas. This Government have invested £2.3 billion in mental health services, a huge amount of which is to go into salaries, to deliver community health services where they are needed: close to patients and to their relatives and families. It is also to provide community health teams and support teams in schools for young people. Clinical commissioning groups are under an obligation to provide those mental health services with the set funding. If the hon. Lady would like to meet to hear more about that, I will be happy to discuss it with her.

**Mr Jeremy Hunt** (South West Surrey) (Con): As this is your last Health questions, Mr Speaker, may I thank you for your many years of campaigning for speech and language therapy for children? It has given great hope to many families in a situation similar to your own.

On the issue of early intervention, given that half of all mental health conditions are established before the age of 14, does the Minister, who is passionate about this, agree that mental health provision in schools is essential? Will she update the House on progress towards the 2023 objective of a quarter of schools having a mental health lead?

**Ms Dorries:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and for his work as Secretary of State. He was the longest-serving Secretary of State for Health ever, and he is passionately interested in this subject, too. Yes, we are on track—in fact, we are more than on track—to meet our objective of 25% of schools being covered by a school mental health support team by 2023-24.

The school mental health support teams have been launched in trailblazer areas, and I visited one a few weeks ago at Springwest Academy in Hounslow to see the amazing work the teams are doing with young children. The teams are teaching coping strategies and identifying mental health problems as they arise very early in life, which helps children to deal with those mental health problems now and into adulthood. We are on track and we hope to meet that objective.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last week it was reported that a 16-year-old boy in Milton Keynes tragically died by suicide. His referral to mental health services was rejected because he did not meet the threshold as his mental health problems were not deemed severe enough. This is deeply shocking, and it is clear that too many children are going without the support they need. Will the Minister now match Labour's commitment to invest in children's mental health services and to ensure that every secondary school has access to a trained mental health professional?

**Ms Dorries:** Obviously I cannot comment on an individual case, but what I can say is that the NICE guidelines on assessment for suicide were recently sent

out to A&E departments to ensure that people who present with mental health problems are treated holistically and looked at in the round to assess whether they are a suicide risk.

We are investing £2.3 billion in mental health services—more than invested by any previous Government—and a huge amount of that is going towards children and young people. I hope cases such as the one highlighted by the hon. Lady will be a thing of the past. We have turned a corner. We are rolling out these mental health teams and, in the last year alone, 3,000 more people are working with young people and young adults. We have the new training scheme and the school mental health support teams. There is more to be done, but I hope such stories will become a thing of the past.<sup>1</sup>

### Prescription Costs: Health Outcomes

**9. Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of prescription costs on the health outcomes of people with chronic illnesses.

[900201]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenge):** Extensive arrangements are in place to help people to afford national health service prescriptions. Those include a broad range of prescription charge exemptions, for which someone with a chronic illness may qualify.

**Helen Goodman:** I think the Minister is being too complacent. The chronic illnesses list has not been updated for years, and I have had complaints from Mr E with coeliac disease, Mrs L with multiple sclerosis and Mr A with cystic fibrosis—he is taking up to 50 tablets a day. With each item costing £9, can the Minister not see how much hardship this is putting on people?

**Caroline Dinenge:** There have been NHS prescription charges in England for decades, and successive Governments have concluded that patients who can afford it should pay prescription charges in order to contribute to the running of the NHS, but a huge number of exemptions are in place and mean that, in England, 89% of NHS prescription items dispensed in the community are currently provided free of charge. People on low incomes who do not qualify for an exemption will be eligible through the NHS low-income scheme.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Ind): Prescriptions not only include pharmaceuticals, so I congratulate the Secretary of State on the launch of a national academy for social prescribing, which he pushed through with his own energy and enthusiasm. Prescribing alternative treatments such as art therapy and speech and language therapy can have a massive impact on people's mental health and on many other ailments. This Department has undertaken a revolutionary step, and I wholeheartedly congratulate him and all his Ministers.

**Caroline Dinenge:** The right hon. Gentleman plays down his role in this agenda; he has been a great champion for social prescribing. All of us in the Department's Front-Bench team have met people for whom social prescribing has been life changing; it has totally changed the way they are able to deal with their symptoms and illnesses. It really is a massive game changer.

1. [Official Report, 5 November 2019, Vol. 667, c. 8MC.]



**Mr Speaker:** But of course modesty is the right hon. Gentleman's middle name.

**Mr Vaizey:** And humility.

**Mr Speaker:** Indeed.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): With one in three arthritis sufferers missing out on at least one prescription due to cost, what can the Minister say to the pensioner in Barnsley who has had their pension cut, lost their local bus service and now lost out on the treatment that enables them to simply walk down the street? Is it not time the Government matched Labour's promise, and invested in pensions, services and free prescriptions on the NHS?

**Caroline Dinenge:** I simply say to the hon. Lady that people over the age of 60 qualify for free prescriptions.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): Too many patients cut back on their prescribed medicines or go without them altogether because they simply cannot afford to pay prescription charges. Research by University College London indicates that this non-adherence to prescribing regimes costs the NHS £500 million more in complex treatments and hospitalisation. Prescription charges are a tax on sickness that disproportionately burdens those who have chronic illnesses and those on low incomes. Does the Minister agree that it is high time we brought an end to these charges, which fly in the face of the principle of an NHS free at the point of delivery?

**Caroline Dinenge:** I suppose I should probably have declared an interest in this issue, because I am severely asthmatic and I do not get free prescriptions, but then again I do not think I should. There is a prescription exemption system designed specifically to assist people who are most likely to need support in paying for prescriptions: people on low incomes or in full-time education; the over-60s; people living with many long-term conditions; and people with an increased risk of illness, such as pregnant women. That is why 89% of prescriptions are dispensed without charge.

### Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

10. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve cancer (a) diagnosis and (b) treatment. [900202]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care** (Jo Churchill): Cancer survival rates are, thankfully, at a record high. Last year, the NHS carried out 53 million diagnostic tests, which is 53% higher than the number carried out in 2010, but we need to do more. Our aim is to diagnose three quarters of all cancers early, so that 55,000 more people each year survive cancer for another five years. To achieve that, we are radically overhauling screening programmes to improve access and uptake, investing £200 million in diagnostic equipment and accelerating the adoption of the most innovative cancer treatments.

**Mike Wood:** Bowel cancer claims 16,000 lives a year, which is 45 every day, yet just 55% of people in Dudley take up bowel cancer screening. What are the Government doing to ensure that more people take up this life-saving cancer screening?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for all the work he does to make sure people are aware of cancer screening and taking it up. Diagnosing bowel cancer early is vital if we are to beat this disease. We have committed to lowering the age of bowel cancer screening from 60 to 50 and we rolled out the fit bowel screening test in June. It is easier to use and is expected to improve uptake by 70% in towns like Dudley. Sir Mike Richards' screening review sets out important recommendations, using prioritisation of evidence-based incentives. We will set out our plan for implementing it next year, so that people can access screening more accessibly—in car parks or wherever else it suits their lifestyle—and we can save more lives.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Access to screening is a function of people's poverty. For example, in Newcastle, cervical screening rates vary from 85% to 23%. A Macmillan Cancer Support report said clearly that we need to have access to screening in the places where people are, particularly for those who are running two jobs and so on. What is the Minister specifically doing to make screening available where people are?

**Jo Churchill:** I agree with the hon. Lady on this. The Richards review and working through the recommendations will enable us to put more screening in places where people can access it. The Eve Appeal, specifically directed at cervical cancer, is looking to put screening in workplaces and so on, but anybody who is worried must get tested.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Secretary of State is absolutely right in his intent to put the one-year cancer survival metric at the very heart of the cancer strategy, to encourage earlier diagnosis, which the all-party parliamentary group on cancer has long campaigned for. Will the Government ensure that adequate funding is attached to the metric, so that we can finally start closing the gap on international survival rates?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for all his work leading the all-party parliamentary group on cancer. We are putting more money into diagnostic tests, which means that there will be more than 7.9 million more tests. Making sure that we have the correct data on survivability, in which the one-year test is an important metric, is part of that programme.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): In the past year, more than 34,000 cancer patients have waited beyond two months for treatment. Every single waiting time measure for cancer has worsened in the past year. Surely, the Minister should be ashamed that so many more cancer patients are waiting longer for treatment.

**Jo Churchill:** I probably know as well as most that waiting for a cancer diagnosis is traumatic and that it needs to be done as speedily as possible. There is nothing more frightening than that wait, so what have we done? In 2018, 2.2 million people were seen by a specialist for suspected cancer—that is more than 1.2 million more people per annum since 2010. Getting to the specialist an individual needs as quickly as possible is what this Government are focused on, and that is why we have

put so much emphasis on having specialist clinical nurses in the cancer workforce. We will carry on making cancer a priority.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** But the problem is that that is not happening, is it? Cancer patients are waiting longer for treatment. In recent weeks, we have had an avalanche of hospital board papers blaming understaffing and George Osborne's pension tax changes for the deterioration in waiting time standards. The Prime Minister promised to fix Osborne's pension tax mess. How many more patients need to be added to the waiting list before it is fixed?

**Jo Churchill:** The guidance for doctors' pensions was changed last month. As I said, making sure that everybody can access a GP as soon as they are worried and then get to a specialist as soon as possible is our top priority, and making sure we have a broad-based cancer workforce is part of that plan. Delivering these things, as well as rapid diagnostic centres with £200 million in new machinery, is how we are going to do it.

### PrEP

11. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What steps he is taking to establish a national programme for PrEP by April 2020. [900203]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** We have expanded access to PrEP—pre-exposure prophylaxis—so that everyone who needs it should have access. Thousands more places remain available on the trial. We are working closely with the NHS, Public Health England and local authorities, who have to play their part, to plan for a seamless transition from the trial to routine commissioning from April next year.

**Neil Coyle:** The Secretary of State gave a personal commitment that the PrEP trial would be extended. He has failed to meet that commitment, and men have contracted HIV as a direct result of the Government's failure. What faith can people who need PrEP and organisations such as the Terrence Higgins Trust, the NHS and councils have that the Government's national programme will be ready and able to meet the demand that exists?

**Matt Hancock:** This is an important issue and I care very much about getting the roll-out right. I chastise the hon. Gentleman slightly for his tone. The Minister met the Terrence Higgins Trust yesterday. It agrees with the approach that we are taking. The roll-out from a trial to routine commissioning will happen in April. There are some gaps where local authorities need to do more, but from an NHS perspective, there are thousands more places available on the trial. If the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about the issue, as I do, he should be working with us to get local authorities to do their part, because the NHS is doing its part.

**Penny Mordaunt** (Portsmouth North) (Con): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on setting the 2030 target on HIV infections? Access to PrEP is vital for reducing new infections, but access to healthcare professional time is also critical. Does he therefore agree

with me and the trust that we must do everything to remove the funding and logistical obstacles that are discouraging clinics from filling the many places that are now available on the trial?

**Matt Hancock:** I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend, who is absolutely spot on about this, but there is more that we need to do in ensuring that the health inequalities of people who are homosexual or LGBT are reduced across the board. We have a whole plan to make that happen. She played an important part in government, and I will rest at nothing to ensure that we address these problems, but we should not engage in the sort of scaremongering that we have heard from the Opposition.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I hear what the Secretary of State has said, but data from the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV have shown that nine gay and bisexual men in Greater Manchester were diagnosed with HIV while waiting to access the PrEP trial. This is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the number of people who have acquired HIV because they could not access the trial. He will agree that this is totally unacceptable and goes against the Government's own commitment to eradicate HIV by 2030, so does he think that PrEP should be routinely commissioned before the trial ends in September 2020 and will he commit now to that happening?

**Matt Hancock:** We are switching to routine commissioning from April. It is a deep frustration of mine that some local authorities are not putting in place the necessary measures. I will look into Manchester in particular; I did not know about that example. I personally set the goal of our being HIV-free by 2030. I am delighted that, with the support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) when she was the Minister for Equalities, we have made the progress that we have. I have absolutely no doubt that there is further road to travel and that we should all come together in support of equalities in health provision, especially in this area. I look forward to working with the hon. Lady and all those who are on the side of trying to make this change happen.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Tommy Sheppard. Where is young Sheppard? [*Interruption.*] He has withdrawn. I was not advised of that. Never mind, he is a most active beaver in the Chamber in normal circumstances. It does not matter that he is not here, because Mr Andrew Rosindell is.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Speak for Romford!

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, speak for Romford. Well done.

### Seven-day-a-week NHS Services

13. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What progress his Department has made on providing NHS services seven days a week. [900205]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ms Nadine Dorries):** Everyone now has easier and more convenient access to GP services,

including appointments in the evenings and at weekends. There are also substantial improvement programmes in place related to seven-day hospital services set out in the NHS long-term plan, including hospitals with major A&E departments providing same-day emergency care services 12 hours a day, seven days a week, by the end of 2019-20.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I thank the Minister for her reply, but I am increasingly concerned that my constituents in Romford often have to wait three weeks or even longer for routine appointments with their GPs. What action are the Government taking to ensure that such long waiting times are reduced and preferably eliminated altogether?

**Ms Dorries:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Just over 40% of all booked appointments take place on the same day with GPs. However, it is important to recognise that many patients will be appropriately booking ahead as part of the ongoing plan for long-term conditions. The new GP contract will see billions of pounds in extra investment for improved access to GPs, expanded services at local practices and longer appointments for patients who need them. NHS England is working with stakeholders and is undertaking a national review of access to general practice services.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): With more than 5 million people across England unable to book an appointment with a GP outside working hours, many of our constituents have had to wait two or three weeks to get an appointment. With the loss of 1,600 full-time GPs since 2015 and billions of pounds in cuts since 2010, does the Minister realise that the NHS is certainly not safe with the Conservative party, and that is what the British people think?

**Ms Dorries:** I simply do not recognise the scenario that the hon. Lady has just articulated. There is access to GP practices throughout England outside of working hours.

21. [900214] **Alistair Burt** (North East Bedfordshire) (Ind): I am delighted to ask the Minister, who is my constituency neighbour, a question. Will the efforts to get more work through a seven-day NHS mean an extra effort to improve the take-up of the flu vaccine this year, not least for those suffering from lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma? About 50% of people with those conditions did not get the vaccine or did not take up the opportunity to do so last year. Will that be improved this year? What steps are the Government taking to ensure that those individuals and the people who support them get the necessary flu vaccine this year?

**Ms Dorries:** It is a delight to take a question in my first Health questions from my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour. If he pops into Shefford pharmacy, I am sure that Jamil will give him a flu vaccine as he walks through the door because Jamil does not require anybody to wait; anyone who wants a vaccine can have one—think pharmacy first. We are also ahead on flu vaccines for pensioners compared with last year. As my right hon. Friend articulated, it is crucial that those in the at-risk groups are vaccinated first to protect themselves

this winter. We are targeting patients through the “Help Us, Help You” campaign, which highlights the impact of flu on those who are most at risk, and we are ahead of our targets from last year.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are running late, but I will take a one-sentence question from Gareth Thomas.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): The three walk-in centres that provide a seven-day-a-week service in my constituency are closed or closing. Why?

**Ms Dorries:** I did not hear the hon. Gentleman’s question in full, but I would be happy to meet him afterwards to talk about the matter in more detail.

### Topical Questions

T1. [900218] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** Since the last Health questions, we have announced 20 hospital upgrades; 40 new hospitals; £200 million for cancer diagnosis kit; £250 million for the NHSX artificial intelligence lab; a social prescribing academy, as mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey); the launch of the “Every Mind Matters” public mental health campaign; a landmark agreement so that cystic fibrosis drugs, including Orkambi, can be available on the NHS; and the firm commitment from the Prime Minister that in any trade talks after Brexit, the NHS is—and always will be—off the table.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** There were 1.2 million hospital admissions related to alcohol consumption in England in 2017-18—3% up on the previous year. Hospital admissions due to alcohol-related liver disease have increased by 43% in the last 10 years, and alcohol problems now cost the NHS an estimated £3.5 billion every year in England alone. Why have the Government not properly recognised the enormous and growing scale of the country’s alcohol-related health problems, and why have they failed to bring forward serious and effective measures to address them?

**Matt Hancock:** The prevention Green Paper that we published in the summer specifically addresses what is needed. The effort that we put into supporting those who are hospitalised through their abuse of alcohol needs to be enhanced, and there is an enormous amount of effort under way to make that happen.

T8. [900225] **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the latest data on the soft drinks industry levy is encouraging and a positive step in the campaign to improve health, particularly of young people?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** Absolutely; I thank my right hon. Friend for putting it so eloquently. This just shows what can be achieved. We have seen great results from the soft drinks industry levy. The average sugar



content of drinks subject to the levy decreased by 28.8% between 2015 and 2018, so we have been able to make significant investments in activity and healthy eating in schools.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Mr Speaker, as this is the last time that we will have Health questions with you in the Chair, I want to thank you for being a fantastic Speaker—particularly through your support for Back Benchers and ensuring that we can be heard through urgent questions.

Last week, we found that the number of people receiving publicly-funded social care has fallen by 15,000 in the past year. We know that 95 people a day die while waiting for care and that cuts of £7.7 billion have been made from social care budgets since 2010. Older and disabled people are paying the price. Labour has set out our plans to deliver free personal care for people aged over 65 who need it. We are providing dignity in old age. When will the Secretary of State give people the dignity and care they deserve, and bring forward the Government's plans for social care?

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage)**: The hon. Lady will be aware that the Queen's Speech announced a Bill to tackle the cost of adult social care. She will also know that the Prime Minister said on the steps of Downing Street that the Government will set out plans to fix the social care crisis once and for all. We need to get through Brexit, and Labour Members need to vote for the methods that will help us to deliver that, because we can then get on to the things in life that really matter, such as ensuring that no one will ever have to use their home to pay for their care.

T9. [900226] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State very much for agreeing to increase the amount awarded to the Alex—Alexandra Hospital—to begin essential improvement works that the whole community in Redditch have been campaigning for for a very long time. Can he tell my constituents when we will finally see shovels in the ground?

**Matt Hancock**: We will see shovels in the ground, I very much hope, from next year. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has campaigned endlessly for these improvements to the hospital in Redditch. There is no better supporter of Redditch than her. She has badgered me endlessly, met me formally and bumped into me on the campaign. Every time I see her, she says, "Can we have the improvement to the hospital?" and the answer is yes.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State says that the NHS is not on the table, but President Trump and his trade officials have been very clear that they will seek to more than double drug prices, driving up the bill from £18 billion to £45 billion a year. What discussions is the Secretary of State having, and does he accept that this is why devolved Governments must have input in trade deals?

**Matt Hancock**: The NHS is not on the table in any trade deal. Medicine pricing and drugs pricing is not on the table in a trade deal. Let me bring the hon. Lady's attention to this quotation from the former US trade general counsel, Stephen Vaughn, who said that if the

UK really is determined to make no changes at all on pharmaceuticals, we can absolutely hold that position and that that has nothing to do with them. Quite right—we do hold that position; they are off the table.

**Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): I welcome the announcement of Royal Preston Hospital being included in the hospital upgrades programme, but what plans does the Minister have for Blackpool Victoria Hospital, where services such as ophthalmics are now over capacity and could do with some additional investment?

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar)**: As Members will know, my hon. Friend spoke only last week about his local hospital in Blackpool and the challenges it faces. It is absolutely clear that we need not only to get leadership right there but to continue to invest in it. I believe that I am already meeting him to discuss exactly that.

T2. [900219] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, can I follow on from my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), our Front-Bench spokesperson, and say that you have been a fantastic Speaker? You and I first got together on the Trade and Industry Committee about 20 years ago, and I recall, before you became Speaker, suggesting to you that you might want to stand for Speaker—I bet you have forgotten that one. Anyway, I wish you and your family all the best for the future. You have always been very fair and very helpful to me, and I think you will be missed in this Chamber, despite what your opponents say.

I will come on to more serious matters now. We were promised by the previous Chancellor that the doctors' pensions tax would be sorted out. He said that he was in negotiations, but this has been raised repeatedly and nothing has happened so far. Doctors are not putting in overtime, patients are suffering and the NHS could be in meltdown this winter. What is the Secretary of State going to do about it?

**Matt Hancock**: Getting this right is incredibly important. The change in the guidance last month allows every single NHS trust to introduce the flexibilities, immediately, to ensure that doctors can do the work and the overtime they need, get paid properly for it and not get penalised through the impact on the pensions system. That change came in at the start of last month. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the details, so that he can tell all doctors that these flexibilities are available so that they can do the work that they need to.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Earlier this year, the Secretary of State spoke about the importance of introducing new financing mechanisms to develop and deploy drugs and vaccines to tackle antimicrobial resistance. Will he update us on that, please?

**Matt Hancock**: Yes. In January, with my hon. Friend's support, we launched the five-year plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance. We have now taken that to a global level; this is a global problem. We have appointed Dame Sally Davies, who recently stood down as the chief medical officer, to be our AMR tsar so that she can continue the drive both domestically and around the world.



T3. [900220] **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): Why, under a Conservative Government, was Airedale Hospital's £22 million bid for renewal of the ward block turned down? Is it not time that the Government adopted the suggestion of NHS Providers of a far larger multi-year capital programme for the NHS, with decisions based on need?

**Edward Argar:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that that is exactly what we have done with the health infrastructure plan, which involves multi-year capital funding settlements and investment in our hospitals. I am happy to discuss separately the specific example he raises.

**Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): There are more than 1.5 million people in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, and they have no access to a radiotherapy facility in either county. Will the Minister agree to bring cancer care closer to people's homes and join the campaign to establish a satellite radiotherapy unit in Stevenage?

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend is a strong local champion for his constituents in Stevenage, particularly on that issue, in which he is joined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), who is sitting next to him. He is right to highlight the importance of easy access to such facilities. I am happy to meet him and my right hon. and learned Friend to discuss that.

T4. [900221] **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): After almost a decade of ideological Tory austerity and underfunding of our NHS, A&E waiting times at Bradford Royal Infirmary have soared, with one in four patients admitted last winter waiting longer than the four-hour target. Patients in Bradford deserve better than being left to suffer in A&E departments and in the back of ambulances. Will the Minister meet me to discuss emergency funding for Bradford NHS services, to avoid another winter crisis?

**Matt Hancock:** We are putting record amounts of funding into the NHS across the country, including in Bradford. If the people of Bradford get their election—if Labour Members vote for it—and they want to know what is the best thing to do to support long-term investment in the NHS, I can tell them that it is to support the only true party of the NHS: the Conservatives.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I note the recent announcement of the roll-out of the electronic prescription service. How will that benefit my constituents? When will it be rolled out, and how can my constituents use it to support their local community pharmacy?

**Mr Speaker:** Preferably in a sentence—Jo Churchill.

**Jo Churchill:** Digitising the process by using electronic prescribing will save the national health service up to £300 million, freeing up vital time for GPs and pharmacists to spend with their patients. It will start on 19 November.

**Mr Speaker:** Splendid.

T5. [900222] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Government have finally completed their consultation on mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid. When can we finally expect to see that eminently sensible policy implemented?

**Jo Churchill:** That was part of the prevention Green Paper. We have the consultation responses, which we will assess and come forward with proposals.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): There is still too much reliance on body mass index as an indicator of good health in sufferers of eating disorders. Will the Secretary of State get behind the “Dump the Scales” campaign and meet the indomitable campaigner Hope Virgo, to ensure that GPs realise there is more to eating disorders than just weight?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ms Nadine Dorries):** I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines state clearly that GPs should not use BMI as the sole indicator for treatment. I have just met the eating disorder charity Beat to discuss how we approach eating disorders. With the £2.3 billion that we have invested in mental health services, we have made a commitment that any young person presenting with an acute eating disorder will be seen within one week, and others within four weeks.

T6. [900223] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): The right to challenge decisions about care and support is fundamental, and the system for doing that must be fair and consistent across all local authorities. Will the Secretary of State make it his policy to introduce a statutory social care appeals process for the decisions made about an individual's care and support?

**Matt Hancock:** That is an incredibly important matter. It was addressed in the Care Act 2014, but I am happy to look at any proposals, because it is important that we get fair treatment right across the country.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I ask Members for one-sentence questions from now on.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the Health Secretary agree with the joint report produced by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee that the best way to fund adult social care is through a social care premium?

**Matt Hancock:** The joint report was excellent.

T7. [900224] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): My constituent Karen Gray will begin a hunger strike on Friday because she still cannot get cannabis oil on an NHS prescription despite the fact that, since her son started using it, he has had no seizures. It is costing the family £1,300 a month. When will the Secretary of State commit to making this available to the people he promised it to?

**Matt Hancock:** As we discussed in the answer to an earlier question, I have both decriminalised the use of cannabis oil and introduced the National Institute for Health Research clinical trials. However, individual rules about prescriptions have to be for individual clinicians, and when it comes to funding it in Scotland, that has to be a matter for the Scottish NHS.

**David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con):** Will the Secretary of State look at making greater use of chiropractors and osteopaths in support of orthopaedic surgeons?

**Matt Hancock:** How could I say no as my wife was an osteopath? I understand very strongly the importance and value of those professions.

T10. [900227] **Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op):** The Royal College of Surgeons reports today that 61% of consultant surgeons have been told not to take up waiting list time reduction initiatives over the winter because of the NHS tax trap. Will the Secretary of State please engage with the Treasury and appeal to it to sort this out before waiting lists are exacerbated over the winter months?

**Matt Hancock:** I am of course engaged with the Treasury on this, but I would also say that these flexibilities are available right across the country and they must be used by trusts.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** We are all grateful to the national health service, but I know that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) has spoken movingly of the particular debt of gratitude he owes to the institution.

**James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con):** I am delighted to echo that again in the context of the fact that next month, November, is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. I ask my right hon. Friend to commend the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation and all those who are highlighting the signs of this disease to save lives, quite literally, because of the need for early diagnosis. Equally, could he update the House on the lung health checks programme, which is targeted screening that could quite literally save lives from this terrible disease?

**Jo Churchill:** Along with my right hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, but also to all the charities that work in the cancer space and do the most tremendous work on awareness raising, because it is only by awareness raising that we can actually get earlier diagnoses and beat this disease. We are looking very seriously at what my right hon. Friend suggests.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD):** May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for all the support you have given to Select Committees during your time in the Chair?

After a long period of engagement with patients, staff and partner organisations, the NHS has come up with a clear set of recommendations to the Government and Parliament for the legislative reforms it needs. I hope all political parties are listening to that. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will accept all its recommendations, including the one that recommends

scrapping section 75 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and other provisions, which would end wasteful contracting rounds in the NHS?

**Matt Hancock:** I want to pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work that she, her Health Committee and all its members have done on this legislation. I think that the legislation proposed by the NHS—with the support of the Select Committee, which will of course scrutinise it further—is an important step forward. I am delighted that Her Majesty committed in the Queen's Speech to legislation on the NHS, of which these proposals will be the basis.

**Mr Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con):** Haslemere in my constituency has a busy minor injuries unit, used by 8,000 people a year, which is currently threatened with closure. Given that that would be catastrophic for the town of Haslemere and for the Royal Surrey A&E in Guildford, will the Secretary of State listen to the residents of Haslemere and agree not to close this vital facility?

**Matt Hancock:** My predecessor, my right hon. Friend, is an assiduous campaigner for South West Surrey. There is no better spokesman for South West Surrey than my right hon. Friend. He has raised this issue with me in private over recent weeks since these concerns were raised. I have in turn raised it with the chief executive of the NHS, and I can confirm that the walk-in centre will stay open.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** The primary care mental health service in York is not being cut; it is being scrapped. Will the Secretary of State urgently meet me to save this service?

**Ms Dorries:** I am happy to help and to meet the hon. Lady to talk about that. No primary care mental health services should be cutting given the amount of funding we are putting in, but I am happy to meet and discuss it with her.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I must say to the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) that my kids think he is a great bloke because he made an effort to go and talk to them at my party last week. He will always be a hero in their eyes.

**Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State share my concern that a highly paid health executive has been made redundant by Southend clinical commissioning group, given £200,000 and then employed somewhere else in the organisation? Disgraceful.

**Matt Hancock:** Today is the first time I have heard of this. National health service redundancy terms were capped at £160,000 in April 2015. We consulted on bringing that down to £95,000 and we have introduced powers in primary legislation to claw back contractual redundancy payments when someone returns to any public sector job within 12 months. I will raise the individual case with the NHS to ensure that taxpayers' money is being used as well as possible.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State speak to his colleagues in the Home Office and get them to allow Glasgow City health and social care partnership to open a supervised drug consumption room in my constituency and get vulnerable people into a service that will keep them alive?

**Jo Churchill:** We currently have no plans to change the law on drug consumption rooms. We support a range of evidence-based approaches to reducing the health-related harms associated with drug misuse. I keenly await the summit in Glasgow, which will focus on tackling problem drug use and bring together the experts we need. Dame Carol Black's report is out in the next few weeks, but putting better resources into treatment and recovery is vital and I urge the Scottish Government to invest.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): Will the Secretary of State visit Wycombe Hospital to discuss the future of our increasingly tired 1960s tower block?

**Matt Hancock:** I am absolutely happy to look at that. We have put in place the health infrastructure plan to ensure that there is a long-term plan for replacing ailing hospitals. That includes the ability to make new proposals that were not announced in the first round. I am happy to visit Wycombe, which is a beautiful town.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Government have repeatedly turned down plans for both a new health centre in Maghull and a new walk-in centre in Southport. Is not electing a Labour Government the only way my constituents and those of Members across the House will get the new facilities they so badly need?

**Matt Hancock:** On the contrary. I was in Southport last month and I saw the fantastic staff and what they do. I was able to talk to them about the improvements that we are planning in Southport. People in Southport and across the country know that unless we have a strong economy we cannot fund a strong NHS. The Labour party's plans for the economy would sink it. Only with a strong Conservative Government can we have a properly funded NHS.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I say to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) that when we stood against each other in Conservative student politics

in 1986, I was the candidate of the right and he was the candidate of the left. Some things change over the years.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Mr Speaker, you won. Although we have not agreed on everything in the 18 years I have been in the House, I say most earnestly, from one midget to another, that I wish you a long and happy retirement.

Following the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), I point out that the individual he mentioned moved from being the accountable officer of the Southend CCG to the accountable officer of the Thurrock CCG. It was a sideways move for which he trousered a fifth of a million pounds of public money, which should have been spent on patients. Do not just cap the payment, sir, make him pay it back.

**Matt Hancock:** Again, we have the powers in primary legislation to claw back contractual redundancy payments. Nobody is keener to ensure the careful expenditure of taxpayers' money than my right hon. Friend. The matter has been raised very powerfully by the voices of Essex in this question time.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry, but we have way overrun. Demand exceeds supply on these occasions—by the way, that is true in the health service under Governments of both colours—but we will take one more question.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I was very distressed to learn last week that a higher than average number of people in Hull are having foot amputations, partly because of diabetic foot ulcers and despite excellent work by the vascular department. The message from that department is that it is underfunded, under-resourced and in desperate need of an infrastructure upgrade to its theatre. Time is running out, so instead of asking the Secretary of State to meet me, will he just act very quickly to give it the funding it needs to stop unnecessary amputations happening in Hull?

**Matt Hancock:** We have the largest infrastructure investment programme in a generation and I am very happy to look at the specific request from Hull to ensure it gets the infrastructure it needs.



## Leaving the EU: Workers' Rights

12.50 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab) (*Urgent question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for workers' rights after the UK leaves the EU.

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrea Leadsom)**: The UK has a long and proud tradition of leading the way in workers' rights and for setting the highest standards. The Government have been clear and consistent that the decision to leave the EU does not change that in any way whatever. The Government have absolutely no intention of lowering standards on workers' rights. To suggest otherwise is scaremongering and is untrue.

The EU has traditionally set minimum standards for workers' rights and, as all colleagues in this Chamber would expect, the UK already exceeds standards in a wide range of areas, such as maternity and paternity leave and pay. The UK offers 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay, compared with the 14 weeks of paid maternity leave required by the EU's minimum standards. Because the Government believe in the importance of supporting families in every possible way, we have also given fathers and partners an additional statutory right to leave and pay, something that the EU is only now starting to consider. We are one of the few EU member states to have introduced shared parental leave and we are proud that in the UK we have given all employees with 26 weeks qualifying service a statutory right to request flexible working that enables so many to better balance work and life responsibilities. EU law only allows workers to make such a request if returning from parental leave.

Under the terms of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, all existing workers' rights laws will be transferred into domestic law once we have left the EU, making sure there is no gap or lack of clarity in the minimum set of workers' rights which, as I have already said, the UK exceeds in many areas. We are also including in the Withdrawal Agreement Bill a new requirement that every Bill brought before this place in the future that affects workers' rights will include a statement by the Government of the day on how it impacts workers' rights. This will ensure that Parliament always has its say. The Government have also published clauses that will require every Government, now and in the future, to monitor new EU legislation covering employment and workplace health and safety standards, and to report on those changes to Parliament so that Parliament can again have its say.

In direct answer to the hon. Lady's question, I can absolutely assure her and this House that the Government will not lower standards on workers' rights when we leave the EU. On the contrary, it is the ambition of this Government to make the United Kingdom the best place to work and to grow a business.

**Laura Pidcock**: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I persisted.

The leaked memos reported in the *Financial Times* over the weekend are both worrying and, at the same time, utterly predictable. They shine a light on the true

politics of this Conservative Government and how they are seeking to use the withdrawal agreement Bill, as with their whole Brexit strategy, to sell out workers. The Prime Minister may keep repeating that it is an excellent deal, and no doubt that will be the mantra come a general election, but I would like to get to the truth. I want to start by asking the Secretary of State about the status of the documents, and particularly which Government Departments they were distributed to and when. At what stage was the Secretary of State aware of their existence and their content? If she was not aware, why not?

This issue is critical given that last week the Government gave a number of assurances on this issue to Members in this House, while at the same time they were seemingly discussing the very opposite among themselves. They will use Brexit as a blueprint for rapid deregulation, which will see the vital floor on protections disappear. This Government have proposed a Brexit deal that benefits their pals—the millionaires, the speculators and hedge fund managers—over working people. [*Interruption.*] Government Members can shout at me all they want, but that is the truth. How can we trust a Prime Minister who stood up and said they would keep the “highest possible standards” on workers' rights, when the leaks show that the Government view such commitments as “inappropriate” and that negotiators had “successfully resisted” them being included in the legally binding part of the agreement with the EU? These rights are not inappropriate; they include things such as maternity leave, working hours, paid holiday leave—things that make a difference in people's lives.

The Secretary of State says that the Government do not intend to dilute rights after we leave the EU. May I then ask her very simply: why did they take level playing field obligations out of the legally binding part of their Brexit agreement? Crucially, has the Secretary of State's Department or the Cabinet Office ever looked at deregulation? If so, why? We need to get to the bottom of this. The Government are relying on the complexity of the legislation to bury their true approach to workers' rights. Once we expose exactly the consequences of their approach to leaving the EU and what it means for our communities, they know that the Government could never win support of this House and, more importantly, of working people. Rather than resisting workers' rights, we need a fundamental shift in power from the owners of business to workers. It is only a Labour Government who will ever do that.

**Andrea Leadsom**: Well, Mr Speaker, that was incredibly disappointing. The hon. Lady obviously was not listening to a thing I said. If she will allow me, I will just repeat what I actually said, rather than what she asserts I said. It is this Government's ambition to make the United Kingdom the best place in the world to work.

I find it extraordinary that the hon. Lady thinks that the only valid protector of UK workers' rights can be the European Union. Why on earth does she think that her party, my party, the other Opposition parties and our strong trade union tradition in the UK are utterly incapable of building on the superb tradition we already have in the UK of exceeding workers' rights in the EU in so many areas? Once we have left the European Union, the United Kingdom will not be represented in EU institutions and nor will we have any direct influence



on future EU legislation on workers' rights. Why then should the Government and this Parliament seek to engineer circumstances where we are required to implement legislation over which we have had no say?

As we leave the European Union, we have a unique opportunity to enhance protections for the workforce and tailor them to best support UK workers. It will be for the United Kingdom to create and enhance UK employment rights and to take advantage of the superb opportunities for new UK-wide skills, jobs and prosperity that await us after we have left the European Union.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Most eccentric behaviour by the hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami). It is not necessary to raise one's hand, as though in a classroom. It is quite sufficient for the hon. Gentleman simply to stand. I do not know what he did when he was at Eton, but he does not have to worry about that now. I am glad there is a beatific smile on the face of the hon. Gentleman. That itself is a source of some solace.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): May I say to my right hon. Friend that the question from the hon. Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock) is completely at odds with reality? If Labour Members look very carefully at wanting to remain in the EU, it is the judgments of the European Court of Justice that Professor Mary Davis of Royal Holloway, University of London—a Labour historian—has said will be a thunderclap to the left, because, with imported workers, they put business rights over workers' rights. So, if this case is exactly what they say it is, they should be wanting to accelerate our departure from the EU to get back full control of workers' rights to the UK.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has done so much to promote social justice in the United Kingdom and he deserves respect from right across this place. What I would say to my right hon. Friend is that one of the EU's own agencies, Eurofound—Opposition Members obviously do not want to hear this, because they are all chatting—ranks the United Kingdom as the second-best country in the EU for workplace wellbeing, second only to Sweden, and the best for workplace performance. That is something to be proud of.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Despite the Secretary of State's energetic assertions, make no mistake: the Prime Minister's deal is disastrous for workers' rights. Scottish workers and industry now face the spectre of Tory trade deals to lower environmental and other vital standards. The Tories can never be trusted with workers' rights; their record speaks for itself, and anyone who believes otherwise is sorely deluded. The Prime Minister bought off Labour votes for his awful deal by pledging "the highest possible standards". Days later, that promise, like so many others, lay in tatters.

EU law and courts provide their own backstop against UK workers' rights being weakened. We know that this Government are planning to diverge on the key regulations post Brexit. Is not it the case that the only way to guarantee workers' rights and avoid them being watered down is to stay in the EU? As the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has pointed out:

"Loss of oversight from, and recourse to, the European Court of Justice will remove...protection from UK citizens".

As a minimum, will the Secretary of State agree to undertake an equality impact assessment of the UK Government's plans for workers' rights post Brexit? If not, why not?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman describes my defence of our ambitions on workers' rights as energetic. It also happens to be true, which is extremely helpful to workers in the United Kingdom. Let us look at the facts. He asserts that somehow the EU is the only thing that lies between us and the poor house, but in reality there is no minimum wage in the EU, whereas this Government are raising the national minimum wage to £10.50 an hour. UK annual holiday entitlement is 28 days, including our public holidays; in the EU it is 20 days. Our maternity entitlements are nearly three times greater than those in the EU. We have given fathers and partners statutory rights to leave and pay. We have given adoption leave. We have given employees the right to request flexible working. In every single area, the UK far exceeds the European Union. It is absolute and total rubbish to say that the EU is the only protector of UK workers' rights.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Could we turn to practical matters for a moment? Most of our constituents are in work, have worked or are related to people in work. It would be a pretty eccentric and perverse prospectus to say to our voters, "Please vote for us. We are going to make your working life worse, your standards lower and your environment less safe." Given the practical, non-ideological politics of Government Members, does my right hon. Friend agree that that would be a very strange political message indeed?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. To give some further cheery news, 80% of jobs created since 2010 are full-time jobs. The introduction of the national living wage delivered the fastest pay rise in at least 20 years for the lowest earners. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) might like to look at the facts rather than listen to the rhetoric coming from Opposition Members. If people want good work, good workers' rights and decent wages, they should stick with the Conservatives.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Asking people to trust the Conservative party is a bit like asking them to trust Dracula with the blood bank. We know what its record is.

Will the right hon. Lady talk about enforcement? We can have all the rights we like on paper, but this Government and their predecessors have slashed enforcement to the bone, which has meant that an awful lot of the so-called rights that people have at work are theoretical and do not exist in practice.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady knows that that is simply not the case. Since 2015 the Government have doubled the budget for enforcement on compliance with the minimum wage. The enforcement activity of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has meant that 200,000 workers could access nearly £25 million in national minimum wage arrears in 2018-19. The employment agency standards inspectorate has received a 50% increase in frontline inspectors. We are investing more than £1 billion in reforming the Courts and Tribunals Service. The hon. Lady is asserting non-facts; I am giving her the facts and she should listen to them.

**Margot James** (Stourbridge) (Ind): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to the UK becoming the best place in the world in which to work and grow a business. Does she agree that we need to consider the way in which employment protection and the tribunals system impact on those in low paid and insecure employment in particular?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have consulted on proposals for a single enforcement body for employment rights. That consultation closed on 6 October and the Government will respond to it. She will know very well that this Government are committed to extending, improving and enforcing some of the best workers' rights in the world.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am going to call a Member who cannot be improved in any way: Alison McGovern.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): I am not sure how much of a favour you have done me there, Mr Speaker. The truth is that the reality of our labour market is that lived by my constituents, not the picture being painted from the Dispatch Box. But never mind that: this is about Brexit and what it could do to our economy. The Secretary of State claims the mantle of the person who will defend family rights at work and people's ability to defend themselves against poor bosses. Will she therefore clarify whether the TUC has recommended that we accept the Government's deal—yes or no?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will know better than I the TUC's view of the Government's deal. She says that the reality is not the same as what I am saying from the Dispatch Box, but she should recognise that almost 32.7 million people are in work, including a further 280,000 over the past year; that 80% of jobs created since 2010 are full-time jobs; and that we have experienced the fastest growth in real earnings since 2015. The hon. Lady should listen to the facts and not try to scaremonger. This Government are improving and protecting workers' rights and enhancing enforcement of them.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Anyone who has travelled in the European Union will know that conditions of employment in the UK are higher, particularly on contracts of employment, as well as the other points made by my right hon. Friend. Does she therefore share my suspicion that this UQ is motivated not by care for people's employment rights, but more by the fact that we face, possibly, a general election?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have to say that I completely agree with my hon. Friend, because what I am hearing from Opposition Members does not resemble any of the facts. It is this Conservative Government who are protecting and enhancing the rights of the workforce and ensuring a benign economic situation, which means that more people than ever before are in work, more women are in work, fewer young people are out of work, and wages are rising. We are also ensuring that employment is safe and more secure and that health and safety rules are strong. It is the Opposition who seem to be positioning themselves for a general election.

**Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Ind): If the Secretary of State is serious about making Britain the best place in the world to work, will she commit to scrapping the anti-trade union legislation? The undermining of trade unions over the past 10 years or so has led to an explosion of precarious low-paid employment, which is now endemic throughout the land.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, in leaving the European Union with the withdrawal agreement negotiated by the Prime Minister, if the European Union makes any changes to workers' rights and employment legislation, the Government will have the facility to consult businesses and trade unions, and this House will be able to express its view on whether any changes could or should be considered for implementation in the UK. It is really important that it is this House and the United Kingdom's courts that should judge and measure whether this or any future Government stick to their commitment to maintain the highest standards of workers' rights.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Ind): One way in which the Government could show that they are not only committed to workers' rights but innovative in the field of workers' rights is to look carefully at what rights we might extend to workers in the so-called gig economy, which has emerged from the success of tech in the UK. Will the Secretary of State update the House on the progress in looking at the Taylor report and on her thoughts on this important area of the economy?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend raises a really important point. In terms of zero-hours contracts and the gig economy, the number of people on zero-hours contracts is falling, and less than 3% of the people in work are employed on them. He mentions the Taylor report. Matthew Taylor said that banning zero-hours contracts would be like using "a sledgehammer to crack a nut".

However, it is important that we do everything we can to ensure that workers have the flexibility they need, so we have consulted on one-sided flexibility. That consultation closed on 11 October and we will bring forward our response soon.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): There is no guarantee from this Government that UK employment rights will keep track with EU employment protections. For example, the gig economy was just mentioned, and the European Commission recently launched proposals to introduce transparent and predictable working conditions for gig economy workers, such as those on zero-hours contracts or in domestic employment. It is also planning other additional protections, so will the Secretary of State promise that that will happen here and that we will keep in track with EU developments?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising that very important point. She is right that the EU has discussed the gig economy and enhancing the rights of working parents. It is true that the EU has introduced proposals in the transparent and predictable working conditions directive, but it is not true that those proposals go further than the good work plan. For example, we brought forward a statutory instrument

in March this year under which the right to a written statement on day one for every worker will come into force in April 2020, whereas under the EU's proposals, if it does introduce that directive, it will not take effect until the summer of 2022, so the UK is bringing forward workers' rights further and faster than the European Union.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Prime Minister championed the London living wage and a much higher national living wage. Does that not demonstrate his commitment to increased workers' rights?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This Prime Minister has been extremely keen to ensure that all workers get a fair deal. He has presided over the intention to bring the national minimum wage to £10.50 at a greater speed than was previously envisaged. We will bring forward measures to ensure that that can be put into force as soon as we can.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The level playing field clause would not constrain any improvement in workers' rights, but it would limit and stop the reduction of workers' rights, so why did the Prime Minister want that clause to be removed from the legally binding withdrawal agreement?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the EU sets minimum workers' rights that all EU members abide by, and the UK then, like many other member states, improves on that—in the UK's case, very significantly. Under our withdrawal agreement Bill and in a no-deal situation, all existing workers' rights will be protected, but the UK does not intend necessarily to dynamically align with all future EU legislation. When I say that, I mean that this House will have the opportunity to look at all measures that come forward, but in many areas the UK will want to do things better than the EU. Dynamic alignment means copy and paste, and we do not want to have to do that. I just gave an example to the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) of an area in which the UK is introducing the right to a day one statement much faster than the EU. That is an example of our wanting to go further and faster in improving workers' rights.

**Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): The purpose of leaving the European Union is not to have a bonfire of workers' rights, but to make decisions in this House. Does my right hon. Friend agree that outside the EU, this House of Commons can pass such legislation to improve workers' rights? We should have the confidence to do so and not leave it to others.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. It is for this House, the UK's trade unions and the UK's parliamentarians of all parties to preserve and enhance workforce rights in the UK for everybody within it in a way that is tailored to the extraordinary opportunities that await us as we leave the EU.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Yesterday, I and a number of my colleagues signed early-day motion 57, in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), as a public indication of support for the withdrawal agreement Bill through which

we would have been able to secure some amendments that would give peace of mind, hopefully to Labour colleagues, that workers' rights would not be undermined after we leave the EU. Does the Business Secretary share my disappointment that rather than bringing the Bill through this House, enabling us all to talk about these things and trying to get the strongest amendments possible, the Prime Minister has instead chosen to pull his Bill?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have the greatest respect and regard for the hon. Lady, and I am sorry to say that on this I disagree with her. If Parliament really did intend to provide the opportunity for the withdrawal agreement Bill to have its Third Reading and Royal Assent, this House would also have supported the timetable to do that. Unfortunately, the fact that so few colleagues, on both sides of the House, decided to support the programme motion means that it undermined its own credibility and willingness to bring that Bill to its conclusion.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Secretary of State will have seen the EU report that says that 90% of economic growth in the next 15 years will be outside the EU. The United Kingdom therefore has to make decisions in line with its national interest that lead to more jobs, opportunities, prosperity and security. That is what we have been seeing for the last nine years that this Conservative Government have been in place.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is exactly right: a very bright future awaits us as we leave the European Union in all circumstances. From the amazing innovations in areas such as healthier, longer living through our life sciences agenda, to areas such as clean growth through our commitment to net zero, there are massive opportunities for new skills, new jobs and new prosperity across the United Kingdom. This Conservative Government will maintain and enhance workers' rights for all.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): As one of the Labour MPs who have worked in good faith to find common ground—a compromise, even—over Brexit, I was disappointed to read the leaked documents. Further to the answers that the Minister has given to a number of hon. Members, will she tell us exactly what workplace rights and protections would be introduced to prevent the Government from backtracking on the commitments that they have made?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Lady's position. I absolutely assure her that it is the Government's intention to maintain all the workers' rights regulations as we leave the EU and to ensure that Parliament has the opportunity, in every piece of primary legislation that comes forward in future, to understand—with a statement by the Government—how that might impact on workers' rights, so that it can express its view. At the same time, the Government of the day will consult trade unions and businesses on whether the impact is positive or negative. There will be the opportunity either to align with those changes in legislation and improve on them, as the United Kingdom so often does, or not to implement them if they are not appropriate for the UK, but it should be for this place to make that decision.



**Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that if the Prime Minister's deal, negotiated with the European Union, is ratified by this House, on leaving the EU the UK will have better and stronger workers' rights than the bare bones provided by the EU?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Yes, my hon. Friend is exactly right.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The Tory party talks about protecting workers. Thomas Cook: no say and no pay. Asda: sign or resign. Royal Mail: agreements made but not honoured. Where is the intervention from the Tory Government? They will further weaken workers' rights after Brexit, including on health and safety. Why is there no legal protection for existing workers' rights in the withdrawal agreement?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is not correct. There are protections for workers' rights in UK legislation. As I have explained to many right hon. and hon. Members, the UK's protections and rights for workers go far beyond any of the EU's minimum standards. We are proud of that fact and have every intention of further enhancing those rights.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): As the Secretary of State pointed out, parties on both sides have expanded workers' rights far beyond the EU minimums, so will she go further and call out this campaign for what it is—a grubby attempt to divide employees from employers and a deliberate politically motivated campaign of misinformation? Moreover, it is deeply insulting to the British electorate to suggest that they are incapable of electing people to this place who share their aims and intentions in wanting to go further in protecting workers' rights.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Yes, my hon. Friend is exactly right. It is a great shame when the House has so much to be proud of in our combined record on workers' rights that Opposition parties are suggesting that the only way to protect workers in the UK is to stay part of the EU. It is blatantly untrue and blatant scaremongering. The Government have a proud record of enhancing workers' rights and look forward to being able to continue that once we have left the EU.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): The right hon. Lady will know that responsibility for workers' rights is a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. She will also know that we have not had a functioning Assembly for almost three years. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been dedicated to the restoration of the Assembly and Executive, but his valiant efforts are now being deliberately and wilfully undermined by the Prime Minister's stunt of an early general election. How on earth does the Business Secretary reconcile the Secretary of State's efforts to have the institutions restored in Northern Ireland with the Prime Minister's stunt of an early general election?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in his place and will have heard the hon. Lady's comments. The parties in Northern Ireland have had ample opportunity to come together, and the Prime Minister, like his predecessor, has sought at every turn to find an accommodation so that all parties in Northern

Ireland can restore the Assembly. It is a top priority for this Parliament, but so too is delivering on the will of the people in the 2016 referendum. It is not acceptable that we have yet to deliver on the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the EU. We must do so.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): A speech the Secretary of State gave in 2012 contains this passage about small business:

"I envisage there being absolutely no regulation whatsoever—no minimum wage, no maternity or paternity rights, no unfair dismissal rights, no pension rights"—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2012; Vol. 545, c. 209.]

It is no wonder we are suspicious on these Benches. If the European Commission provides protections on zero-hours contracts, childcare provision and leave that are stronger than those in the Taylor report, will the UK Government match them or deviate?

**Andrea Leadsom:** In each of the areas the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, the UK already provides enhanced rights to workers. The Government are proud of their record on improving workers' rights and will seek to continue that record as we leave the EU.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): As a Member who voted for Second Reading of the withdrawal Bill, I say to the Secretary of State that it is at best confused and at worst slightly disingenuous to put more weight on the programme motion vote than on the principle of the Bill going forward, which many of us supported, as a reason for not bringing the Bill back.

On workers' rights, I welcome the Secretary of State's ambition, but under this Government the qualifying period for entitlement to a tribunal doubled, tribunal fees were introduced and the Trade Union Act 2016 introduced. If the Government were serious about putting these provisions into law, she would strengthen clause 31 of the withdrawal Bill, ensure a clear role for the TUC and not just workers' representatives, recognise that the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) were aimed at improving the Bill and ultimately give the House the chance to vote on it.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his personal efforts to support the resolution of committing to the will of the people in the 2016 referendum. I know it has been difficult for him personally and I sincerely pay tribute to him.

Under the good work plan, the Government are committed to taking forward 51 of Matthew Taylor's 53 recommendations, including improving the clarity of employment status checks and introducing proposals for a single enforcement body for employment rights and a right to request a more predictable contract. And of course we have introduced a tipping Bill to ensure that employees can keep their hard-earned tips. At every level, the Government show their desire and willingness to enhance workers' rights. On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about trade unions, we have given a commitment that when a Bill is introduced that affects employees' rights, the Government of the day will be required to consult businesses and trade unions, and have to seek Parliament's view on whether that should be reciprocated in UK law.



**Mr Sam Gyimah** (East Surrey) (LD): The Secretary of State's words ring hollow simply because workers' rights were in the legally binding withdrawal agreement and have now been moved into the political declaration. But her reassurances ring hollow for another reason: the logic of leaving the EU to look for new trade deals is that whatever we want will come at the price of what the other country wants. The desire for a US trade deal as a political trophy would that mean workers' rights could be traded away. Can she assure us that that will not happen in our pursuit of a US trade deal, if the Prime Minister's deal were to pass?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I find that intervention from the hon. Gentleman, of all people, quite shameful. As an ex-Conservative Minister, he will be aware of the Government's proud record of, and commitment to, enhancing workers' rights and protections. It is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I understand what the Secretary of State says about new legislation introduced by the EU, but of course existing rules from the EU are not static and can be interpreted and changed, for example by European Court of Justice judgments. If the ECJ does interpret an existing employment right in a way that is favourable to the employee, will the Government legislate to enhance that in UK law as well?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. As I have tried to explain to other right hon. and hon. Members, whenever a new piece of EU legislation is brought into force, the Government will provide a report to the House so that the House can express its opinion on whether it enhances, reduces or changes workers' rights, and when a Bill is introduced in this place that affects employees' rights, there will be a requirement to consult businesses and trade unions on any impact, for better or worse, on workers' rights. It will be for this House to decide what gets taken forward.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has repeatedly discussed pay inflation in response to questions. The west midlands TUC has today published pay level analysis. My constituents are currently experiencing the worst pay squeeze in 200 years and are still earning less in real terms than in 2008. We cannot trust the Government on pay, so how can we trust them to deliver the workers' rights that I, along with other hon. Members, have been trying to deliver with them as part of the withdrawal agreement Bill?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Again, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her efforts to get the withdrawal agreement Bill through the House. However, I must disagree with her. It is this Government who are committing to raising the national minimum wage to £10.50. We introduced the national living wage, our changes in the tax free allowance have taken millions of people out of tax altogether, and real wages are rising at their fastest level since 2015. There have been real increases in take-home pay for millions of workers, which is absolutely vital. This Government will always do everything we can to retain and enhance the rights of workers.

**Mr Speaker:** Jim Shannon.

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

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I called the wrong Jim. No disrespect to the hon. Member for Strangford, but I should have called Jim Cunningham. [*Laughter.*] I say to the hon. Member for Strangford, you are a very great man, sir, but I was originally going to call Mr Cunningham. We will come to you; don't worry. I am saving you up.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. We now have a situation, under this Government, where we actually have the working poor. We all want to know what the Government's intentions are regarding workers' rights. All we have to look at is the Trade Union Bill that one of the Leader of the House's colleagues tried to take through the House last year. What value or credibility can we give to any of the Government's commitments on workers' rights?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the plight of workers. He will know that there are nearly 33 million people in work—an increase of 280,000 since last year—that 80% of jobs created since 2010 are full-time jobs, that real wages are rising, and that the Government are committed to increasing the national living wage to £10.50 an hour. Those are all incredibly important steps to give workers better rights and better conditions.

**Jim Shannon:** Will the Business Secretary confirm the rights of NHS staff who are skilled but do not meet the "highly skilled" threshold?

**Andrea Leadsom:** You have just called two of my favourite Jims in the world, Mr Speaker.

It is absolutely the case that the UK will always ensure that the immigration system is fair to the United Kingdom's needs for a skilled workforce, but also fair to those around the world who would like to come here to contribute to our economy and to our fantastic NHS.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): To understand the Government's real attitude to workers' rights, we need only look at the treatment of the Interserve workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Those cooks, cleaners and porters have been engaged in a long-standing dispute over terms and conditions and pay, and over the recognition of their trade union, the Public and Commercial Services Union. The Secretary of State talked about strong trade unions earlier, yet the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will not recognise the PCS. If the Government are really serious about workers' rights, why have they allowed this dispute to run and run?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure the hon. Lady will be delighted to know that in my own Department there has been a dispute resolution. It is obviously important for trade unions always to represent the workforce, but it is also important for the discussions that take place to be respectful on all sides, and I know that that is the case across Whitehall.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): We have heard plenty of words from the Dispatch Box today but, when it comes to workers' rights, is it not the case that the British public do not trust a word that the

[Gerald Jones]

Tories say? Is it not also the case that the Government wish to use this deal to dispose of all those hard-won workers' rights on the bonfire of a harsh Tory Brexit?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. The UK has gone beyond EU minimum standards in so many instances, including maternity entitlements, leave and pay for the other parent, shared parental leave, minimum holiday rights and the national minimum wage. One of the EU's own agencies, EuroCloud, ranks the UK as the second best country in the EU for workplace wellbeing, and that is something of which the Government are extremely proud.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): In the United States, employment contracts are at will. There is no right to union representation, there is two-week holiday pay entitlement, there are no maternity rights, and there is no entitlement to sick pay. Think of that. Is it not the case that the purpose of not making alignment with the European Union legally binding is to align more closely with the United States?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will know that what she has just said is absolutely not the case. The EU minimum standard is 20 days' paid holiday; the UK's is 28. There is no minimum wage in the EU; in the UK, we are moving to £10.50. Moreover, we are introducing a right of transparency from day one for all employees in respect of their employment entitlements. The UK already far exceeds the EU's minimum standards, and there is no way that, in a free trade deal, the United Kingdom will need to—or agree to—give away anything that we think is in the interests of the UK's workers. This Government are committed to making the UK the best place in the world in which to work.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): European standards are one thing, but another aspect of European Union law is that, once member states have established enhancements, they cannot row back from those enhancements. Why did the Government seek exemptions from compulsory arbitration if they were not intending to dilute those very enhanced standards to seek a trade deal with the United States?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am tempted simply to refer the hon. Gentleman to what I have just said to his hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah). The United Kingdom far exceeds EU standards for workers' rights. We intend to enhance those further, but it is for trade unions in the United Kingdom, for businesses in the United Kingdom and for this Parliament to decide on those enhancements once we have left the European Union.

## Points of Order

1.36 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House of Commons could well agree to an early general election today, with Parliament being dissolved on Monday, which is the day scheduled for the election of your successor. If a general election is called, many Members could be quite understandably detained in their constituencies on Monday. To preserve the dignity of this place and the importance of the election, Mr Speaker, may I call on you to consider continuing in your position for the next two working days to ensure that you leave this place in the way that you would want to?

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

**Mr Speaker:** I will respond to the right hon. Lady, but first I will take the point of order from the hon. Member for North Wiltshire.

**James Gray:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that the whole House will want to mark—and, I almost said, to celebrate—your departure from this post after 10 highly distinguished years in your seat, but would it not be a shame if the transition to the new Speaker were marked by anything less than an entirely seemly procedure? If, for example, a new Speaker were to be elected on Monday 4 November, the House could be dissolved on Tuesday. Let us imagine that that new Speaker were then not to be elected when representatives of other parties stood against him or her in the constituency. In that event, a Speaker would be sitting in your Chair for just one day, which would be a great deal less than seemly. There are a number of other reasons—to do with pensions, for instance—for that not to be allowed.

Is there not therefore a strong argument, Mr Speaker, for you to be kindly asked to extend your stay in the Chair for another couple of days, until next Monday, and for a new Speaker to be elected when the new Parliament reassembles?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We do not want a spate of points of order. The point has been made with great clarity and courtesy by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). However, if the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) really thinks that he has anything to add, I will come to him in a moment.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** No, no, not yet. I am keeping the hon. Gentleman waiting because someone else signalled before he did, but I thank the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray).

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think that everyone is aware of my personal ambitions in this regard but, to be very serious, it is perfectly possible that Parliament will be prorogued on Thursday evening. However, it might be prorogued on Monday or Tuesday next week. If it were prorogued on Thursday evening, there would not be a speakership election next Monday. I understand that if there were to be a general election on 12 December, the requirement for a 25-day dissolution before that would mean that the House would be dissolved next Wednesday.

If I am honest, speaking as a candidate, I think it odd for the House to be focusing on a speakership election when we should be focusing on the concerns of the nation. So let me gently say, as a candidate, that it would be good to resolve this matter as soon as possible. I think that it would be daft to have a speakership election before the general election.

**Michael Fabricant:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to take a contrary view and I will tell you why if I may—you and I discussed this actually some months ago. I have stark memories of being a new Member of Parliament and, when we voted as new Members of Parliament, we just voted on party lines; we did not know the individuals involved. I believe it is right that Members of Parliament should have the choice of different candidates for Speaker whom we know. There is a possibility of a large churn at the next general election, with new Members of Parliament who actually will not have a clue about the individual candidates and will simply vote on party lines. I do not think that is right for Parliament.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (IGC): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I agree with the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) because, when I came in in 1992 as a new Member, the first thing I did was vote for a Speaker, without knowing any of the candidates in any detail whatsoever. But surely the best way to resolve this issue is not to have a general election in December.

**Mr Speaker:** We have now had points of order from the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (James Gray), for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). My response is as follows, and I hope it will be taken in the constructive spirit in which it is intended. This is first and foremost, in terms of opinion, and opinion guides and informs us in everything here, not a matter for the Chair. It is in the first instance, I think, very properly a matter for the candidates for the Chair—I think that is a material factor if there is a consensus among them—and, if I may say so, for the usual channels. I have been apprised of this matter only within the last hour and I have had the briefest of exchanges with the Leader of the House about it. I think that there is merit in hearing the views of the candidates not in the Chamber, and the views of the usual channels.

I hope I can be forgiven, not least in response to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke, who made her point with great courtesy, for saying this. I made my announcement on 9 September and I meant it. I have not the slightest

ambition to serve any longer than the close of business on Thursday. Having been a Member of this place for 22 years and Speaker for 10, I will do my duty and, if the House asks me to do as people have requested, of course I take that extremely seriously and as close to being an instruction as makes no difference, but I do not think that it should be resolved here and now.

I hope I have given an earnest account of my good intentions and let us see if we can resolve this matter in a courteous and constructive way within the coming hours and certainly within 24 hours. I hope that is helpful. May I thank Members for what they have said and for the way in which they have said it?

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): Four more years, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I think there would be a Division on that, and I think the hon. Lady would be in isolation in the Division Lobby—“Four more years”, she said. *[Interruption.]* I am glad the House is in a good mood at this time of day.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### NORTHERN IRELAND BUDGET BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Julian Smith, supported by the Prime Minister, the Attorney General and Rishi Sunak, presented a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31 March 2020; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; and to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for that year.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 9) with explanatory notes (Bill 9-EN).*

### EARLY PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

The Prime Minister, supported by Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Michael Gove, Secretary Priti Patel, Oliver Dowden and Secretary Stephen Barclay, presented a Bill to make provision for a parliamentary general election to be held on 12 December 2019.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time today, and to be printed (Bill 10) with explanatory notes (Bill 10-EN).*



## Early Parliamentary General Election Bill (Business of the House)

**Mr Speaker:** I should inform the House that I have selected an amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). In a moment, I will ask the Leader of the House to move the business of the House motion. I simply want to emphasise to the House that the vote on Second Reading of the Bill must come no more than four hours after the start of proceedings on the business of the House motion. There is an amendment to it, as I have just said, which I have selected, and of course colleagues are free to debate the motion and the amendment. May I gently encourage and exhort the House not to exhaust itself in so doing, because the deadline for the vote on Second Reading is as I have described, and I can inform the House that several colleagues wish to speak on the substance of the Bill? Moreover—gentle hint—the business of the House motion is potentially subject to a closure motion after a reasonable period of debate. I hope that that is helpful to the House.

1.45 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Early Parliamentary General Election Bill:

### *Timetable*

(1) (a) Proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be taken at today's sitting in accordance with this Order.

(b) Notices of amendments, new Clauses or new Schedules to be moved in Committee of the whole House may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.

(c) Proceedings on Second Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(d) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

### *Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put*

(2) As soon as the proceedings on the Motion for this Order have been concluded, the Order for the Second Reading of the Bill shall be read.

(3) When the Bill has been read a second time:

(a) it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;

(b) the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

(4) (a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

(b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

(5) If, following proceedings in Committee of the whole House and any proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, a legislative grand committee withholds consent to the Bill or any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill, the House shall proceed to Reconsideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(6) If, following Reconsideration of the Bill—

(a) a legislative grand committee withholds consent to any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill (but does not withhold consent to the whole Bill and, accordingly, the Bill is amended in accordance with Standing Order No. 83N(6)), and

(b) a Minister of the Crown indicates his or her intention to move a minor or technical amendment to the Bill, the House shall proceed to consequential Consideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(7) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (18)(a) of this Order.

(8) On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(9) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (7)(c) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chairman or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.

(10) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (7)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause or Schedule of the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

### *Consideration of Lords Amendments*

(11) (a) Any Lords Amendments to the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(12) Paragraphs (2) to (11) of Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (11) of this Order.

### *Subsequent stages*

(13) (a) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(14) Paragraphs (2) to (9) of Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (13) of this Order.

### *Reasons Committee*

(15) Paragraphs (2) to (6) of Standing Order No. 83H (Programme orders: reasons committee) apply in relation to any committee to be appointed to draw up reasons after proceedings have been brought to a conclusion in accordance with this Order.



*Miscellaneous*

(16) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply so far as necessary for the purposes of this Order.

(17) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(18) (a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken, to recommit the Bill or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

(b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.

(c) Such a motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly. (d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed.

(e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(19) (a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

(b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(20) No debate shall be held in accordance with Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.

(21) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(22) No private business may be considered at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.

I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate that I do not wish to detain the House unduly. I hope that the House will support this business of the House motion so that we can move on to consider the stages of this Bill. This is a straightforward business of the House motion that will facilitate consideration of a short Bill, so that the House can agree the date of a general election. The motion sets aside up to six hours for consideration of the Bill, including up to four hours for the Second Reading, with the remaining time for Committee of the whole House and remaining stages.

To have a pre-Christmas election on 12 December, this Bill will need Royal Assent by 5 November for the House to dissolve just after midnight on 6 November. That general election timetable allows for the Northern Ireland Budget Bill to pass before Dissolution to ensure the Northern Ireland civil service can access the funding it needs to deliver public services and proper governance. The situation facing a number of Northern Ireland Departments has become critical, and the Bill is needed to allow the Northern Ireland civil service to continue to access the cash needed to deliver public services.

To ensure that the Bill receives Royal Assent to allow for Dissolution on 6 November and allow the 25 working days for the administration of the poll, it needs to proceed quickly. We have therefore proposed in the business motion that all Commons stages of the Bill happen today.

The Bill before the House is only two clauses long so is a very short Bill. It is also a simple Bill in that it seeks only to set the polling day as 12 December. The House should not therefore be disadvantaged by considering all stages of the Bill in one day.

Turning to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), the Government's business motion provides for an efficient timetable for the consideration of this Bill, which is a straightforward piece of legislation for an election on 12 December. Of course, the Government recognise that the selection

of amendments is a matter for the Speaker or Chairman of Ways and Means; however, it is entirely standard practice in this House for amendments not to be taken from Back-Bench MPs on Bills as simple as this one where an expedited timetable is required. While it may not be a wrecking amendment in itself, there is no doubt that it is a gateway to amendments that could seek to obstruct the Bill. The Bill is simply designed to give effect to what all four of the biggest parties in this House have now said they support—a December general election—nothing more, nothing less.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Once upon a time, the Leader of the House was a champion of this House, but since he became Leader of the House he seems to be trying to curtail debate on every Government Bill. I know that he has had a long-running, if polite, dispute with the Speaker, but will he explain to us paragraph (3)(b) and why he felt it was necessary to say

“the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.”?

The Speaker is never in the Chair when we are in Committee. Why does the Leader of the House feel it necessary to say that this afternoon?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The hon. Lady and I served on the Procedure Committee together, and she must be aware that this is completely standard whenever the Speaker leaves the Chair to go into Committee. It has been standard for decades, if not for centuries, and there is nothing unusual in it. If anyone thinks that this is in any way a dig at you, Mr Speaker, they simply do not understand the procedures of this House. I note that you are indicating that you are in assent with what I am saying. I am frankly surprised that the hon. Lady, who is a distinguished member of the Procedure Committee, is unaware of that basic procedure.

So it is just a December general election, nothing more and nothing less. There will be six weeks to discuss all the great political questions facing our country before the people are given the chance to give their verdict, but the debate today is not about those great issues; it is simply about setting 12 December as the date for a general election.

1.50 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the business motion. The House is surprised and alarmed at the state of the Government for moving a motion for a general election in this way. The Leader of the House said yesterday that the Bill would be published this morning. It was a great disservice to the House that it was not available yesterday. It is just one line. We are now debating a programme motion to introduce the Bill in one day.

Yesterday, the Government called a vote under the terms of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, but they did not have the necessary majority. They did not get the magic 434 votes to give them a two-thirds majority in the House, so they are now introducing another Bill. Will the Government now repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act? This Bill will be pushed through in one day and will then come back from the Lords. The Leader of the House criticised the first and second European Union withdrawal agreement Bills, which similarly had few clauses, yet he and the Government

[Valerie Vaz]

are now doing exactly the same. As you have stated, Mr Speaker, the whole process will take six hours, with the Second Reading vote coming four hours after the start of proceedings, and with one amendment having been tabled. I think that this is another way to crash out of the EU without a deal, because the Government have not met their target of 31 October. This programme motion is unacceptable. It has been deliberately designed to avoid scrutiny of the Government.

Speaking of programme motions, the withdrawal agreement Bill is in limbo, in purgatory or in the ether. When this House was asking for a proper programme motion on the Bill that would have enabled hon. Members to have a proper discussion and to discuss, debate and amend where necessary, the Government did not want to give us that time. They did not want to deal with leaving the EU in an orderly way for businesses, farmers, working people and the environment. The Leader of the House will know that the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) said yesterday:

“Surely the proportionate and sensible thing is to offer the House more time. If it does not vote for it, the Government will take their course, but surely they should at least try.”—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2019; Vol. 667, c. 138.]

The Leader of the House made it clear yesterday in his response to the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir David Lidington) that he had no intention of bringing the withdrawal agreement Bill back to the House. Why? Why can we not have a proper debate on the Bill, with a new programme motion and with amendments being tested in a vote? Then we could see where the House stood on this issue.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): Will the shadow Leader of the House cast her mind back to the Second Reading debate for the withdrawal agreement Bill? Perhaps she will recall that Labour ran out of speakers some one hour before the end of the debate. Why does she therefore need more time?

**Valerie Vaz:** If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I was saying, he would know that we need more time so that we can amend the Bill to take everyone’s views into account. We did not have an opportunity to amend it or even to vote on it.

We tried to have discussions, but the Government were not listening. Yesterday, in response to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), the Leader of the House said that

“the reason for not bringing forward an allocation of time motion is that the House has made its mind clear: it does not want to deal or engage seriously with the withdrawal agreement Bill.”—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2019; Vol. 667, c. 134.]

How did he know that? I think that that is highly patronising. We have been begging for extra time so that we could have the votes, so that the House’s views would be clear. The reason that the Bill needed further discussion, as he knows, is that there would be a border down the Irish Sea—that was the reason that the previous Prime Minister ruled this out—or that it would result in the break-up of the United Kingdom. The Leader of the House should do the right thing by the House and reintroduce the withdrawal agreement Bill with a new programme motion that could be agreed with the usual channels and that took into account all sides of the debate. That would help the country to move on.

1.55 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for bringing forward this very interesting business motion this afternoon. Here we are, once again, considering another programme motion. I am pretty certain that the Government are full and sick of these cursed things. Who knows?—after the contribution from the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), we might be heading for meaningful programme motion No. 2. I was beginning to sense that Labour Members were about to oppose this motion, which could mean that the Bill would not progress. My message to everyone is that if they are intent on getting their Brexmas decorations out, perhaps they should just wait a moment until this has been concluded.

We could have had all this done and dusted by now. It could all have been settled in October, and the Commons could have been reassembling right now to get on with the business that our constituents find important, but the Prime Minister’s bluff and bluster have brought us here to a deadlocked Parliament, a broken Britain and the spectre of the Government’s hard Brexit still looming over us. However, there are now a few things that we know as we consider this programme motion. They will not get their no deal, which is good, and the Prime Minister will not be able to bring back his withdrawal agreement until the British people have had their say, but probably most importantly, he has failed to get the United Kingdom out of the European Union on Thursday. Remember, it was “do or die”, “no ifs, no buts” and “die in a ditch”. This was the very basis of his Tory leadership campaign and his solemn pledge to his party. The Kippers, the Faragists and the right-wing Tories must feel like total mugs today, because he has not delivered and he will soon be judged.

The date on the Bill is 12 December, and we all know that a poll in December is less than ideal. In some of the highland parts of my constituency, for example, it gets dark about 3.30 pm at that time of year. It is probably worse for some of my colleagues. However, it is worth that risk in order that we remove this Prime Minister. Calling an election by driving through a Bill in just one day is also less than ideal. We will have six hours to consider all these details, and using a programme motion to clamp down on any kind of amendment is absolutely objectionable. That is why we are supporting the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) today.

It has never been the practice of the Scottish National party to vote with the Tories in this House on programme motions, and we will not be supporting them on this today, but we will not be standing in the way of the Bill. We will not vote with the Tories on the programme motion, but we will back the general election that this country definitely needs to break the Brexit deadlock and make Scotland’s voice heard loud and clear.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman know where his partner, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), is, because she has not bothered to turn up for the debate? I thought this was something they had agreed together.

**Pete Wishart:** I say to the hon. Lady in all gentle candour that to categorise the Liberal Democrats as the Scottish National party's partner could not be further from the truth. We are delighted that they have come along with us to try to promote and progress this agenda. Sometimes, the Liberal Democrats have their values and their uses, although not very often.

The challenge for the Government is to get the numbers for this programme motion, and it is really up to the rest of the parties to decide what they are going to do today. The message from the Scottish National party is that we want no part of this shambolic Brexit; we want the right to decide our own future in Scotland. We will do our bit. We will take on the Tories, and we will beat them in Scotland. It is up to the other parties to have the courage and self-belief that they can beat the Tories. We will be back in even greater numbers in this House following this election, and we will continue to progress our nation's independence and demand that it is Scotland's right to choose the future it wants, based on the decisions of the Scottish people.

1.59 pm

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move amendment (a), in paragraph (7) after subparagraph (b) insert—

“(ba) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chair for separate decision;”.

Amendments (a) is about ensuring that whatever happens today the House can know that it was fair play. Last night, the Leader of the House told this place that, while we could not see the Bill before today, we could see the programme motion. A whole one copy was made available in the Table Office after 10 pm, and it showed that what the Government were trying to do was, in simple terms, rig today's debate by removing the part of the Standing Orders that allows the Chair of proceedings the right to select any amendment, new clause or new schedule for vote.

To do that late at night, without any consultation with the Opposition and in the hope that nobody would notice, is frankly—I hope the Leader of the House understands this concept—not cricket. It is to admit that, rather than win the case for this Bill as it stands, the Executive want no challenge to it at all, and that, whether one thinks it is a good Bill or not, should be worry for us all. If we let this lie now, it will become standard practice in future.

This is not the first time the Government have tried such a measure when backed into a corner. They also did it on 24 October last year with Northern Ireland legislation. Thankfully, the Government saw sense and agreed to restore it, which is what amendment (a) would do today. It does not amend the Bill itself and does not encourage any particular selection; it simply reinstates the concept of fair play in this House by restoring our Standing Orders as they would be for any other legislation. In doing so it repairs both our rulebook and, frankly, our reputation.

Letting this programme motion through without the full list of rules is like letting Lance Armstrong keep his medals or Maradona benefit from the hand of God or accepting Major Ingram as a winner of “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”—[*Interruption.*] That reaction is the point in case. Let us not confirm the reputation that the public already think we have of backroom deals, cheats

and liars. Whatever one thinks of this Bill, let it be won by fair play today, let us use the rulebook that has always been used, and add amendment (a) to this programme motion.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made.

*The House divided:* Ayes 312, Noes 295.

**Division No. 14]**

**[2.3 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cummins, Judith
Abrahams, Debbie	Cunningham, Alex
Ali, Rushanara	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Allen, Heidi	Daby, Janet
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Dakin, Nic
Amesbury, Mike	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Antoniazzi, Tonia	David, Wayne
Ashworth, Jonathan	Davies, Geraint
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Day, Martyn
Bardell, Hannah	De Cordova, Marsha
Bebb, Guto	De Piero, Gloria
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dent Coad, Emma
Benn, rh Hilary	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Berger, Luciana	Dodds, Anneliese
Betts, Mr Clive	Dodds, Jane
Black, Mhairi	Doughty, Stephen
Blackford, rh Ian	Dowd, Peter
Blackman, Kirsty	Drew, Dr David
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Dromey, Jack
Blomfield, Paul	Duffield, Rosie
Brabin, Tracy	Eagle, Ms Angela
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Eagle, Maria
Brake, rh Tom	Edwards, Jonathan
Brennan, Kevin	Efford, Clive
Brock, Deidre	Elliott, Julie
Brown, Alan	Ellman, Dame Louise
Brown, Lyn	Esterson, Bill
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Evans, Chris ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami</i> )
Bryant, Chris	Farrelly, Paul
Buck, Ms Karen	Farron, Tim
Burden, Richard	Fellows, Marion
Burgon, Richard	Field, rh Frank
Butler, Dawn	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Byrne, rh Liam	Fletcher, Colleen
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Flint, rh Caroline
Cadbury, Ruth	Forbes, Lisa
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Fovargue, Yvonne
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Foxcroft, Vicky
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Frith, James
Carden, Dan	Furniss, Gill
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Gaffney, Hugh
Champion, Sarah	Gapes, Mike
Chapman, Douglas	Gardiner, Barry
Chapman, Jenny	George, Ruth
Charalambous, Bambos	Gethins, Stephen
Cherry, Joanna	Gibson, Patricia
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Gill, Preet Kaur
Clwyd, rh Ann	Glindon, Mary
Coaker, Vernon	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Coffey, Ann	Goodman, Helen
Cooper, Julie	Grady, Patrick
Cooper, Rosie	Grant, Peter
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gray, Neil
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Green, Kate
Cowan, Ronnie	Greening, rh Justine
Coyle, Neil	Greenwood, Lilian
Crausby, Sir David	Greenwood, Margaret
Crawley, Angela	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Creagh, Mary	Griffith, Nia
Creasy, Stella	Grogan, John
Cruddas, Jon	



Gwynne, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham P.  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lee, Karen  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian

Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambos*)  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth

Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
  
 Adams, Nigel  
 Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, rh Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, rh Jake  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Bradley, rh Karen  
 Brady, Sir Graham  
 Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Steve Baker*)  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, rh Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Burns, rh Conor  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman

Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Woodcock, John  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Thangam Debbonaire and**  
**Chris Elmore**

**NOES**

Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, Colin  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, rh James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Ms Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, rh Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky



Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, rh Zac  
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Luke  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Bill  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Hair, Kirstene  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Harrison, Trudy  
 Hart, Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollingbery, Sir George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, rh Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg

Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Sir David  
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley*)  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Masterton, Paul  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark

Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, rh Alok  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, rh Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo

Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomson, Ross  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Stuart Andrew and  
 Iain Stewart

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Early Parliamentary General Election Bill:

#### *Timetable*

(1) (a) Proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be taken at today's sitting in accordance with this Order.

(b) Notices of amendments, new Clauses or new Schedules to be moved in Committee of the whole House may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.

(c) Proceedings on Second Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(d) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

#### *Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put*

(2) As soon as the proceedings on the Motion for this Order have been concluded, the Order for the Second Reading of the Bill shall be read.

(3) When the Bill has been read a second time:

(a) it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;

(b) the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

(4) (a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

(b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

(5) If, following proceedings in Committee of the whole House and any proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, a legislative grand committee withholds consent to the Bill or any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill, the House shall proceed to Reconsideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(6) If, following Reconsideration of the Bill—

(a) a legislative grand committee withholds consent to any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill (but does not withhold consent to the whole Bill and, accordingly, the Bill is amended in accordance with Standing Order No. 83N(6)), and

(b) a Minister of the Crown indicates his or her intention to move a minor or technical amendment to the Bill, the House shall proceed to consequential Consideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

(7) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(ba) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chair for separate decision;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (18)(a) of this Order.

(8) On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(9) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (7)(c) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chairman or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.

(10) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (7)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause or Schedule of the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

#### *Consideration of Lords Amendments*

(11) (a) Any Lords Amendments to the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(12) Paragraphs (2) to (11) of Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (11) of this Order.

#### *Subsequent stages*

(13) (a) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(14) Paragraphs (2) to (9) of Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (13) of this Order.

#### *Reasons Committee*

(15) Paragraphs (2) to (6) of Standing Order No. 83H (Programme orders: reasons committee) apply in relation to any committee to be appointed to draw up reasons after proceedings have been brought to a conclusion in accordance with this Order.

#### *Miscellaneous*

(16) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply so far as necessary for the purposes of this Order.

(17) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(18) (a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken, to recommit the Bill or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

(b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.

(c) Such a motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly. (d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed. (e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(19) (a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

(b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(20) No debate shall be held in accordance with Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.

(21) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(22) No private business may be considered at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.

## Early Parliamentary General Election Bill

### Second Reading

**Mr Speaker:** Before I invite the Prime Minister to move the Second Reading, I must announce my decision on certification for the purposes of Standing Order No. 83J (Certification of bills etc. as relating exclusively to England or England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence), with which I feel sure colleagues will be closely familiar. On the basis of material put before me, I certify that in my opinion the Bill does not meet the criteria required for certification under that Standing Order.

I will make a public service announcement now. Under the terms of the business of the House motion, as amended, which the House has just passed, amendments for the Committee stage of the Bill may now be accepted by the Clerks at the Table only. Members may continue to table amendments up until the start of proceedings in the Committee of the whole House. For the benefit of everyone, however, I would encourage Members to table their amendments as soon as possible. The Chairman of Ways and Means will take a provisional decision on selection and grouping on the basis of amendments tabled a quarter of an hour after the beginning of the Second Reading debate. That provisional selection list will be made available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website before the start of proceedings in Committee. If necessary, an updated amendment paper will be made available as soon as possible during proceedings in Committee. The Clerk at the Table is happy, and therefore we can all be happy.

2.23 pm

**The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is now a week since Parliament voted to delay Brexit yet again. It is a week since this Parliament voted yet again to force Brussels to keep this country in the European Union for at least another three months, at a cost of £1 billion a month. In the days since then, the Government have tried to be reasonable and to ascribe the best possible motives to our friends and colleagues around the House. *[Interruption.]* I have twice offered more time for debate. I offered more time last week and I made the same offer last night. I said that we were prepared to debate this Bill—*[Interruption.]* I said we were prepared to debate the withdrawal Bill around the clock to allow Parliament time to scrutinise it, to the point of intellectual exhaustion. We must bear in mind that not only has this House been considering this issue for three and a half years, but last week when this Bill was being debated there was not a single new idea and not a single new suggestion. All they wanted was more time, more weeks, more months, when they could not even provide the speakers to fill the time allotted.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab) *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** I give way to the hon. Lady.

**Jess Phillips:** I thank the Prime Minister for eventually giving way. *[Interruption.]* We can all go, “Ooh”, like children but we are actually trying to get something through. Let me go back to the comments he made when he opened his speech. Either this House voted for the Second Reading or it delayed it—he cannot have it

both ways, which is what he seems to want. Would the Prime Minister like to go back over his first comments and address whether he thinks they were entirely correct, because almost everything he said seemed to me as though he might be misleading the House and the country?

**The Prime Minister:** I am astonished to hear that the hon. Lady thinks that she voted for the programme motion last week—that is the logic of what she said. As far as I understand it, she voted for delay. She voted to delay Brexit indefinitely. Let us be absolutely clear: the whole country can see what is really going on. Does she want to deliver Brexit? No, she doesn't. She does not want to deliver Brexit. People can see that Opposition Members do not want to deliver Brexit. All they want to do is procrastinate. They do not want to deliver Brexit on 31 October, 31 November or even on 31 January.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the only indicative vote that passed through this Parliament was to find alternative arrangements to the backstop and that he removed the backstop from the deal, but this remain Parliament will still not vote for it? Therefore, his call for an election is the right thing to do—let the public decide.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is entirely right and he speaks for his constituency; they want to deliver Brexit, he wants to deliver Brexit, but Opposition Members just want to spin it out forever, until the 12th of never. When the 12th of never eventually comes around, they will devise one of their complicated parliamentary procedures and move a motion for a further delay and a further extension. I have to say that this delay is becoming seriously damaging to the national interest, because families cannot plan and businesses cannot plan. Not only is the climate of uncertainty corroding trust in politics, but it is beginning to hold everybody back from making vital everyday decisions that are important for the health of our economy—decisions on buying new homes, hiring new staff and making new investments. The performance of the UK economy is, frankly, miraculous, given the stasis here in Parliament.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Ind) *rose*—

**The Prime Minister:** That is why I hope that so many of our colleagues will support this Bill today, including the Father of the House, for whom I have the highest respect.

**Mr Clarke:** My right hon. Friend was one of those who delayed Brexit in March by voting against departure then on the deal that had then been negotiated. He did get a majority of 30 for his deal in principle last week, and if the subsequent time of this House had been devoted to the Committee and Report stage of the House, following the ordinary principles of government, we would be well on our way to leaving in the middle of November. I respectfully say to my right hon. Friend: can he find a slightly better basis for fighting this election when we get to the campaign in due course?

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid that my right hon. and learned Friend is in error; I voted for the withdrawal Bill. I hope that he will vote for this Bill today to get Brexit done.



**Mr Clarke** *indicated assent.*

**The Prime Minister:** I take his nod as assent to that proposition, because that is the way—

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): Will the Prime Minister look at the amendment tabled in my name, which suggests that if we work seven days a week—like many of my constituents do—we could get the Brexit Bill through and meet his deadline? Is not a Brexit in the hand better than two Brexits in the bush?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who I know wants to deliver Brexit. I am afraid that the idea he puts forward is one that we have tried twice. We tried it last week and we tried it last night. It would have been a good offer for the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) to take up. He refused to take it up, and we are left with no choice but to go to the country to break free from this impasse, and to allow us all to submit, as we must in all humility, to the judgment of the electorate—to allow us to make our case and, above all, to allow a new and revitalised Parliament, with a new mandate to deliver on the will of the people and get Brexit done.

That new Parliament, in just a few weeks' time, will have before it a great new deal with the EU—a great new deal, which brings together Members from across the House, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) mentioned earlier. It will be the job of that new Parliament, in just a few weeks' time, to ratify the withdrawal deal and put an end to this long period of parliamentary dither and delay.

I am glad to say that since I first put forward the idea of a general election as a way out of this impasse, the ice floes have begun to crack. The Lib Dems are now in favour, and the Scots Nats—the Scottish National party—is now in favour of it. There is only one blockage still standing in the way of democracy. There is only one party that refuses to trust the judgment of the people. There is only one party that is still running scared of an election and that is the main party of opposition, which is failing in its defining function—[*Interruption.*] Well, we have not heard anything to the contrary. Dogs bark, cows moo and Oppositions are meant to campaign for elections—except for this one.

I have no way of knowing what the right hon. Member for Islington North is going to say. He has called for an election 35 times in the last year alone. I have no idea why he has been so opposed to an election. Maybe it is because he has been following the precepts of his intellectual mentor, Fidel Castro, whose adoring crowds used to serenade him with the cry, “Revoluciones sí, elecciones no!” Maybe he is congenitally opposed. Maybe he has been listening to the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), or the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who I gather have been arguing against an election. He should beware of their motives in counselling him against a general election. It is not so much that they fear a general election, though they probably do; it is just that they do not want a general election with him as their leader.

I do not know what has been holding the right hon. Gentleman back from this obvious democratic exercise, but whatever it is, I hope that he will now stand up and

say that he has mastered his doubts and that he is finally willing to submit to the electorate. He has mentioned that he is a great eater of porridge. All I can say is that when it comes to the offer of elections, he reminds me of Goldilocks in his fastidiousness—one offer is too hot and one is too cold. I hope he will be able to stand up this afternoon and say, “This time, this offer of an election is just right.”

If the right hon. Gentleman does that and I hope he does, we will then be able to put that choice to the people of this country. We can go his way, which is for an economic recipe that would mean the destruction of the UK's wealth-creating system and over-taxation of a kind that is derived from revolutionary Venezuela, combined with the political nightmare agenda of not one, but two, referendums—one on the EU and one in Scotland—with all their potential for further rancour and recrimination. As I understand it, that is his policy. Or we can go forward with this Government: a Government who have secured a great deal that allows us to leave the EU as one whole United Kingdom—as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—able together to do free trade deals around the world, able to set our own path, to make our own laws, to take back control of our borders, our money and our regulations, able to deliver all the benefits and all the freedoms of Brexit, from new free ports to more humane treatment of animals, which the right hon. Gentleman would block, from tax breaks for new technology to cutting VAT on sanitary products.

It is a deal that the Opposition said was impossible three months ago. They said we could not change the withdrawal agreement. They said that we would never get rid of the backstop, and we did. The deal is there. It is ready to be approved by a new Parliament, with a Government yearning with every fibre of their being to be able to get on and deliver our one-nation Conservative agenda, with a vision for uniting this country and levelling up with record investments in health, like nothing else in a generation, with 20,000 more police officers and more funding for every primary and secondary school in the country—levelling up across this whole United Kingdom. It will be a Government able to commit to fantastic public services and infrastructure, precisely because we believe in free markets and enterprise. We believe in free markets and enterprise and the wealth-creating sector of the economy in a way that causes a shadow of Transylvanian horror to pass over the semi-communist faces of the Opposition Front Bench.

That is the argument I want to have with the Leader of the Opposition. That is the biggest and most important difference between us—between us one-nation Conservatives and the socialists on the Opposition Benches. There is only one way now to move this country forward and to have that debate, and that is to get Brexit done. There is only one way to get Brexit done, in the face of this unrelenting parliamentary obstructionism—this endless, wilful, fingers crossed, “Not me, guv!” refusal to deliver on the mandate of the people—and that is to refresh this Parliament and to give the people a choice.

I say to the whole House and to all those who may still be hesitating about whether to vote for the Bill that there is only one way to restore the esteem in which our democracy is held and to recover the respect in which Parliament should be held by the people of this country, and that is, finally, to offer ourselves to the judgment of the people of this country. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.37 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Labour backs a general election because we want this country to be rid of this reckless and destructive Conservative Government. They are a Government who have caused more of our children to live in poverty, more pensioners to be in poverty and more people to be in work and in poverty, more families to be without a home and more people to sleep rough on our streets. They are a Government who have cut and sold off so much of our important public services.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not. They are a Government who created the vicious hostile environment that saw our own citizens deported. It is time for real change.

I have said consistently, when no deal is off the table we will back an election. Today, after much denial and bluster by the Prime Minister, no deal is officially off the table, so this country can vote for the Government it deserves.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I shall be voting against an early election today and encourage as many of my colleagues as possible to defy the threats and blandishments, and to do so as well. The uncertainty about the outcome of a general election means that, in reality, no deal has certainly not been taken off the table.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I hope my friend will join in the campaign to defeat this Government and to bring in a Government who will end injustice, poverty and inequality in this country. That is why I joined the Labour party all those years ago, and I will be very proud to take that as our message to the people of this country. I want to give our public services the funding they need and to end the threat of privatisation that hangs over so many public service workers; to stop the grotesque poverty and inequality in our country; to rebuild the economy in every region and every nation of this country; to tackle the climate emergency with a green new deal, a green industrial revolution that will bring good quality jobs to many areas of the country that have been denied them by this Government and their Liberal Democrat accomplices during the coalition years; and, after three years of Conservative failure, to get Brexit sorted—the only party that is doing so—by giving people the final say on what happens over Brexit.

We will launch the most ambitious radical campaign for real change in this country, and I look forward to campaigning in a general election all over the country, including in Uxbridge if the Prime Minister is still the Conservative candidate there at that time.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am extremely grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for giving way. May I say to him that, in the upcoming election, the right of the Scottish people to choose their own future will be at the front and centre? If the Scottish National party wins a majority of seats in Scotland, will he respect that result?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am looking forward to campaigning all over Scotland to support Labour candidates to be elected in Scotland. Indeed, I was there last weekend,

and the enthusiasm of Scottish Labour to get out there and campaign was palpable everywhere. I am delighted to support Scottish Labour in its campaign to bring £70 billion of public investment to Scotland under a Labour Government, which is something that the SNP cannot offer.

**Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I look forward to campaigning with him in Scotland in the upcoming election, but, as he will know, one crucial thing in this election will be the turnout and ensuring that we get as many people out and using their votes as possible. In Scotland especially, it is very dark and very cold. Does he support the idea of having polling day as a public holiday to ensure maximum turnout?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my friend for that intervention and compliment her on her work. I agree that a public holiday on election day would be a very good idea, because it does mean that everyone could then get along to vote without the problems of being at work at that time. It is something that has been discussed before. I do not know all the amendments that are coming up later on this afternoon, Mr Speaker, but if that one were included that would be very welcome indeed.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend will know—and I raised this yesterday—that I have tabled a cross-party amendment, which is supported by many Labour colleagues, for votes at 16. The Prime Minister talks a lot about the United Kingdom. In Wales and in Scotland, 16-year-olds now have the right to vote in elections and in referendums. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that should be afforded to all 16-year-olds in the United Kingdom.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my friend for that intervention. I am coming on to that in a moment, but I absolutely do agree that all 16-year-olds should have the right to vote, because it seems fundamental to our democracy. After all, it is young people's future that we will be debating in this election. I thank him for his intervention, and the work that he has done on bringing about parliamentary scrutiny to this whole process.

The House has amended the programme motion and it has done so in a very helpful way that empowers this Chamber, the House of Commons, to amend this legislation. I think we should just reflect for a moment that the Prime Minister was actually trying to stifle parliamentary democracy with an almost unprecedented edict that only the Government could amend their own legislation, which presumably they wrote last night. This idea of their amending today what they wrote last night suggests they have a problem, perhaps, with memory loss—I do not know what it is. I am pleased that those amendments will be debated today.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not give way.

What this legislation does is sum up in a couple of words the undemocratic and authoritarian instincts of this Government and this Prime Minister in relation to Parliament. I want to put on record my thanks to my

[Jeremy Corbyn]

friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) for her persistence in tabling that amendment last night, which means that the House will have an opportunity to debate a number of very serious amendments today. We will be seeking to expand the franchise in the December election, which means supporting votes at 16, as is the case now for Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections. It also means that we support the rights of EU citizens with settled status to vote in elections in this country. After all, we do recognise their contribution to our society. We do give them votes in local elections, so it seems to me only logical that, since they have made their future in this country in our society, they should have a right to vote on their future as well, and I look forward to supporting those amendments later on today.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I look forward to getting out on the campaign trail and smashing the Conservatives at the ballot box and returning more Labour colleagues here. I am particularly pleased by what my right hon. Friend has just said around EU settled status here. We already allow our Commonwealth citizens to vote in our elections, so can we try to ensure that all EU citizens who are settled here get to vote as well?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My friend is right. Commonwealth citizens have permanently had the right to vote in British elections, and that is absolutely right, and, as far as I know, most Commonwealth countries reciprocate. Our relationship with Ireland means that all Irish nationals have an automatic right to vote in UK elections and vice versa.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con) *rose*—

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con) *rose*—

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD) *rose*—

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not give way.  
It seems to me—

**Sir Hugo Swire:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not give way.  
It seems to me—

**Sir Hugo Swire** *rose*—

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not give way.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** On that point—

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have already said I will not give way, but I will say it again—no!

**Sir Hugo Swire** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. He has been in the House since 2001 so he is familiar with parliamentary etiquette, which stipulates quite clearly that when somebody who has the Floor is not giving way, he should accept the verdict. He does not have a right to intervene and he should have learned that by now.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I want to make the point that we want any election to involve as many people as possible. It is meant to be a big exercise in democracy, and I hope the amendments—

**Sir Hugo Swire:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have already said that I will not give way, so I say it again for the fourth time—no!

In that election, everyone should have the right to participate. It is their future and this country's future that is at stake.

The Prime Minister has failed in his promise to be out of the European Union, do or die, on 31 October, but it may be the date that Parliament dissolves, thereby marking the end of his tenure in office. Whatever date the House decides for the election, I am ready for it, we are ready for it. We want to be able to say to the people of this country that there is an alternative to austerity, there is an alternative to inequality, there is an alternative to sweetheart trade deals with Donald Trump, and there is an alternative of a Government who invest in all parts of the country, a Government who are determined to end injustice in our society, and a Government who are determined to give our young people a sense of hope in their society, rather than the prospects of indebtedness and insecure employment in the future, which, sadly, is all a Conservative Government and their coalition with the Lib Dems have ever brought them. I am very ready to go out there and give that message in any election whenever it comes.

2.48 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I very much applaud the Prime Minister for the stand that he has taken continuously over the past months. He is doing the right thing for the right reason. Furthermore, I have listened to the Leader of the Opposition talking about autocratic, undemocratic decision making. Time and again, we have witnessed undemocratic decisions—on the Benn Act and a series of other enactments and motions—continuously over the same period of months.

The Opposition are a disgrace. They have completely undermined the democracy in this House, and have undermined the referendum—or are trying to do so. At last, they have been dragged kicking and screaming to the Dispatch Box, and it sounds as if today they are effectively going to agree that we will have a general election in December. I therefore have absolutely no compunction whatever in condemning them for their shameless behaviour and for voting against motions for an early general election over the last few months.

I am glad to say that I voted against the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill back in 2010 and 2011 during its passage through the House, and I did so for precisely the reasons that we are now having to overcome. I said at the time—on Second Reading and while discussing various amendments—that the provisions of that Bill, which the Bill we are discussing today is at last putting straight, were

“in defiance of the democratic mandate. This is about Whips and patronage; it has nothing to do with the people outside.”

I said that damage was being done to the people of this country and that there was no mandate

“of any kind for any party, in any manifesto, in any part of the political system.”



I also said that

“a motion can be passed by a simple majority of one, as has been the case from time immemorial—from the very inception of our parliamentary process in what is sometimes described as the ‘mother of Parliaments’. That is now being changed in a manner that will seriously alter the method whereby a Government may fall.”—[*Official Report*, 24 November 2010; Vol. 519, c. 309-312.]

Furthermore, I added that what mattered was the constitutional principle that underpins the basis of having a simple majority in this House; this two-thirds majority has always been wrong.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald**: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir William Cash**: I will not give way for a very simple reason, which is that both hon. Gentlemen have consistently tried to obstruct Brexit for the most specious and completely unacceptable reasons.

**Mr Speaker**: Has the hon. Gentleman completed his oration?

**Sir William Cash** *indicated assent*.

**Mr Speaker**: He has. [*Interruption.*] There is a rather unseemly atmosphere in here. Mr Linden, you are a very over-excitably fellow today; calm yourself. Mr Newlands next to you is clearly moderately embarrassed. He is going to try to encourage you to tread a path of virtue, and we should say three cheers to that. Meanwhile you can smile, Mr Linden, because I am about to call your leader—Mr Ian Blackford.

2.52 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). I have to say that I think he has just written the SNP's leaflets for our election campaign. He says that we have tried to obstruct Brexit. Well, I would say to the House: guilty as charged. Let me explain exactly why we have done so.

We are used to referendums in Scotland. We have had two: one in 2014 and another in 2016. Crucially, we were told in 2014 that, if Scotland stayed in the United Kingdom, we would be staying in Europe. But more than that—we were told that this was going to be a Union of equals and that Scotland was going to be respected. And what has happened? In the European referendum, Scotland voted to remain in Europe by 62%, and our Parliament and Government have sought to give voice to that. We have published document after document under the title “Scotland's Place in Europe”, in which we have sought to compromise with the United Kingdom Government, but at every step of the way—whether it was the previous Prime Minister or this one—we have been ignored.

I have repeatedly made the point—I make no apology for making it again today—that SNP Members are simply not prepared to sit back and allow Scotland to be taken out of the European Union against its will. On that basis, I welcome the opportunity of an election. Make no mistake, the coming election will be for the right of Scotland to determine its own future. We will

reflect on everything that has happened since 2017, when 13 Scottish Conservatives were temporarily elected to this House. I say “temporarily” because they have voted against Scotland's interests every step of the way, and have given no consideration to the fact that every single local authority area in Scotland voted to remain.

Just think about what Brexit would do to Scotland. Just think about the challenge we face in growing our population—a challenge that we have had for decades, but one that we have risen to on the basis of the free movement of people. Our economy is growing and European citizens have made a contribution to that economy. We have collectively benefited from the right to live, work and travel in 28 EU member states. We voted to retain those rights, yet the Conservatives want to take us out, so I really look forward to the election, when we can reinforce the mandate that we already have from the Scottish election in 2016, when the people of Scotland yet again voted the SNP into power. We have a mandate for an independence referendum, and it ill behoves this House to frustrate the legitimate demands of our Parliament and our Government. If the people of Scotland back the SNP again in the coming election, it has to be the case that we have the right to determine our future.

I am grateful that the European Union has granted us an extension to the end of January, and we must use the time wisely. But I say to our friends in Europe: please remember to stand by Scotland in our hour of need; and, as our dear friend Alyn Smith said in the European Parliament, keep a light on for Scotland because we are coming back. And that is because we are ambitious for our country. We want to grow our economy, to continue to benefit from the single market and the customs union, to make Scotland a destination in Europe, and to complete the journey that Scotland embarked on with devolution 20 years ago. We have a Parliament that has delivered for the people of Scotland and that is pushing on with addressing the challenge of climate change. We have a Parliament that is doing its job and has delivered education free at the point of need, not based on people's ability to pay. I could go on about the differences between the way in which the Scottish Government and the UK Government have delivered for our people, and about the growing self-confidence that we see in Scotland.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): As my right hon. Friend spells out, it is going to be quite straightforward for the SNP to write its manifesto for the upcoming election. The Prime Minister has failed in his promise of “do or die”, and the Scottish Conservatives have been acting against the interests of the people of Scotland and the against the wishes in their referendum in 2016, so I wonder how easy it will be for them to be trusted in this election. Is it not true that in that election we cannot give the Scottish Conservatives or this Prime Minister any chance at all?

**Ian Blackford**: Absolutely, and that allows me to ask the question: where is the Prime Minister? He seems to have beetled and scuttled out of the Chamber. One wonders if he is away to dig a ditch.

One of the things I can be proud of is that we gave 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in the 2014 referendum in Scotland. Why? Because it was about their future; it was a principled decision that those who follow us, who

[*Ian Blackford*]

are going to be living and working in our country, have the right to a say in its future. The SNP calls on Members to reduce the voting age to 16 for all elections, and to extend the franchise to citizens of the European Union. As we have heard in this debate, citizens from the Commonwealth are given the right to vote in our election. Why is it the case that European nationals, who are our friends—who work with us and are part of our community, and whose rights are affected by what the Conservatives want to do—do not have the right to vote in our elections? It is an absolute disgrace. Those who pay taxes in our country should have rights of representation.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Can the right hon. Gentleman tell me whether any other European countries offer European citizens not from their country the right to vote in their national elections?

**Ian Blackford:** If the hon. Lady had been listening, I just explained that we do that in Scotland. The problem for the Tories is that they can never make a judgment on what is the right thing to do. We are talking about EU citizens who are losing their rights.

Let me remind the House of what the Prime Minister said way back in July in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) when he asked about EU nationals having the right to vote:

“Those guarantees, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we are giving unilaterally, in a supererogatory way.”—[*Official Report*, 25 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 1498.]

Well, there we are—the words of the Prime Minister, doing exactly what we are calling for, yet we find that the Conservatives are blind to these calls. I therefore expect the Government today to look positively on any amendments that come forward for EU nationals. The Government have nothing to fear from extending the franchise—and of course one very important and salient point is that EU nationals are already on the voters register because they are allowed to vote in local elections. There is no moral reason for the Government not to allow this.

This is about choosing our future: our future in Europe. It is about choosing freedom from austerity. It is about opportunity. We cannot be held back any more by Westminster. The SNP will take that message to the public. Many decades ago it was said in a letter by Steinbeck to Mrs Kennedy that Scotland is not a lost cause—Scotland is a cause unwon. We will win that battle. Scotland will become an independent country and the general election will be an important step on the way to completing that journey.

3.2 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): When I first arrived in this House as a new MP nearly two and a half years ago, I knew that delivering Brexit would be a complex problem. I knew that achieving a negotiation between our country and our 27 nearest neighbours was going to be a huge challenge and cover many areas. I also knew that leaving the EU with a deal was in the best interests of so many of our constituents, especially those who have shared families with other residents from other

EU countries, those who have jobs in companies that trade with Europe, those who are involved in our security services and want to share data with our closest allies, and those in our scientific community who often work on collaborative projects that make a difference to our world's future and want to continue to work with those in our neighbouring countries easily.

The deal that the previous Prime Minister delivered was challenging. Some people thought that the backstop might last forever. I always saw it as a temporary issue, but I saw it as a way to deliver Brexit and move on. I voted for it three times. Our current Prime Minister has done what nobody thought he would achieve. He has reopened the negotiations and found a different way to resolve the incredibly complex situation in Northern Ireland; it is a solution that keeps open the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. I voted for that deal too, and many colleagues from the Opposition Benches were brave enough to come through the Lobby with us to support it. I would have liked to see the programme motion carried. I believe that our constituents expect us to roll up our sleeves and work day and night to get that deal over the line. I would have liked to see a second programme motion, but I genuinely do not believe that the Opposition would have supported it.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way in which our governing party can face the electorate is to say clearly to them that the best way of delivering Brexit is with the deal that the Prime Minister has agreed with the EU?

**Vicky Ford:** I absolutely agree, because the deal is in the interests of our country and has been negotiated with 27 other countries.

Continuing this uncertainty does not solve anything. A second referendum will not solve the uncertainty. The Labour policy to try to renegotiate and then have another referendum and then another one does not solve the problem.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Ind): The hon. Lady makes the case that a second referendum will not solve the Brexit impasse. I would like her to elaborate on that. On the question of the Bill which the Prime Minister proposed unamended and has now pulled, so this House cannot take it forward, surely a referendum on whether or not that proceeds would give a definitive outcome. Perhaps if the House had allowed the British public a vote on the previous Prime Minister's deal, we could have had a definitive outcome many, many months ago.

**Vicky Ford:** The Prime Minister's Brexit deal was pulled the moment the programme motion was rejected—sadly. If I believed that the Opposition truly wanted to have a couple of extra days to scrutinise it, I would give them another chance, but they proved otherwise again and again when they failed to turn up to scrutiny Committees and debates in this House.

**Paul Farrelly:** Does the hon. Lady recognise that for the majority of Members here who are concerned that we are leaving the EU, the main issue was not the backstop—it was a lack of clarity about the future relationship with our European neighbours and trading partners, and this second deal does not change that one iota?

**Vicky Ford:** The EU has made it clear since day one that we cannot discuss the detail on the future partnership until we have agreed the terms of withdrawal. That is in article 50—read it. It is only the tiniest paragraph, but it makes that clear.

The document on the future relationship covers a wide range of different issues. I have been impressed by how much the EU27 have been prepared to put into that document, including areas such as co-operation on science and security, access to trade and the deepest free trade agreement. It details important issues such as how financial services can work together in our regulatory environment, and why sharing data is so important. That is all in the future framework, but we cannot discuss the detail of it until we have agreed the terms of exit. Every time the Opposition parties say otherwise, they are being disingenuous with the British people.

Saying that we will go back and try to have another referendum in a constituency such as mine, which voted 51:49, will not heal the divisions. It just leads to a lack of decisions. In my constituency, people want to get on and focus on other things: the more police that they are now seeing on the streets, the improvements that we are seeing in our nearby hospital, the money that is coming into our NHS, the money that our schools have been asking for and is now being delivered, the infrastructure improvements that have just given my constituency the largest housing infrastructure grant in the country and unlocked a railway station that has been blocked for 20 years, and the work that we are doing on the environment—incidentally, the Lib Dems could not be bothered to turn up to the debate on the Environment Bill last night. My constituents want us to be working on those issues that affect them and their future, and not going round and round in circles on how we resolve Brexit.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I listened closely to the comments made by the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). She alluded to the Lib Dems not being present last night. That is not the case. Our spokesperson for the environment—my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Jane Dodds)—was here for the entirety of the debate, as I understand it from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), so I would like that to be amended in the record.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady has amended the record. *[Interruption.]* No, no, no—I do not require any help from the hon. Member for Chelmsford. I am perfectly capable of adjudicating upon these matters on the strength of 10 and a quarter years in the Chair without her sedentary chuntering. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has corrected the record as she sees it, and the hon. Member for Chelmsford appears to accept the veracity of what she said. I was not here for that debate, but I know that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion orated in the debate, because I saw it on the annunciator. She could not have done so if she was not here. She did, so she was here.

**Vicky Ford:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Oh, if you really feel it is necessary.

**Vicky Ford:** I apologise if one Liberal Democrat Member was here last night, but as I see it, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion represents the Green party.

**Mr Speaker:** I am perfectly well aware of that. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree has corrected the record as far as her party is concerned. She referred to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion, who was here and did speak. With the greatest of respect, there is nothing to add. A lot of other colleagues wish to speak in the debate, from whom we can now hear and in whose contributions I am sure everybody is interested.

3.11 pm

**Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The question that we are grappling with in this House and, indeed, in the wider country is not just a narrow matter of our relationship with the European Union, although this debate on Brexit has exposed significant differences in how people feel about that. People's identities of remain or leave run deep, because this is not only about whether we remain in the EU or leave; it is about who we are as a country. It is about our values. It is about whether we are open, inclusive and internationalist in our outlook, facing the future, or whether we are closed and insular, wanting to pull up the drawbridge and look to the past. That is the key question that we, as a country, need to resolve.

The Prime Minister talked about “one whole United Kingdom”. I thought he had a cheek, because he has not been acting in a way that protects our whole United Kingdom. He has sold out the people of Northern Ireland with the deal he has done with the EU. This is a man who said that no Conservative Prime Minister should ever accept a border in the Irish Sea, yet that is exactly what he has done. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I think that our United Kingdom is something precious that is worth protecting, and that Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are stronger together.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): If there was a vote across the whole country—one person, one vote—on the Prime Minister's deal, my view is that the majority of people would vote remain. Does the hon. Lady agree that there is a great fear that, with a minority of votes, the Tories could get a majority of seats if the remain side splits, and we will end up with Brexit, thanks to her provocation?

**Jo Swinson:** The hon. Gentleman and I have both been campaigning for a people's vote. I believe that the ideal way to resolve this issue is to put this specific Brexit deal to the public. He is right; I think that the public would be likely to reject this bad Brexit deal, because it is a bad deal. If we look at the polls, we have to go back some way to find the leave vote being ahead of remain, and that has been an increasingly consistent pattern in the last couple of years.

People who support Brexit struggle to agree among themselves what Brexit should look like—we see it day in, day out in this Chamber. To some people, the Prime Minister's deal is not Brexity enough, and other people want to see a softer Brexit. The suggestion that there is a majority in the country for this specific Brexit path is wrong, which is why this needs to be put to the people for a final say. But I have campaigned for that. I have marched for that. We have argued for that. We have tabled amendments for that. We have not been able to secure it, and my fear is that we will not in this Parliament. We do not have the luxury of time, because the EU has



[*Jo Swinson*]

given us an extension to 31 January. We need to resolve how we will use that time, because further extensions should not be guaranteed.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): The hon. Lady and I have both stood on a platform asking for a people's vote. My constituency is the second youngest in the country. Does she agree that it is essential that 16-year-olds have the vote, to save their future?

**Jo Swinson:** The hon. Lady and I agree on much. I do want 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to be able to vote. The time for that change is coming, and I will always vote to support 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds having the right to vote. I have debated this issue over many years with many MPs, and Members who are sceptical should look at the success of votes at 16 in Scotland. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon on polling day, we see young people from fifth year and sixth year leaving school, walking down the road and going en masse to the polling station. It is a sight to behold, and it is a positive step. Many Members—particularly Conservative Members—in Scotland who were sceptical have come round to the idea after seeing that it is a successful change. Of course I will support that.

**Paul Farrelly:** Has the hon. Lady considered the Liberal Democrats' contribution to the present predicament? Their cannibalisation by the Conservatives in 2015—helped by their record in coalition, particularly on tuition fees—gave David Cameron the majority to get the referendum legislation through. Why on earth is she now making it worse by pushing for this early date? The uncertainty of the outcome of a general election certainly does not take no deal off the table.

**Jo Swinson:** While the Liberal Democrats were in coalition, there was not a referendum on our membership of the European Union. In fact, we passed a law to say that that should only happen when there was a significant treaty change. The loss of Liberal Democrats from the Government allowed that to be pushed through the House of Commons.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): The hon. Lady says that there was not a referendum under the coalition as a result of the Liberal Democrats. I was here in 2008, and she said in this Chamber, "We are being gagged. Only the Liberal Democrats will offer an in/out referendum." The Liberal Democrats were actively campaigning for that. They were saying that the Conservatives were only offering a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, while they would give the public a say. Whatever happened in coalition, she has long been a campaigner for an in/out referendum.

**Jo Swinson:** We then voted to pass an Act of Parliament to say that that should happen at the point of significant treaty change, which we have not seen. I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She has a beautiful constituency, which I am already very familiar with, and I expect to be there more in the coming weeks.

As I was saying, the Prime Minister has not supported the United Kingdom. He has agreed to a border down the Irish sea, bluntly, because he does not care sufficiently enough. This is all about him; it is not even about what

he thinks is right for the country. There are different views on the European Union across this House. The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who was in his place earlier, has had a very consistent view on membership of the European Union. I have taken a different view, but most people in this House know where they stand on our membership of the EU. They do not have to write two different newspaper articles to decide which way to come down on that matter, and they would not make such a decision on the basis of what is more likely to get them elected as leader of their party.

The fact that the Prime Minister was prepared to make that call in his own interest, rather than in the national interest, proves he is not fit to be Prime Minister. This is a man who has been prepared to say anything and sell out anyone to become Prime Minister. No wonder people do not trust him. He said that he would get a great deal. What has he brought forward? It is an atrocious deal. It is bad for our NHS. We have already lost 5,000 nurses from the European Union 27 countries. It is a bad deal for our security. It is a bad deal for our economy—so bad that the Government have not even published an economic impact assessment. So much for a party that liked to say it was one of economic competence. Now it has even given up doing the analysis because it knows the results would be so bad. It is a bad deal for workers' rights and environmental protections, which have been removed from the treaty and put into a declaration that is not worth the paper it is written on.

The Prime Minister also said that we would leave on 31 October, which is Thursday—Halloween—and we are not leaving on 31 October. I for one will be celebrating the fact that we are still a member of the EU, as will the 3 million citizens in a country from other EU countries and so millions and millions more. It shows that the Prime Minister says one thing and is not bothered about whether he delivers it.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): On the question of trust, has not the hon. Lady said that her party's policy is to have a second referendum, but if the referendum comes up with the wrong result, she will ignore it, while if that does not happen and her party gets into a majority Government, she will just dispense with article 50 and ignore 17.4 million people? Why should anybody trust what she says, and why should anybody believe that she has any truck in being called a Liberal Democrat any more?

**Jo Swinson:** I really have to scotch this suggestion. I am not going to change my basic belief, and, to be honest, I do not think there are many in this House who would do so. Had we voted to remain in 2016, I would not have expected the hon. Member for Stone suddenly to think that being a member of the European Union was a good idea. Of course, I will always think it a good idea to be a member of the European Union, but what would be the case—

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Jo Swinson:** I have not finished answering the hon. Gentleman's colleague.

If we had a people's vote on the deal and there was a vote in favour, I would at least have confidence that there was a majority view in the country in favour of

leaving under those specific circumstances. Right now, I have no confidence about that whatsoever. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned that it is the policy of the Liberal Democrats to go into a general election and say to people, “We are a party of remain. We believe that our best future is in the European Union. If you vote Liberal Democrat, we will do everything we can to stop Brexit. If you elect a majority Liberal Democrat Government, we will revoke article 50. If we are in that situation, as Prime Minister, I will revoke article 50 on day one.” That is setting out what we plan to do and, if we are elected and win the election, then doing it, which is exactly the essence of democracy.

**Tim Loughton:** Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Jo Swinson:** I have answered the hon. Gentleman’s point. I am going to make some progress and let other people contribute to this debate.

We as a country face huge challenges. We have a mental health crisis, particularly among young people, that needs to be tackled. We have schools that urgently need investment to make them world-class centres of learning. We need to take bold action to tackle the climate emergency, because the scientists tell us that time is running out. However, we have huge opportunities and huge reasons to be hopeful. We have people with huge innovation and ingenuity in our universities and our businesses, and there is a spirit of entrepreneurialism in our country. We are in the middle of a technological revolution that can help provide answers to the climate emergency, to the shared problems that we face and to improve our health and wellbeing for the future. When I speak to young people—whether they are in schools in my constituency, the climate strikers or the people on the marches about remaining in the EU—I hear their energy and enthusiasm, which should be an inspiration to us all.

As members of the European Union, working with our closest neighbours as a United Kingdom family of nations—strong together, working within the EU—we can reshape our economy, harness the technological revolution and build a brighter future. That is the message the Liberal Democrats will be taking to the country in this general election.

3.25 pm

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I think we have had a filibustering of democracy for much of the last year. We have had endless games and arcane procedures to prevent Brexit, and we are seeing the same games today to prevent a general election. I think this Parliament is really reaching new levels of absurdity. In the Leader of the Opposition, we have—perhaps for the first time in history—a man who can neither lead nor oppose. I still do not quite understand whether he is supporting an election today. We need an election or we need Brexit. The Labour party voted against the Brexit timetable motion, which means that we cannot proceed. Therefore, we have to go for plan B, which is an election.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): May I say to the hon. Gentleman that he is just wrong? On the morning of the vote on the first programme motion, the Labour side of the usual channels asked for a meeting,

but it was refused by the Government. It is now up to the Government to lay down a new programme motion, but they have refused to do that. It is still within the powers of the Government to do it.

**Mr Seely:** I have absolutely no doubt, given the bad faith that has been exhibited over Brexit and this election, that if the Government came forward with a new timetable motion, the Labour party would find ways of picking it apart endlessly.

**Mr Jones:** No, it is worse than that. In the morning, the Labour Chief Whip asked through the usual channels whether he would be able to sit down to talk about a programme motion. It was the Government who refused to do that, and it is the Government who are refusing to bring back a programme motion. The idea that somehow this House is stopping debate on the withdrawal Bill is absolutely not true.

**Mr Seely:** Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the Labour party did not oppose the programme motion, because the Labour party did oppose the programme motion? However—

**Mr Jones** *rose*—

**Mr Seely:** If I may, I would not mind making a bit of progress.

On the grounds of consensus, why do the hon. Gentleman’s Front Benchers not come and say that? They should come and ask to renegotiate a programme motion now.

**Mr Jones** *rose*—

**Mr Seely:** I have given way twice. May I continue? [*Interruption.*] I give way.

**Mr Jones:** We opposed the programme motion because a major constitutional Act would have been put in place that was going to be discussed within 48 hours? The Wild Animals in Circuses Bill got more than that on the Floor of the House. The Government could have come back and said, “Right, we’ll negotiate on a programme motion”. The usual channels on the Labour side were offering that, but it is up to the Government to do it. We have always said—this has been said by the Leader of the Opposition—that we would sit down to talk about a programme motion. It is the Government who have refused to do it, not the Opposition.

**Mr Seely:** I am not sure I buy that. I am sorry, but I simply do not. Every time we try to bring forward—

**Paul Farrelly:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Seely:** I would like to just answer and then move on, if I may.

Every time we bring something to this House, the House tries to turn it into the political equivalent of a pushmi-pullyu. We tried to put a timetable motion through, and Labour Members voted against it, but now they want a timetable motion. You were offered three times—

**Paul Farrelly:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Seely:** I am not giving way because I want to answer the point made by the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). It is really important, and I would like to continue to make my point. Three times we had a withdrawal agreement this summer, and three times it was voted against, but now we are told you want that withdrawal agreement again. Whatever the right hon. Gentleman votes against, a week later they say, “Oh, why didn’t we get that back again?”

**Mr Kevan Jones:** I ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question. If the Government are so proud of the withdrawal agreement they have drawn up, why do they refuse to let the House discuss it? The House proposed a programme motion that could actually move it on today. If anyone is stopping Brexit, it is the Government.

**Mr Seely:** I do not buy that for one second. We had three withdrawal deal votes this summer.

**Paul Farrelly:** I do not want an extended debate on this, but there is another good reason why the hon. Gentleman, despite his certainty, is absolutely wrong. The Government have no control of the timetable because they have lost their majority by expelling Conservative Members with long and proud service, losing people to defections and losing the support of the Democratic Unionist party. The reason is, therefore, that the Government have been badly and recklessly led.

**Mr Seely:** Again, I do not buy that. The Government have been led very well, and I will explain why, although I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s intervention.

**Mrs Main:** I want to give my hon. Friend a bit of a breather. I understand his frustration. Until the last incarnation of the withdrawal agreement, the Labour party—Her Majesty’s official Opposition—had set their face against a withdrawal Bill. Only five Members of Parliament—

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Main:** No. I am making an intervention on my hon. Friend. Eventually there was a consensus on the withdrawal agreement, so the next point of attack became how long we could discuss it. It is obvious to the country that there is a process that is coming to a conclusion. The conclusion should be that the withdrawal agreement is passed to give business and people certainty. Arguing about it will not get us anywhere.

**Mr Seely:** My hon. Friend is spot on. To answer the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), I think that the Prime Minister is acting in good faith. I personally have found him entirely reasonable in my dealings with him in the past couple of years. He was very supportive of a project that I helped to write earlier this year—he did not have to be.

The Prime Minister is trying to keep a promise that was made to the British people. In the Labour party manifesto, which Labour Members stood on, there was a promise to respect the referendum.

**Mr Kevan Jones** *rose*—

**Mr Seely:** No, please let me continue. I have not yet learned to say no—I need to do so. Nyet!

In the Labour party manifesto—I think on page 24—Labour Members collectively promised to respect the referendum result. That was patently in bad faith because they have not yet done so. The Prime Minister, believe it or not, is trying to respect the referendum result that was given to him in the mandate of 2016. I am afraid to say that the Labour party is trying to do everything it can to avoid respecting the manifesto commitment in 2017. That is why my first sentence referred to filibustering democracy.

**Dr Allin-Khan:** I have respect for the hon. Gentleman. However, the Labour party did not stand on a manifesto to sell the British public down the river. Does he accept that perhaps our reason for not voting for the withdrawal agreement three times is that it was an utter load of rubbish?

**Mr Seely:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. The question was not framed in pejorative terms: are you voting for Britain to be greater, Britain to be smaller, Britain to be richer, Britain to be poorer? The question was a simple one: do you want Britain to leave the European Union?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have great regard for the hon. Gentleman’s perspicacity, but not for his failure to adhere to parliamentary rules. The word “you” should not as a foreign body invade his speeches. “You” refers to the Chair. I have taken no stance on these matters.

**Mr Seely:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I think I have been slightly thrown by taking so many interventions, so I am saying “you”. I know I should not and I apologise.

If I may continue with the points that I was making—

**Paul Farrelly:** Do you know where you are?

**Mr Seely:** Roughly, yes. About 10 minutes ago, I was making the point that we needed a new Parliament, before I faced a host of helpful interventions from Labour Members. We need a new Parliament because we spend so much time talking about the same old thing; talking about Brexit endlessly, when there is so much else out there.

**Mr Kevan Jones** *rose*—

**Mr Seely:** Please let me make some progress. I will let the right hon. Gentleman intervene a little later.

We need a new Parliament because there are so many other things that we need to debate. I am interested in debating the rise of autocracies in the world. We have significant issues regarding Huawei.

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend has just said that we need a new Parliament as if somehow a totally different electorate will be voting for people to represent them. Does he think that the people of our country made a mistake in 2017 with the Parliament they elected?

**Mr Seely:** No. My right hon. Friend makes a good point. I do not think the people made a mistake and one has to respect what they did. They read the Conservative



and Labour manifestos and 80% of Members were elected on a pledge to respect the wishes of the people in the 2016 referendum.

**Justine Greening:** But my hon. Friend will also know that at the bottom of page 36 of the Conservative manifesto it was clear that the party's intention was to leave the European Union with both a withdrawal agreement and a future partnership agreed by the end of the article 50 period. Surely he accepts that that is now not what is being proposed, so the current proposal does not deliver what the Conservative party manifesto set out at the last election.

**Mr Seely:** Again, my right hon. Friend makes a perceptive point. It is not from lack of trying. We have had two withdrawal Bills. We have almost got to the point of a "take your pick" withdrawal Bill. We had one this summer, which Labour Members relentlessly voted against. Now many of them wish that they had not done so, because, funnily enough, they like the new withdrawal Bill even less.

**Jess Phillips:** The Prime Minister voted against it.

**Mr Seely:** He did, but then he voted for the last one. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Lady wish to intervene?

**Jess Phillips:** No, carry on Bob.

**Mr Seely:** Thank you so much.

**Vicky Ford:** The Conservative party is, of course, the Conservative and Unionist party and I believe in equality across the Union. Many young people in my constituency might like the idea of votes at 16. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be unfair if 16-year-olds had them in Scotland and in Wales, but not in England, and that instead of raising such topics at the last minute time should be given to consider whether they are deliverable?

**Mr Seely:** I thank my hon. Friend for her point. Regardless of whether one agrees with the principle, we almost certainly do not have time to introduce such a measure by 12 December.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am sorry, but I do not buy the claim that we do not have time to deal with 16 and 17-year-olds voting. We have tabled amendments and spoken about the matter at every opportunity we have had in the House since 2015. On every occasion the Conservative Government have said that it is not the right time to do it. Why not just do it now?

**Mr Seely:** Lowering the age limit is a significant point of principle and one should not do it in a rush. In the case of many Bills that we introduce in haste, we repent at leisure.

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Is it not the case that the Labour party voted for Brexit—the one that was in our manifesto, rather than the Government's version of Brexit? Labour has called for a customs union, but the Government have not offered that. Why should we support the Government's deal, when it is not the promise we made to our own electorate?

**Mr Seely:** I suspect the answer to that is that I am sure the hon. Gentleman will enjoy telling his electorate why Brexit has not been passed. The hon. Gentleman believes that that is a competent answer. We look forward to seeing him back here. I clearly hope very much that I will be back here too, but I need to explain to my electorate why Opposition Members keep voting against Brexit and, thus far, keep voting against a general election.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** The hon. Gentleman says that Labour Members are constantly voting against Brexit, but he should remember that for two years and eight months this House had no say on Brexit because it was an internal debate within the Conservative party. He says that the Labour party opposed the deals. If he reads the Labour party manifesto, he will see that I stood on a clear commitment to not support no deal, and that a customs union and close integration with our European allies was key. My colleagues and I have stuck to our manifesto, and the idea that we have spent three years discussing Brexit is just not true.

**Mr Seely:** I would say that we have arguably spent 25 years debating it, certainly in some parts of Britain. We then spent months before an election campaign and a couple of years afterwards debating it. The right hon. Gentleman is right to point out that those of us on the Government Benches are not perfect and that there was argument within the Conservative party. Arguably, we spent too long trying to work out the sort of Brexit that we wanted. I accept that point. It would be churlish of me to say that we are perfect and that the right hon. Gentleman's side is not, but there is a basic principle here which I am very happy to explain to the good folks on the Isle of Wight. It is this: we have tried repeatedly to push through a realistic and sensible Brexit deal. We tried three times this summer. We tried again with the Prime Minister's very good withdrawal deal. Granted, I did not like some elements relating to Northern Ireland, but we have to move on and try to make the best of what we can. We have not got that, because it has not been supported by this House. We then said that we need to go back to the people, but that has not been supported by this House. That is why I said a few minutes ago that the right hon. Gentleman's leader is the first Leader of the Opposition in history who has not led and not opposed. I want him to do that because we need to have a general election.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** It was the Prime Minister and members of the European Research Group who voted down the previous Prime Minister's deal, so the idea that he is somehow blameless in the process of stopping Brexit is not the case at all.

**Mr Seely:** I think the Prime Minister voted for two out of four, which is more than most Opposition Members. I have voted for four out of four and I will keep voting for any sensible Brexit withdrawal deal that comes our way.

**Graham P. Jones:** The hon. Gentleman says he will vote for any Brexit that comes forward. It has been seven or eight days now and the withdrawal agreement Bill has not been brought forward. I do not know why—it is rumoured that the Government are on strike and will not bring it back. In the Bill is an amendment

[Graham P. Jones]

for a customs union. He says he will vote for any sensible option to get it through. Why does he not encourage the Prime Minister to bring the Bill back, vote for a customs union and get Brexit done?

**Mr Seely:** For me, a customs union is not a realistic Brexit and it is not the kind of Brexit that was voted for. That is not the sort of Brexit that many Labour voters want to see either. The Labour party actually did quite well in my patch at the last election. It got 16,000 or 17,000 votes. Half of those votes were from people who wanted Brexit and I think they will be very disappointed by the behaviour of the hon. Gentleman's leadership in not voting for Brexit. I do not think it is in the interests of his party either. We all want to move on, because there is so much else to do.

**Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind):** Mr Speaker, I cannot work out whether you are eating popcorn as you watch this extraordinary spectacle of a great debate between two of our great parliamentarians play out across the Chamber.

**Mr Speaker:** Cashew nuts.

**Mr Vaizey:** Does my hon. Friend not agree with me that this election provides a fantastic opportunity for each of the main parties to set out in principle what they want to see from Brexit, and to finally address the point that the public voted to leave the European Union but are leaving it to parliamentarians to decide the best way of delivering Brexit? It is therefore incumbent on both main parties to set out their Brexit proposals. We can at least unite in this fractious Chamber by agreeing that no deal is not an option and that those who voted to stop no deal are the real heroes of Parliament.

**Mr Seely:** I thank my right hon. Friend for what I think was a friendly intervention. I am certainly learning to appreciate the benefit of friendly interventions.

**Mr Speaker:** May I say to the hon. Gentleman that it is normally known in the trade as in-flight refuelling?

**Mr Seely:** I have just been refuelled, Mr Speaker.

We were talking about the need for a new Parliament. There are many things that I would like a Parliament to spend much more time talking about instead of being so focused on Brexit. The rise of autocracies is a very serious issue. On Huawei, do we allow the use in this country of high tech from a communist party state, especially if its stated aim is to dominate global 5G in the years to come? I am wary of making the world safe for autocracies and one-party states. We need time to debate that.

Another issue is the ongoing disaster of Syria and the clear mistakes made by President Trump. There is also the need for integration of overseas foreign policy. We also have an exciting domestic agenda and I want us to talk more about that.

Finally, I want an Isle of Wight deal so that our public services are of the same standard as those on the mainland, or the north island, as we call it. Most parts of the United Kingdom that are isolated by water—in

other words, islands—either have a fixed link, which we are never going to have because it would cost £3 billion, or more money through increased public expenditure, but the Island has neither, and that has been a structural flaw for many years.

The best way to deal with all of those problems is for us to agree to an election and to listen to our constituents, the folks in the places that we care for and love—

**Mr Vaizey:** Are you winding up?

**Mr Seely:** I am trying to. Does my right hon. Friend wish to intervene, or shall I just get on with it?

**Mr Vaizey:** No, I'm waiting for you to finish.

**Mr Seely:** Fantastic. For all those reasons, I very much want an election if we cannot have Brexit. Given that, thanks to the Labour party, Brexit now seems to be off the table, an election is the way forward.

3.46 pm

**Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab):** I begin with the revolutionary thought that if something was a bad idea yesterday, it might just be a bad idea today. I do not believe that the Prime Minister has been pushing for an election because it is impossible to get his deal through. After all, the proposal received its Second Reading last week. This is being done because the Prime Minister wants to avoid proper scrutiny of his proposals before he calls an election, and he has been desperate to run this election since the day he took office, no matter what he says about his reluctance.

There are two reasons that should give us pause for thought. First, depending on the outcome of an election, this does not take no deal off the table. The Prime Minister has made sure of that himself, through his own petulant decision to pull his withdrawal Bill before it could complete its parliamentary stages—before we could even begin the detailed scrutiny that a measure of this importance deserves. If no withdrawal Bill is being discussed before the poll takes place, no deal is still a possibility.

Moreover, we are only in the first phase of this negotiation. Not only is no deal a possibility in the first phase of withdrawal, but, as we know from the political declaration placed before us a week or so ago, it is also a distinct possibility in the second phase. In fact, it is more likely in the altered political declaration than it has been in the past. The possibility of a no-deal exit has not been removed. That is my first point.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the only way to completely remove no deal from the table is either to revoke, which his party says it does not want at the moment, or to agree a deal, which his party blocks?

**Mr McFadden:** Those are not the only ways. There are three ways to avoid no deal: we can revoke, as the hon. Lady says, but that is not something we should do without the people having a say; we can agree a deal; or we can go back to the people. There is more than one possibility.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** *rose*—

**Mr McFadden:** I would like to proceed.

Secondly, what is the right way to reach a resolution on an issue that has been so difficult for us and for the country? Surely the right way to reach a resolution on Brexit, and on the proposals before us, is to properly and fully consider them—not to have the pre-cooked, pre-prepared tantrums of the Prime Minister. The withdrawal agreement Bill is a hugely important piece of legislation—perhaps the most important that this House has considered for many years—and it deserved proper scrutiny.

**Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is simply a dreadful deal, that the attack on workers' rights, environmental protections and consumer protections is simply appalling, and that we need time to discuss these important matters?

**Mr McFadden:** I do. There are many other points about this deal that we should properly explore, not least because for the first time, the proposal before us is to have two Brexits, not one—one Brexit for one part of the country and another Brexit for the rest of the United Kingdom.

There are those who will say, “You have been discussing all this for three years; you have had plenty of time,” but as others have said in this debate, much of that time was taken up by an internal negotiation within the Conservative party and the Cabinet, with multiple Cabinet resignations, and the specific proposals before us were published only a couple of weeks ago. They are different from the proposals in the past.

**Tim Loughton:** The right hon. Gentleman said that he could not vote for the agreement because it still allowed the possibility of no deal and because that possibility of no deal could happen after the agreement was passed, and following the subsequent negotiations about the nature of the deal. So on that basis, he could never vote for a deal. There is all this nonsense about how we need more time for scrutiny and how all these years were wasted, but he was never going to vote for a European withdrawal Bill. He pledged in his party's manifesto to uphold Brexit, but he is not going to do that. The only way out of this, therefore, is to have this election, which is why he should vote for it.

**Mr McFadden:** I voted for a number of proposals that would have kept us close to the EU economically, including customs unions, single market arrangements and other proposals. It is not the case that I have opposed everything.

**Mr Vaizey:** Anyone on the Government Benches who voted against the withdrawal agreement proposed by the last Prime Minister cannot really complain if other people voted against different versions of Brexit, because they clearly subscribe to the principle that their interpretation of Brexit should guide their vote.

**Mr McFadden:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a very wise point. When hon. Members such as the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) say, “You have blocked everything”, it is worth remembering that the people who were most vociferously opposed to the deal of the previous Prime Minister, the right hon.

Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), were Members from her party, some of whom now occupy Cabinet positions. That is important in the argument to come.

The proposals before us were published only a couple of weeks ago and they depart from the previous proposals in several important ways. First, as I said, they propose two different Brexits for different parts of the UK—one for Northern Ireland and the other for the rest of the UK. Secondly, they chart a course for the future that is much more divergent on some of the rights that hon. Members have mentioned than was the case previously.

**Alberto Costa:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr McFadden:** I am going to wind up soon. In my view, the right way to have dealt with this issue is not to do what the Prime Minister has wanted to do since day one—to go for an election before these proposals could properly and fully be scrutinised by this House and the public—but to have proper scrutiny and debates and consider the amendments that would have been put forward. If we want to consult the public again on Brexit—as the Prime Minister said he wants to do time after time—and let them decide, why not consult them on the specific Brexit proposals of which he is now the champion? For those reasons, I do not think this is the only way to go.

Since the day he took office, it has been part of the Prime Minister's plan to run a people versus Parliament campaign, despite having opposed several Brexit deals himself, and to blame everyone except the champions of this project for its not proceeding—to blame the European Commission, Parliament and sometimes the civil services and judges. But while this may have been part of his plan since day one, not all of us are willing to fold into it this evening.

3.55 pm

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con):** It is important that we have a general election. When the question about Brexit was asked in 2016, it was a matter of which side of the argument people supported. The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who looks as if she is about to leave her seat, says she looks forward to being in my constituency more often. I say to her: thank you—we have had the magazine with your name all over it. The hon. Lady, who is now leaving the debate, is promoting herself in my constituency as the next Prime Minister, so it is important that we look at what is being heralded by parties such as the Liberal Democrats in the next election.

When we had that 2016 question, it was not a tribal question; the question for us on the doorstep was not: “Is yours a party of remain or leave?” We were empowered to campaign for whichever side of the argument suited us best, and we all pledged to respect the result, whether we knocked on the door and said “I'd prefer to leave” or “I'd prefer to remain”. I stood in the marketplace in St Albans behind a market stall manned by Conservatives, some supporting remain and some supporting leave, showing that our party respected the right of people to determine that question, not along party lines but having lived the European project for 40-odd years. Some, including me, had never had the opportunity to vote on the matter; others were being asked a second time.



[Mrs Anne Main]

As I said in an intervention on the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who has now gone, along with all her colleagues—[*Interruption.*] Oh, sorry. I did not recognise the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) back there. He is a worthy stalwart, staying for the debate, which is not something the Liberal Democrats do very often. I am pleased he is here for my remarks.

As I said, the parties were free to campaign, and as I said to the hon. Lady, in 2008, for purposes of electoral expediency, seeing that David Cameron and the Conservatives—I was serving here at the time—were uncertain whether to offer a debate on the Lisbon treaty, which was being passed by the then Labour Government, the Liberal Democrats campaigned with a great big photograph of Nick Clegg all over a leaflet saying: “We are the party to offer a referendum.”

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My hon. Friend articulately expresses how the EU referendum result was not based on what parties campaigned for. Does she agree that it was not a country-by-country or constituency-by-constituency vote, but that it came down to every individual vote by every citizen across the United Kingdom?

**Mrs Main:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is important that we go back and look at how we got to where we are in order to understand where we are going next. I am sorry about the history lesson, but it was in 2008 that the campaign started gathering momentum, simply because the Liberal Democrats were saying, “Only we will give you the choice.” I do not remember then or any time in between, until now, when it seems politically expedient, that any party campaigned to revoke. All of us, on whichever side of the in/out binary argument we stood, were free to campaign, hence the divide and the fact that there are Members with firmly held views, either for remain or leave, on each side of the House. Now the House and the political groupings have turned it into a party political campaign, and that is the problem.

**Paul Farrelly:** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady’s attack on the Liberal Democrats. I did not vote for the referendum legislation, and I did not vote to trigger article 50, so I am certainly not going to vote for an early general election, which is opportunism from the Prime Minister and opportunism from the Liberal Democrats. However, the hon. Lady has a chance today to agree with the Liberal Democrats, because an amendment, if selected, could change the date to 9 December. If the Conservatives want an election as soon as possible, given the chronology—the 9th comes before the 12th—why are you sticking to the 12th?

**Mrs Main:** I assume that the word “you” was directed not at you, Mr Speaker, but at me, so I do not expect you to answer the hon. Gentleman’s question and tell us why you are not changing the date to the 9th, but I will answer it and say that I do not think the public will care one way or another. We have a tradition in this country of holding elections on Thursdays, but as for the guff and nonsense that we have heard in this place about people going to Christmas parties and school plays and

all the rest of it, the public will think that that is a pretty trivial argument. I do not think it amounts to a hill of beans now: I think that the public are absolutely fed up.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend not think it bizarre that some people are arguing for a people’s vote 2019 when we have not yet implemented the people’s vote 2016?

**Mrs Main:** My right hon. Friend tempts me, and since there are no time limits, I may well wax lyrical on that point. However, it is important for us to get to the nub of the matter, which is that we have moved this away from being a choice for the people. I knocked on doors, and people said, “I am for leave” or “I am for remain”—

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Main:** May I finish this point first? Otherwise I could be speaking for hours, and I am sure the House would rather I did not detain it for that long.

People came up to that market stall and said that they were for leave or for remain. I did not ask them, “Do you vote Liberal Democrat, do you vote Green, do you vote Labour?” Indeed, members of the Labour party have suggested that they agree with my views, while members of the Conservative party, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), probably disagreed with my views at the time. All of us, at the time—well, I believe that the Liberal Democrats said that they would respect the vote—gave the impression that it was a once-in-a-lifetime choice, and a once-in-a-lifetime decision on which we would not renege and which we would not revoke: it would be delivered. It then came to a Parliament whose members were subsequently elected on the basis of their own political tribes.

**Graham P. Jones** *rose*—

**Mrs Main:** On political tribes, I shall give way.

**Graham P. Jones:** Will the hon. Lady please explain to me why the Government have not got Brexit through when they have had a majority for three years?

**Mrs Main:** Perhaps the arithmetic in the hon. Gentleman’s particular tribe is not as good as it might be. The Conservatives have not had a working majority for three years; there have been difficulties. However, the hon. Gentleman has fallen into the trap of seeing Brexit as a “political tribe” decision.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Just about everyone in the Chamber said that they respected the result of the 2016 referendum and stood on manifestos in 2017 saying that they would honour that result. Why does my hon. Friend think they have backtracked and are retreating into their political tribes in respect of this very important issue?

**Mrs Main:** I can only hazard a guess that certain parties saw it as politically expedient to suggest or imply, in 2008 in the case of the Liberal Democrats or in 2017 in the case of the Conservatives and the Labour party, that they would indeed offer, or respect, a referendum. Now too many of the parties are finding it politically difficult.

This is not about us. It is not about individual parts of the United Kingdom and individual constituencies. That is not how the referendum campaign went. Nobody came and asked us questions on a constituency-by-constituency, country-by-country or region-by-region basis. We are in this mess now because we have turned the issue into a political football.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way, on that point?

**Mrs Main:** On political footballs? The hon. Gentleman plays the game very well, so I shall hand over to him.

**Ian Murray:** On the subject of football, if the hon. Lady would like to buy my new book on football, she is very welcome—and I thank her for allowing me to plug it.

The hon. Lady talks about manifestos; I stood on that manifesto in 2017 and was the director of Scottish Labour for the single market and the customs union, which would have taken us out of the European Union, but, given that the Conservative party decided not to try to seek a consensus and instead turned to its own tribes with the Prime Minister pandering to the extreme right, that was no longer on the table and therefore I moved to a position that if it is not on the table the best deal is to put it back to the people and let them decide.

**Mrs Main:** On a scintilla of that argument I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, I am going to go back to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) about referendums, and the result the hon. Gentleman said he was not happy with is what he would now like to see not delivered in that particular way. His Front Bench, unfortunately, wishes to have the perverse situation of going back to the European Union, shredding the deal that has been agreed by 27 countries and that seems perfectly fit for purpose, if not perfect, and coming back with a better deal—because they are bound to offer the hon. Gentleman's Front Bench a better deal!—in the full knowledge that the deal that would be better will then be campaigned against. It is a nonsense. To back—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Main:** I will not give way now as I want to respond to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire about honouring referendums.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs Main:** I will give way in a moment; I am in great demand. First, however, I will respond to my right hon. Friend's intervention on referendums. It is important that we recognise that people voted in that referendum who had never voted before. I spoke to people in St Albans—and I am sure that this experience was replicated across the House—and they had a fixed view; it was not a political view, but it was a fixed view on whether they wanted in or out. Some people wanted help in making their minds up, and some changed their mind, but they had a fixed view, and I had numerous people say to me, "Politicians are all the same," but on this matter all the political parties came together to ask the same question.

**Paul Farrelly:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Main:** I hope the intervention is on this particular point of asking the same question, because I do wish to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean).

**Paul Farrelly:** My area, Newcastle-under-Lyme, voted 60% to 40%, some say 62% to 38%, to leave. During the last election I was re-elected—some thought it was a surprise. When I was asked about Brexit on the doorstep, I said that, first, it was for this House to determine how, but I was quite honest with the constituents that I thought our future would be better if we remained, and that was my straight answer. In St Albans, where 62% of people voted to remain, what is the hon. Lady's answer to her constituents?

**Mrs Main:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman asked me that because my answer to my constituents then, now and in the future is that I completely respect democracy, and whatever democratic outcome was delivered I would respect. I am not here to argue against it or for it; I am here to argue to deliver it. And I hope, since the political make-up of the hon. Gentleman's seat is very like mine—I do not dispute that in any way whatsoever—that he will be arguing, as I do, that the British public, as we need to heal—

**Paul Farrelly:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Main:** No, I am not going to have a two-way debate with the hon. Gentleman on this particular matter.

**Paul Farrelly** *rose*—

**Mrs Main:** No; I said no, and I say no twice. Mr Speaker made a ruling on this earlier on, so the answer is no.

What I will be arguing, as indeed we are arguing, is that we gave the in/out choice, regardless of political parties, and the in/out choice was delivered. Some people did not like it, and some constituencies did not match up with what their MP wanted, but that is not what it is about; what it is about—

**Rachel Maclean** *rose*—

**Mrs Main:** I will take my hon. Friend's intervention before I get to that point.

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank my hon. Friend very much for allowing me to intervene on her fantastic speech. She is making a number of points that I agree with extremely strongly. I voted remain in the original referendum, but my very strong feeling the day after the referendum, when we saw that overwhelming desire to leave the European Union, was that I should passionately support democracy in this country. Ever since that day I have supported that vote, even though I am a remainer, because I think we have one thing to do in this House, which is keep our promises to the electorate. Does my hon. Friend agree with that, and does she find that people who voted remain in her constituency share this desire to honour democracy above all else?

**Mrs Main:** I absolutely accept my hon. Friend's point. I accept that there are people in my constituency, as there will be in others, who fervently wish to overturn the result and to back remain. However, most people I

[Mrs Main]

speak to, when asked, feel that revoking would be a step too far. Most of them say, “I just want it over and done with. I want a deal.” I believe that this Government have tried to deliver exactly that. The last Prime Minister tried to deliver exactly that. She, like my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), made it clear that she was a remainer, but like me she vowed to respect democracy. The fact that I am mismatched with my seat might be something that political opponents wish to capitalise on, but the fundamental question we need to ask ourselves is whether we value political self-interest more than the trust, the pledge and the contract that we all made when that referendum was called.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Mrs Main:** On the point about honouring contracts, I shall take the hon. Gentleman’s intervention.

**Martin Whitfield:** Honouring contracts: an excellent input. I should like to draw the hon. Lady slightly back towards the Bill that is before us today, which she no doubt fully supports—quite rightly, in her own mind. Does she agree that the accompanying notes to the Bill confirm that it deals with the franchise for the election and the date of the election, as discussed? The notes state:

“The Parliament of the United Kingdom and parliamentary elections, including the franchise and disqualifications for membership of that Parliament, are an excepted matter under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

I ask this specifically with regard to the importance of the Bill, which is addressing a general election.

**Mrs Main:** Yes, we are discussing a Bill about having a general election. My point is that we need a general election because we have moved so far away from the original concept of the referendum, which was a choice between in and out, not a party political choice. Now, we are in a sclerotic position. We cannot move forward in here, and the only obvious answer is to ask the public to decide.

**Mr Kevan Jones** *rose*—

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mrs Main:** Can I just answer the previous intervention before I take any more?

If it is somehow politically expedient for some people to vote tonight for an election, I would say that they are putting their own considerations before those of the country. This should not be about us. This should not be about us looking at poll ratings and saying, “Does it suit me and my campaign to go to the country now?” This should be about us remembering what we said in 2016 or—as I said in my intervention on the Liberal Democrats—remembering what we tempted the public with in 2008. I will stand corrected if I am wrong, but I do not believe that any party ever said, “We will offer you a referendum, but if we don’t like the result we will frustrate it and campaign against it to try to get a different one”, or worse, “We will ignore the result.”

I am waiting for the “Ooh!” and the jumping up and down from the Scot Nats when I say this, but I believe that they are hoping against hope that they can have a referendum and—hopefully, according to their agenda—deliver an independent Scotland. I hope that before this House grants any such independence referendum, they will have a full deal to put on the table, very much like they are saying we should do on the European Union. I hope that they would first have an answer on the fisheries policy, the euro, the border and all the other hard concerns they have about the Northern Ireland question. The reality is that a referendum is never formed in those terms. The previous one was not, and a future one would not be. The reality is that we asked the question: in or out? [*Interruption.*]

**David Duguid:** I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend’s articulate flow once again. I could not help but hear the chuntering from a sedentary position on the SNP Benches. I believe that there were 617 pages in the White Paper on Scotland’s future that was published in advance of the 2014 independence referendum. On page 217 of that document, it clearly told the people of Scotland—[*Interruption.*] Page 217—do Members know where I am going with this? It told the people of Scotland that if they voted against independence, there was a risk of Scotland remaining in the UK and the UK then holding a referendum on EU membership, as that referendum had been announced by that time. Despite that warning, Scotland still voted to remain in the UK.

**Mrs Main:** My hon. Friend knows the minutiae of the 600-page White Paper produced by the Scots Nats. I am sure it was his bedtime reading.

**Mike Kane:** On the sclerotic nature of this Parliament and whether a general election will somehow change that, will it ever? Brexit has been a virus in a vial in a nightstand by the Tory party bed for 40 years. Occasionally, it would break and infect the Conservative party, which would catch a cold, and maybe the Labour party would win an election. You unleashed a referendum and broke the vial across the whole country, and we have all caught the cold. Churchill said that fanatics were people who will not change their mind and could not change the subject. Brexit will not be solved by a general election.

**Mrs Main:** I do not blame you at all for unleashing a vial across anybody, Mr Speaker. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, but the point is that the people were asked. We cannot now say we should not have asked the question. Plenty of colleagues went around the country framing the arguments—plenty of colleagues framed the arguments for, and plenty of colleagues framed the argument against.

I come back to the point that the only reason we need a general election now is that the public have seen how we have behaved in here. The public have seen which party is the most likely to honour its pledges made to the British people in 2017, which party came out with a deal that this House found favour with, and which party remembers that we are only here to carry out the referendum, not to ignore it or to change it.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is also about ending uncertainty? Only with a general election and a Conservative victory can we show the path of certainty.



**Mrs Main:** I agree, but we also need to get on and discuss all the other issues. For example—this is not the most important thing for me, but it is important—St Albans has what claims to be the oldest public school in the world. It is right slap bang next to the cathedral. It is iconic. I have been in contact with parents—I am meeting another group on Friday—who are extremely concerned that the Labour party will remove the school's charitable status if it is elected. They are extremely concerned that the Lib Dems will charge the school VAT. Businesses are extremely concerned that they do not have certainty about what to do next. People are pleased to hear about the £400 million investment in hospitals in St Albans and Hertfordshire, and they are extremely pleased that St Albans schools have received above-average cash injections. They want to hear about all these other topics. My hon. Friend is right that Brexit is drowning out the scrutiny of all these other things.

I want to remind the people in St Albans that the Labour Government left a little note when they left office saying that there was no money left. I want to remind St Albans that we now have the lowest number of unemployed young people since records began. I want to remind people in St Albans that there have been 500,000 new apprenticeships. I want to remind people in St Albans that we have lifted loads of people and families out of paying income tax at all, and that came from a Conservative Government. I want to be discussing those topics. The interminable vial of Brexit to which the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) referred is being kept active in here.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is dangerous to continue this “people versus Parliament” narrative, saying that Parliament is somehow frustrating the process. The reason we have not been able to coalesce around a deal is that the two deals that have been on the table have been terrible for this country. Diligence and integrity are required to ensure that we make the right decision. Has the hon. Lady read the impact assessment? If so, what does she make of the value of the trade deal to Northern Ireland? What does she make of the impact of this deal?

**Mrs Main:** I have, and the worst impact is the absolute uncertainty surrounding investment in our jobs and businesses. People do not know whether they can trade, whether they have to stockpile goods or what the arrangements will be because the dates keep moving. That is the worst thing.

All this flummery about Brexit is hiding the fact that we are not getting the business of this House done. Almost no one was here to talk about the Environment Bill, yet people are marching against plastic.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): To return to the Second Reading of this Bill, my hon. Friend faces a challenge from the Liberal Democrats in St Albans. Does she agree that, during the referendum, every household in the country received a letter saying

“The Government will implement what you decide”?

Does she remember the previous leader of the Liberal Democrats saying that, even if it were by one vote, the result should still stand? And did she hear the other day—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I say very gently to the hon. Gentleman that there is a difference between a brief intervention and what one might call leisurely musing. I fear that what should be a brief intervention has elided, surely inadvertently, into leisurely musing and therefore his triple-hatted inquiry is, I feel sure, reaching its zenith.

**Richard Graham:** You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker. My inquiry was reaching its climax. I finish by asking my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) whether she also recalls the current leader of the Liberal Democrats saying that, if there were to be a people's vote and the result were to go, in her view, the wrong way—in other words, if the people were to vote again to leave the European Union—she would not recognise it as valid. Is that not a most extraordinary position for any party of democrats to take?

**Mr Speaker:** It is always a pleasure to oblige the hon. Gentleman because his naughtiness is mitigated by his charm, but the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) should not be diverted from the path of virtuous debate by his intervention, no matter how sedulously he propagates his case.

**Mrs Main:** I take your instruction, Mr Speaker, and I will not be diverted.

A general election allows us to ask which party is prepared to honour democracy, and I will be asking that question every day in St Albans. A general election also reminds people that a strong Government is needed, and I mean a strong Government with a majority.

The current situation is the worst of all governance. It is governance by horse-trading. The Conservative party did not quite have the majority it needed at the 2010 election, so the Liberal Democrats came into power with us. [*Interruption.*] It worked so well, as someone says from a sedentary position. The horse-trading began straightaway. Horse-trading is exactly what happens in weak Governments. The lack of numbers means people suddenly start putting forward different agendas.

In St Albans, many students and young people were seduced by the thought of free tuition fees. I heard that being promised time and again across the land, and young people, potentially facing large debts being wiped away, suddenly found they might want to nail their colours to tuition fees at a general election. Tuition fees were an issue that attracted many young people for obvious reasons, and young people nailed their colours to that mast in largish numbers.

However, when we got into government with the Liberal Democrats, tuition fees were the first thing to be horse-traded. Tuition fees were horse-traded for a vote on the alternative vote system. The Liberal Democrats felt that changing the voting system was more important than tuition fees. As a result, hundreds of thousands of young people found themselves being duped and the horse-trading continued.

**Mr Vaizey:** I have enjoyed every second of my hon. Friend's 29-minute speech, and I am grateful to get in just before the end of her remarks, because I know that she is going to give way soon to others who want to contribute to this debate. Given the seat she represents, I know that she agrees that one issue we will want to talk about in the election, apart from Brexit, is culture

[Mr Vaizey]

and heritage. That issue is close to my heart and hers, so in the last couple of minutes of her speech I would like her just to acknowledge that.

**Mrs Main:** The right hon. Gentleman tempts me, because the culture and heritage goes back to the Romans in St Albans and I could talk about it for a very long time. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have a wonderful picture of the new St Albans museum, in the centre of my beautiful city; before he was Prime Minister, he came to St Albans and congratulated the Conservative-led council on delivering a fabulous museum, which is to the absolute enhancement of my constituency.

I will move on to the general election—[*Interruption.*] Is shouting down democracy something we agree with in this House? As far as I can see, this House says it wants more time to debate things, but when an hon. Member stands on her hind legs and starts debating things, they do not want her to have that amount of time—they want to run on to other Opposition groups or to other Members in the House. On something as important as this, the people need to know, even if it is Brenda of Bristol, why on earth we are troubling them yet again with another election.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): On that point—

**Mrs Main:** On Brenda of Bristol, I shall give way.

**Mr Speaker:** Has the hon. Lady completed her oration?

**Mrs Main** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** No, she is taking an intervention from none other than the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone)

**Jamie Stone:** Mr Speaker, I rise as the unrecognised Liberal Democrat in this place and I apologise to the Chamber. Let me get back to the issue of the election itself. I represent the coldest and most northerly constituency in the British mainland. It is going to get dark a hell of a lot earlier where I come from than it does in St Albans, and the streets and roads are going to be an awful lot icier. This is perhaps an appeal for the Leader of the House, who is not with us at this precise moment, but may I ask the Government to co-ordinate as closely as possible with the Scottish Government to make sure that the streets and roads are safe for the people who want to come out to exercise their democratic right?

**Mrs Main:** I am not sure how that related to Brenda of Bristol, but the point I wish to make, before I start concluding my remarks, is that in 2017 the public were sick of the idea of having an election but they turned out and they mostly elected the two biggest parties, on a mandate to deliver. This House, for whatever reasons it wishes to conclude, has been letting the public down. The binary choice of in or out has been turned into a political football. Now the parties need to draft their manifestos. They need to firm up their pledges and be honest about what they wish to do. They need to tell the public that if a party is elected with a strong mandate, the horse-trading will stop, the deals will stop and the taking over of the agenda by the Opposition or other

individual groups with their own little axe to grind will stop. The parties need to say that a Government will be able to deliver on all the additional funding pledged in the Queen's Speech and on Brexit, and that the next Government, unless they are a Government who are asked to oppose Brexit, will be delivering on the pledge to deliver to the people.

I hope that today there will be a vote for a general election, and not for political expediency. All of us should be saying sorry to the public for putting them through it again. We should be saying sorry for the dark streets, the cold nights, and the cancelled Christmas decorations or whatever else was going on in halls that are now going to be having election proceedings. All of us need to apologise to the public and say, "Sorry, when you told us to leave, we weren't actually sure you meant it."

I believe the public meant it. I know that other Members wish to speak today, including the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), who was not here for the whole debate—

**Mr Vaizey:** Right honourable.

**Mrs Main:** He has risen to right. hon—I am so sorry and I apologise. He wishes to speak. When we are going out on the doorstep, we should remember that that person who voted in or out did not vote Conservative, Green, Labour or Liberal—they voted in or out. We need to respect that. We gave them a choice. It is insulting the public to say that we should not have given them the choice, as someone on the Opposition Benches has said, that they were too stupid to make the choice, as some have said, or that some of them are dead now and so we will ask people again. So may I make the plea that tonight we go for a general election, even though it or the timing may not suit all of us? What it should do is resolve this issue of a zombie Parliament incapable of action and deliver a Conservative Government who will deliver on their promise, their mandate and their pledge to uphold democracy.

4.30 pm

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I wonder why on earth we need a four-hour debate, because we have a very simple choice: we either want to vote for a general election or we do not. I voted for a general election last night and I will vote for one tonight. Let us be truthful: I do not think anybody in the House, listening here or in their rooms or wherever they are listening, will change their mind one iota on how they are going to vote because of this four-hour debate. Some Members are probably using the debate more as an election address. I do not have to do that, because I am not standing again, but I want to say why I will support a general election in the vote tonight.

Let us not forget that the public have been looking into Parliament a great deal more in these last few months than ever before. What they have seen is a Parliament that does not and cannot allow the Government to govern. The Government do not have a majority. The Government have not been able to get their withdrawal deal through; they have not been able to get much else through. Without doubt, there are Members who will never vote for any withdrawal agreement whatsoever, no matter how wonderful it is, because they do not want

to leave the European Union, and the reality is that people out there know that. They know that we now have a Parliament that is a bit of a shambles.

Anyone who goes out and talks the public, whatever their views and however they voted in the referendum, will know that they think this Parliament is a bit of a shambles. They are seeing that even today. A simple vote on whether we have a general election is now being turned into a debate, with very little time, on whether we want 16 and 17-year-olds to be added to the electoral register and whether we want to give European Union citizens the right to vote. Even if I supported those proposals 100%, this is not the time to be changing who is on the voting register; in reality, it is pretty difficult for that to happen before a general election on 9 December or 12 December.

**Mr Fysh:** Does the hon. Lady agree that people outside might think it a little disingenuous of some Members to say that they want to vote for an election, while seeking to add wrecking amendments, such as votes for children or for EU nationals?

**Kate Hoey:** A lot of people who have seen how Parliament works over the past few months will have seen that wrecking amendments, delaying amendments and procrastination are now part and parcel of how we work in this Chamber. That is why we are here now talking about a general election.

The last general election we had, in 2017, was entirely unnecessary. Many people know that it was ridiculous to have a general election and the public punished the party that called the general election, when it had a majority and there was no need for a general election. The situation is very different now, because the Government cannot govern and the public deserve the right to have a Government, of whatever party, who can get their business through the House and who can get some general sanity into what we are doing in our procedures.

**Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind):** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene. As she and I both serve on Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, she will be well aware that the essential legislation to compensate the victims in Northern Ireland of appalling historical institutional abuse began its progress through Westminster in the other place. If we were to dissolve on 6 November, she knows perfectly well that those victims of historical institutional abuse who have waited so patiently and with such dignity for so long will not be able to see that legislation pass through this House in time for them to have that compensation. How does she feel about supporting an early election and, in so doing, doing down the victims of historical institutional abuse?

**Kate Hoey:** I take it that the hon. Lady will be voting against the general election.

**Lady Hermon** *indicated assent.*

**Kate Hoey:** I do think that that is a hugely important issue, which has unity across this House. If the Leader of the House, who has just left his place, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland really wanted to get that Bill through, they could do so this week. It could still be put through this week. It passed its Second Reading in the other place last night, so there is absolutely no reason why we cannot get that Bill through. Yes, the

hon. Lady is right. There will be many things that we cannot get through, but there are also an awful lot of things that we should be getting through but we are not able to do so because there is no majority for them in this House.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** I thought that I heard the Leader of the House say that one reason for keeping the House going until 6 November was to get that Bill through. It would be iniquitous if we do not get this Bill through, because people in Northern Ireland really require to have it passed.

**Kate Hoey:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that those whose business it is can sort out what we do over the next few days. As I understand it—I am sure that other people know more than I do on this—if there is not a general election until 12 December, we will not have to dissolve until the following Thursday, which means that there is time. If there is unity in the House about that very important measure then it could be put through.

I know, too, Mr Speaker, that you have made your decision about leaving this House. I see no reason why the election of a new Speaker could not have been brought forward to this week, so that the issue could have been resolved before Parliament dissolves. I am getting away from the Bill, and I know, Mr Speaker, that you would not want me to do that.

**Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con):** I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Under the previous Labour Government when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister, was not the question of giving voting rights to overseas citizens living here raised and looked at by Lord Goldsmith, who concluded that full voting rights should be given only to UK citizens?

**Kate Hoey:** I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to make a contribution in Committee, when we will know more about the detail of that amendment, but I certainly will not support it. I do not support it, and I certainly do not support, as I have said earlier, either of those changes being introduced in this Bill at this time. What this legislation is about is whether we want a general election.

In my view, every political party and every candidate standing in the election will have to be very clear about their position on what will happen about our leaving the EU and honouring the result of the referendum. Members have mentioned a people's vote. I waited 40 years after we joined the Common Market to get another referendum. We have not implemented this referendum, so I am very pleased that there does not seem to be a majority in this House for another referendum. None the less, it is absolutely clear that we just cannot go on like this in our Parliament. We must resolve this issue. I hope that when the parties put forward their manifestos, they will be very clear that this withdrawal agreement can still be looked at and changed.

I hope that they will see that the terrible part of this deal, which to me really stands out, is the way that Northern Ireland has been treated. We cannot allow that to happen. I know that there are lots of talks going on about how this can be changed. I believe that we should be leaving as a whole United Kingdom, not



[Kate Hoey]

leaving Northern Ireland different and separate. That can be solved and it needs to be solved if we are finally to get an agreement through this House.

It is important that the public see that we have finally said that we accept that there is not a majority for anything really happening in this House over leaving the EU. I blame those Members of Parliament on both sides of the House who decided very early on that they would do what they could to prevent us from leaving. They have been very successful, but I do not think they will be as successful when it comes to the general election.

4.40 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The question before us today is: do we want a general election? Do the public want a general election and do the politicians want a general election? I do not think that anybody wants a general election. If we have an election in December, it will be the third time in three years that my electorate have been asked for their vote, and I hope that they give the same answer this time. But what people do want is Brexit to be delivered.

My constituency of Sleaford and North Hykeham voted overwhelmingly to leave. The country as a whole voted to leave, but even the constituents I meet who voted remain—including business owners and people who run businesses—also want Brexit done. They tell me, “Look, we really wanted to stay and to start with we thought another vote might be a good idea, but now what we see is that the ongoing uncertainty—this kicking the can down the road all the time—is more damaging to our business than any form of Brexit, and we want you to get it done and respect democracy.” So why has it not been done?

There has been much talk of whether we are representatives or delegates, and whether the 450 MPs who represent constituencies that voted to leave should also want to leave. We are representatives, and as such we can choose whether to follow the majority of our constituents. I have followed the majority of mine in supporting Brexit, because that is what they voted for. In this case we have a very unusual situation, whereby we representative politicians gave the choice to the British people. We delegated the responsibility for this one decision to them, asking them, “What do you want us to do? This is such a momentous decision that we want you to make it for us.” They said that they wanted to leave, and it is up to us as representatives to deliver Brexit on their behalf. But we have now a perfect storm, whereby the representatives do not agree with the delegated decision of the British people, and the Government lack a parliamentary majority with which to deliver their will. Under this Prime Minister, the Government have tried every single avenue open to us to deliver Brexit.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** What the hon. Lady is saying is not exactly true, is it? It took her party two years and eight months to put anything to this House. The Government now have a Bill that has passed its Second Reading and could actually go forward, so it is not the case that an election is somehow going to deliver Brexit. The architect of stalling the Brexit process was the present Prime Minister, when he voted against the former Prime Minister’s original withdrawal deal.

**Dr Johnson:** The point I was trying to make is that the Government have tried every avenue to deliver Brexit, but this Parliament and this Opposition have done everything they can to stop it.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The argument that the proper thing to have done was to extend the time available is undermined by the fact that the greatest enthusiasts for that voted in principle against the Bill. By “scrutiny” they merely mean amending the Bill so that it no longer represents the agreement and the negotiations have to be restarted and the whole wretched cycle can begin again.

**Dr Johnson:** My right hon. Friend is exactly right.

The Prime Minister was told that he could not reopen the withdrawal agreement, but he did. He was then told that he could not remove the backstop from that agreement and could not gain other important changes, but he did. He was then told that he could not get a deal that, in principle, was voted for and supported by this House, and on Second Reading he did. But then the Opposition voted to prevent it from being discussed, because it cannot be discussed without a timetabling motion, and they voted against that.

**Mr Kevan Jones** *rose*—

**Dr Johnson:** I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already.

This is a question of trust. The British people trust us to deliver on our promises, and if we do not deliver on our promises we undermine the basis of democracy. The leaflet that came out during the European referendum said: “We will implement what you decide.” Many people, some of whom had never voted for the whole of their lives because they felt it did not make anything change, went and voted in the European referendum because they thought it would make a difference. It was the biggest democratic exercise in our country’s history and a majority voted to leave—and leave we must.

The Opposition are playing party politics, because their only determination is to try to make sure that Brexit cannot happen by the 31st. That is because they think the public are stupid. They think the public will say, “Ah—the Prime Minister did not deliver Brexit by the 31st, so we can go to the country and say that he did not keep his promise.” But actually the public are not stupid. They can see that the reason we have not delivered it by the 31st is that the Opposition voted to institute the European Union (Withdrawal) No. 2 Bill, which surrendered control of when we leave to the European Union.

I want to deal with the issues in the amendments. The first amendment would allow all EU voters living in this country to vote. Quite apart from the fact that this has not been properly debated, it is very difficult to add 3 million voters to the register at very short notice. It would also have—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I just say very gently to the hon. Lady that a copy of prospective amendments has been made available, but the time for debate upon amendments is at the Committee stage for which they are intended. Therefore, briefly to animadvert to a possible amendment is orderly, but to dilate upon it is not.

**Dr Johnson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for that guidance. I did notice that many other speakers mentioned the amendments during their orations.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am not sure whether that was done in an arch way. It was advertised, and it has attracted the attention of the Clerk at the Table and of the Chair, but in any case I know that the hon. Lady will unfailingly sign up to the nostrum that two wrongs do not make a right.

**Dr Johnson:** Absolutely, Mr Speaker

I would like to discuss the issue of European citizens, which has already been mentioned during the debate. It would be very difficult to add 3 million voters to the electoral register at short notice, and the relative size of constituencies would be affected. It is notable that some, like my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), who was here earlier, have constituencies of more than 100,000 people, while others have constituencies of just 20,000 people. I know that there has been an effort by the Boundary Commission to introduce changes that would even those up, but suddenly adding European voters would have an impact on the relative value of an individual's vote. It is also notable that none of the EU27 member states allows citizens not from their country to vote in a general election, and with free movement and elections at different times one can rather see why that might be.

Other speakers have discussed votes at 16. As a paediatrician, I have over time seen and treated a number of young people at 16. I have met some very, very mature 16-year-olds with great life experience who no doubt have the knowledge and maturity to vote, but I have also met 16-year-olds who do not. It is worth looking at the international—

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** I put forward a private Member's Bill to try to extend the franchise. Does the hon. Lady not agree that if we start to put up arbitrary barriers and set tests for 16 and 17-year-olds, we should set the same tests for other age groups? If she set a maturity test for 16-year-olds, I can bet her that the Prime Minister would not pass it.

**Dr Johnson:** I am reminded of the fact that when people start to get personal towards the Prime Minister or others, it is because they do not have a political argument to make.

It is useful to look at international norms. The United Nations, which we are part of, sees 18-year-olds as adults. Internationally, refugees are seen as children if they are less than 18 years old. We are part of the Five Eyes group, along with Australia, New Zealand, America and Canada, all of which allow votes only from 18. All EU member states, apart from Austria, allow votes only from 18. As a children's doctor—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I ask the hon. Lady to resume her seat. Either entirely of her own initiative—which is perfectly credible, because she is a most assiduous parliamentarian—or because she has been exhorted by others, or maybe a judicious combination of the two, she seems inclined to do precisely what I told her she should not do, which is to dilate on matters that, as things stand, are outwith the scope of the Bill. I cannot

in all conscience encourage her to persist with her global tour, and potentially her intergalactic tour, in pursuit of evidence that she wishes to adduce on the matter of the appropriate age at which people should vote. What I have tried to tell her courteously, and which I now tell her courteously but bluntly, is that those matters are not currently up for discussion. It will not suffice for her to smile at me and say, "Mr Speaker, I am most grateful for your guidance," with a view then to comprehensively ignoring it.

**Dr Johnson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker; I appreciate your guidance on this matter. I hope you will not mind my responding to the comments made by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), who said that our children should have a vote because it matters to their future. This will affect my four, eight and 12-year-olds' futures even more, but that is not a rational argument for them to vote.

I am concerned that the amendments that have been tabled are wrecking amendments, because they are trying to change the franchise just before an election. Were that to happen against the Electoral Commission's advice, we would not be able to have an election in December.

**Sir Greg Knight:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. I think she is saying that the Bill should be left as it is not only on Second Reading but beyond it, to maximise support for it.

**Dr Johnson:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention; he is right.

We need to deliver Brexit and get on with the priorities of the British people. People in my constituency want more police, more money for schools, better broadband and a strong economy—all the things that were promised in the Queen's Speech. This Parliament needs to be honest with the people. If Members do not want to deliver Brexit, they should be honest about that and say to voters that they do not want to deliver Brexit, then see whether they are returned. We are at an impasse where the only solution to get Brexit done, whether we want one or not, is to have a general election now.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I am most grateful to the hon. Lady. May I politely suggest that colleagues have care and concern for each other? Each of them wishes to speak. It is not necessary or desirable for one person to speak at inordinate length and then say, either openly or to themselves, "Whoops! Sorry. I stopped someone else doing so." It is better to avoid that grisly fate.

4.53 pm

**Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab):** I agree. I plan to say a number of things, but I want to follow up on some of the things that have been said during the debate. There has been a huge amount of talk about being honest with the public, political expediency and turning the referendum into a party political thing. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) seemed very concerned that the referendum and how we vote on Bills has been used for political expediency. I would like to gently remind everybody of the time that the Prime Minister got a camera crew to come and take a picture

[*Jess Phillips*]

of him as he signed his little resignation letter to Theresa May—sorry, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). Some might say that it had been politically expedient and, lo and behold, he is now the Prime Minister. Gosh forbid that anybody should use things for political expediency or that Conservative Members have always voted for the Bill.

The trouble with the arguments we are having is that the Government have continued to behave like a Government who have a majority, regardless of the fact that they do not. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead suffered exactly the same problem after the referendum, which was not won decisively by one side—it was a marginal win—and after the 2017 election, when again the country was split, and the idea of bringing forward a Bill that we could all sit down and work on was literally never ever taken forward.

I have listened to Conservative Members saying today, “Well, you shouldn’t be allowed to amend the Bill”, or “You only want time to amend it”. Er, yes—that is absolutely right, because that is the job of this House. Different people come here from different backgrounds and make laws that are not just for one sort of person, but that represent this country. I seem to be in a twilight zone where the Government and the Executive seem to think that they just write a line and then go, “Er, well, it’s my way or the highway”. Welcome to parliamentary democracy!

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Does my hon. Friend agree with me that it is even worse than that because Parliament was excluded from this process for two years and eight months while the Conservative party had an internal debate about what type of Brexit they could get through, and it was only then that this House was let in to the arguments?

**Jess Phillips:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. It is ridiculous.

I represent a leave seat, and, as we enter this general election, I may face the fate for my beliefs that the hon. Member for St Albans fears that she will face—and that is okay. She thinks it is okay, and I think it is okay that I may have done something different from what the majority of my constituents did, regardless of the fact that 10,000 extra of them voted for me post the referendum.

The reality is that the Government have only ever wanted obedience. They have looked on people like me and said, “Do as we say, little girl. We’re not going to let you do anything to our precious Bill.” But that is not the meaning of this place. What nobody in this place can answer is how will it end if what is returned is another hung Parliament. We did not think we were going to be here before, yet here we are. I believe the right hon. Member for Maidenhead thought that she would be having a considerably nicer time when she was next to Lord Buckethead on the evening of the general election, yet here we are.

What has happened since then is like a Rorschach test. The hon. Member for St Albans can look at the exact same result as the one I can look at, and we can say, “In this piece of toast, I can see the Virgin Mary”. We say that the voters think exactly what we think, regardless of what they actually said, because the question

is fudged. We did not do so when we asked them in a general election, and we are not going to get a decisive answer on the issue of Brexit.

I spoke to the Prime Minister in the Lobby the other day. He was loitering around outside the private Members’ Bills ballot, which I invited him to enter as it seems he would struggle to change the law otherwise. He asked, “What will it take for you, Jess, to support this Bill?” Am I allowed to say my own name? Is that allowed? He asked, “What will it take for you, the honourable—the incredibly honourable—Member for Birmingham, Yardley?” I said, “What it will take for me is that you ask the people where I live if they are happy with the deal”. It is as simple as that. He looked at me as if this was brand new information—“This is the first time I’ve heard such a revelation”—which I thought was odd, but, you know, he is an unusual man.

Then the Prime Minister said to me, “Don’t you think another referendum will be dangerous for this country?” To that, I said, “I’m not entirely sure why you think it would be any different from a general election”. We are all sitting in here talking about this general election, but pretty much no one has actually talked about general elections, apart from a few party political broadcasts about people’s museums in their constituencies and how beautiful the islands are. The reality is that we have all talked about the referendum. This is going to be a Brexit referendum whether we like it or not, except that we will not be being clear and we will not be being honest—none of us will be—and in what we get back we will be able to see whatever we want to see.

I have heard people in here say that I as a Labour voter voted to deliver Brexit based on the last general election, and that is simply not true. I did not do that. As a Labour voter, I voted for many, many things that I believe in about Labour values. My vote had nothing to do with the Brexit position of my political party and I would say the same if I was not a representative of it. We are going to dishonestly use a general election. It will not be about the fact that people in my constituency cannot send their kids to school five days a week, or about whether the NHS is serving them properly, or about whether they are happy with something that the Conservative party might say. We are going to use the general election for political expediency. Can we all stop pretending that it is about anything else?

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for making a passionate and amusing speech. I believe that she is making the argument for a further referendum. How long would it take this place to legislate for that and how long has the EU given us in the current extension?

**Jess Phillips:** The honest answer—I have truck with honesty—is that I am not entirely sure, but does the hon. Lady understand that we tried to get the biggest piece of legislation through this House in three days? I am certain that the wit of the people in this Chamber could organise a referendum, even to be on the same day as a general election.

I do not particularly like the idea of a general election in December for all the reasons people have mentioned. The main thing I do not like is exactly what I have said: it will be used by people afterwards to say that it meant what they wanted it to mean. That applies not just to



the Government side, but to the Opposition. No one can answer the question of what happens when we return a hung Parliament to this place and we are stuck once again in Brexit paralysis. What will we do then? No one is answering that question because everybody is acting completely arrogantly and doing that thing we all do on the stump when we say, "Here's the next Prime Minister" even if we are in a minority party with about four people in it. It is totally ridiculous. It does not answer the question of what we do if we return a hung Parliament that, just like in 2017, is split exactly down the middle and we cannot get anything through.

**Mr Fysh:** What is the hon. Lady's view of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 in such a situation, where hung Parliaments cannot do anything? Should we look at abolishing it? Would the Labour party support that?

**Jess Phillips:** I do not speak for the Labour Front Bench or those who make policy, but the Act seems to have caused paralysis. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is nothing ideal about the situations that any of us have found ourselves in since 2016. None of this is ideal. Frankly, it needed people who could put most things aside and try to do what was best, and I am afraid that this House has largely failed in that endeavour to try to find consensus.

And so we face the future. After the next general election, will we all agree to try to build a consensus, if it returns a hung Parliament with no clear line? Will we all put that in our manifestos? I do not know the answer to that. "Make it end" could just carry on in perpetuity. Nobody wants that.

I want to build consensus. A man was arrested and charged for trying to break into my office, calling me a fascist because I would not vote for the deal. I asked for him to be shown leniency in court, and I asked for us to be able to sit down and talk to each other because I do not believe that I cannot find something in common with this man who is the same age as me and grew up streets away from me. I believe we can find consensus, but I am not sure a general election campaign is where we will find it.

I can guarantee to all hon. Members that an onslaught of money will come from who knows where to fund propaganda in our election: when our electoral laws in this country are currently not fit for purpose; when we are about to enter into a battle where foreign funding can flood into our system; where the Prime Minister's chief of staff, who led a campaign that has been found to have broken the law, is going to be in charge of some of that propaganda machine; and when the Prime Minister himself refuses to answer direct questions on exactly his role in the decision-making and when he found out.

In the recent European Parliament election, a man stood on a platform, completely legitimately, when the thing that made him most famous was whether he would or would not rape me. Our electoral laws are not fit for purpose. So what are we all going to do—all of us sitting here pretending that what we want is honesty and that we do not just want to win? What are we all going to do during the election campaign to make sure it is fair, to make sure it is legal and to make sure that it is not trying to say from the other side that people like me are a danger to the country or from my side that people like you are, so that people who hear that turn

up and try to break into my office, scream in face and send me death threats? What are we going to do? It might be much easier for everybody to get a one-line Bill through, but a one-line Bill on an election does not answer a single one of the questions that every single person in this place has been asking for a very long time.

I shall finish my remarks by saying that I will gladly go back and sleep in my own bed for a solid six weeks, see my children every day and join the camaraderie of the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who will join me in my seat as they do every time we have an election, but what happens next is the question that nobody can answer. Until that is the case, the one-line Bill is useless.

5.7 pm

**Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Ind):** I am grateful to have been called when I was not able to be present for the whole debate. I will try to keep my remarks brief, because I know that other colleagues want to speak.

It is an example of the journey I have made in my 14 years in this House that my maiden speech was a Eurosceptic speech that followed a speech by a Labour Eurosceptic, the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins). I will now make a resolutely pro-remain, pro-European speech following the excellent speech by one of the Members whom I most admire in this House, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips).

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I just very gently say, because the right hon. Gentleman implied that he would be brief—I hope, mercifully, that he will be brief, brilliant though he is—that there is no need for him to make either a pro-European or an anti-European speech, or a speech anywhere between the two? There is a need for him to make a speech about whether there should or should not be an early general election, nothing more. It will be delivered with an eloquence worthy of Demosthenes and an intellect to rival Einstein's, I feel certain.

**Mr Vaizey:** I have to say, Mr Speaker, that the minute you rose I realised the error I had made in speaking injudiciously and inaccurately. From now on, I will take a forensic approach. The point I was going to make was that I support the call for an election. It is quite right that we try to break the deadlock that exists in Parliament by having an election as soon as possible. I am also mindful—I have listened to every word you have said in this Chamber, Mr Speaker—that I am not going to speak about any of the amendments. All I will say is that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley raised important points and the amendments, if they are called, will also raise important points.

There are important debates to be had in this Chamber about the shape and form of elections. I am open to the idea, for example, of 16-year-olds voting. I am open to the idea of our European friends who live here and contribute their taxes voting. In particular, I take on board the point the hon. Lady made about money and lies. We know that in a digital age the propaganda pumped out on tech platforms will be a huge issue in this election and in future elections. When this House returns after the election, I hope that that will be one of the issues that is addressed.

Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), who made an excellent speech, have focused on the fact that people in the country are yearning for us to talk about something

[Mr Vaizey]

other than Brexit and about the issues that matter to them. I am extremely fortunate to represent the wonderful constituency of Wantage and Didcot, which contributes an enormous amount to the British economy. It is a centre for scientific research, space companies and life sciences, and it has a Formula 1 team, Williams Formula 1. Understandably, the constituency voted to remain because those companies rely on the expertise of a workforce who are spread throughout Europe and who are able to come to this country to work. It is clear, therefore, that when we have this election—and we must have it—Brexit and the issues that emerge from it will be an important factor in the debate.

It is also right that when we call this election—I am speaking in support of the Bill—people should have the chance to debate issues such as who provides the best stewardship of the economy, healthcare and education as well as the importance of culture and the creative industries in our society, a subject very close to my heart.

I echo what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley said—I hope this is in order, Mr Speaker—about the tone of any forthcoming general election campaign. You will be pleased to know that the insight I am about to deliver represents the conclusion of my remarks. When you quite rightly ruled me out of order for saying that I was going to make a pro-remain speech when in fact I am making a pro-election speech, the point I wanted to make was that, with a little bit of Brexit inside me—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans has perked up. Obviously, I do not want to be part of a European superstate. I often say to my remain friends that if at any point the European Union told us, “You can stay in the European Union only if you join the single currency,” I would be the first to man the barricades and call for Brexit—even, dare I say it, a no-deal Brexit.

What was left behind after the referendum, and what I hope we get back if we call an election, is an understanding of the role of this incredible institution of Parliament. We know that the people voted to leave the European Union, but the paranoid hard-right Brexiteers decided that any version of Brexit apart from their own would somehow snatch away their hard-won victory. However, you know, Mr Speaker, that the role of this place, as the Chamber of a representative democracy, is to take that instruction and to interpret it as best we can.

My rebellious streak emerged when a hard-line Brexit was proposed—the proposal to leave the customs union and the single market while maintaining an open border in Ireland is an impossible circle to square—and there were attacks on our judges, who were called “enemies of the people” for interpreting the law; attacks on business, which pays taxes and employs people; attacks on our civil servants, who worked day and night to deliver the instructions of their political masters; and, dare I say it, Mr Speaker, attacks on you for allowing us in this Chamber to have our say on important matters. What really drove me mad was the attempt by some people in this House to own the result of the referendum and say, to echo the words of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley, “My way or the highway,” trashing in the process every single institution that they purported to be campaigning for when they campaigned for Brexit.

That is utterly shameful. I hope they realise that everyone in this House has done their best to deliver on the referendum result.

It is not our fault that there was a hung Parliament. We can blame various people for the reason that we came back with a hung Parliament—[*Interruption.*] No, I blame the politicians. I blame the person who was leading our party at the last election when we could have come back with a majority, and this party can perhaps reflect on how long it took to react. Nobody knows how this election will turn out. I have simply taken a consistent position—as I have watched the carnage and the wreckage, and the ratcheting up of the rhetoric to “traitor” and “treason”—and said, “We should respect the referendum result, but we should leave with a deal.”

I do not know whether you and I will ever meet again in our respective positions, Mr Speaker. I simply want to say to you, as one man of average height—to echo my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois)—but of substantial girth: thank you for everything that you have done to stand up for the rights of this Chamber. Thank you as well to all my colleagues, who I look forward to seeing on the election beat, reasonably exchanging sensible and intelligent views on the best way forward—

**Sir Robert Syms** (Poole) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Vaizey:** I hope you do not mind if I take a small intervention, Mr Speaker.

**Sir Robert Syms:** It will be a small intervention, Mr Speaker. I do not wholly agree with my right hon. Friend, but this place would be poorer if he were not a Member of a future Parliament. I hope that he gets the Whip back and we can hear more brilliant speeches about science and all the other things that he has championed in this place.

**Mr Vaizey:** I am very grateful; my hon. Friend has been a wonderful colleague to me over many years. This place at its best is one of the best places to be—and at its worst, it is absolutely awful.

**Mr Speaker:** I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman’s very kind and gracious remarks, and I will not forget them.

I am afraid that to accommodate the remaining colleagues who are on the list, I will have to introduce a three-minute time limit with immediate effect—[*Interruption.*] Otherwise, people will not get in—I cannot help it, but there is injury time, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) knows.

5.16 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I will not be supporting a general election because I do not think that a general election will resolve Brexit. The clue is partly in the name: a “general” election is about general issues. It is impossible to extrapolate from the result what people think about a very specific issue—in this case, Brexit. If we want a specific answer on Brexit, we have to ask a specific question, and the best way of doing that is through a people’s vote. That is even more the case with an electoral system that is as undemocratic

and antiquated as ours, because first past the post regularly delivers majority Governments on a minority of votes.

A million people did not march through the streets of London a few weeks ago demanding a general election; they wanted a people's vote because they know that that is the best way—indeed, the only way—to get to the bottom of this crisis and resolve it. All that a general election will do, frankly, is put Nigel Farage and the Prime Minister back in their comfort zones, giving them a stage—political insiders dressed up as rebels, whose agenda, frankly, is chaos—so that division will thrive.

I want to take on the idea that this Parliament has run its course. The Prime Minister has won votes on both his Queen's Speech and the Second Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill. The only person who is blocking progress in this Parliament is the Prime Minister. The reason for that is very clear: he has an agenda that is all about a general election—about installing an even harder Vote Leave contingent of MPs in Parliament—but let us not allow him to get away with telling us as Parliament that somehow we have not been doing a good job of holding him to account. This is not a zombie Parliament; it is a Parliament that has got its head around parliamentary procedures in a way that any new Parliament will take months to do. It is precisely because we have been able to keep the Prime Minister in his box that he is not very happy with the fact that we are trying to continue on our way forward.

One of the reasons I do not want a general election right now is that the thing that should be front and centre of it—the climate emergency, which is what we should be debating in a general election—will be overshadowed by yet more fights about Brexit, which it will not resolve. We know that the next 18 months will be crucial in terms of whether we have a chance of getting off the collision course we are on with the climate catastrophe. The Committee on Climate Change said in its report to Parliament a few months ago that the next Parliament will be absolutely vital, so it is crucial that the next general election is about the climate crisis. This existential crisis is facing all of us and if we fritter the time away with more debates about Brexit, which they are not even going to resolve, we will be responsible for the greatest irresponsibility—that does not quite make sense, but you know what I mean. We will be responsible for the greatest betrayal of young people and their futures, because this is a massive wasted opportunity, and I cannot bear the fact that we are going to spend it talking about Brexit in a way that is not going to resolve it.

5.19 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): As I made clear earlier, there are issues relating to the franchise, conduct and security of any election that take place, but we do not have time to go into all those, so I will concentrate on the issue I have tabled two amendments on: votes at 16.

Votes at 16 could be done in a variety of ways without impediment, and I await the selection of amendments for the Committee stage. In my view, at the very least, 16 and 17-year-olds, and 18-year-olds who are obviously already on the register, should be able to vote. This step has been taken in Wales and Scotland. In my view, those who have the greatest stake in the future of our country—our young people—should be able to vote in

this important general election, as they should in referendums, local elections and other such matters. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friends the Members for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield), for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) and for Hove (Peter Kyle), who have pursued this issue strongly in the past.

**Tim Loughton** *rose*—

**Stephen Doughty:** I will not give way because of the time.

**Tim Loughton:** You will get extra time.

**Stephen Doughty:** I know, but I am conscious of other colleagues.

I pay tribute to all the organisations, particularly Members of the Youth Parliament, who have been making their voices heard and urging us to support the proposal and who want us to be able to debate this crucial amendment. Members of the Youth Parliament visited me in my own constituency a couple of weeks ago and reflected to me the issues that young people want discussed in this election. It is not just about Brexit, which I have spoken about many times—I am clear it will leave our country worse off, less safe and more unstable and I will continue to oppose it and to campaign for a people's vote; it is about all the other issues that young people in my constituency come to talk to me about, including mental health, climate change, public services, opportunities for young people, tackling antisocial behaviour, violence and knife crime, and all the other issues. Our 16 and 17-year-olds care just as much about the future of our country as all the rest of my constituents do, and I will continue to stand up for them and all my constituents, young and old, in any election, but we need to be clear that that younger generation must have the vote in this general election.

5.22 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My constituents and constituents across Scotland will have their say in a general election on the shambles they have seen unfolding over this Brexit farce. Scotland voted against Brexit—62%. Every single council area did so, but this Government and this Parliament ignored the Scottish Government's compromise and ignored the Scottish Parliament, where every single party except the Tories voted to avoid this situation. The SNP wants to stop Brexit. We want to see the Prime Minister's rotten deal go by the wayside.

More than that, since 2012, my constituency has been enduring the scandal of the universal credit roll-out to full service, which has brought misery to my constituents. The city used to have just one food bank; now there is one in every quarter of the city, thanks to the misery universal credit is causing. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) has raised the issue of the rape clause in universal credit. I have urged three Prime Ministers now to listen to the Motor Neurone Disease Association, Marie Curie, Macmillan, patients, doctors and clinicians, to get rid of the six-month rule in universal credit for the terminally ill and to allow implicit consent, yet it has been ignored at every single stage. They all deserve their say on the Government's failings. What have the Government got to fear from votes at 16? What do they have to fear from 16-year-olds?



[Drew Hendry]

They are about to inherit the farce that this place is laying down for them. EU nationals are also vital. In the highlands, they are vital for care, the NHS, tourism, hospitality and farming. These are our friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they should have the vote, as should 16 and 17-year-olds. Scotland does not want a Tory Government, and it especially does not want this Tory Government, who have failed my constituency and are failing Scotland. It cannot afford to be ignored any more.

A mandate exists for a referendum on independence for Scotland. We need to be in a position to give all our people in Scotland hope for the future and a choice between Boris island—this broken spectacle of Westminster little Britain under Brexit—and an independent Scotland taking its own seat at the heart of Europe.

5.24 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I do not think that I will take my three minutes, Mr Speaker.

I do not fear an election, because I know the people in Motherwell and Wishaw well. I have been talking to them over the last few months, and the spirit of those people says that they are looking for independence. They want out of this cracked and broken Union. They want rid of this reckless Tory Government. They want the feckless Labour Opposition to stand up and fight against Tory austerity, Tory Brexit and the Tory mess that they have turned Scotland and the UK into over the last umpteen years.

Let us have an election. Let us find out what Scotland really wants. I know, but the rest of the UK should know. Scotland wants and needs independence, and independence soon.

5.25 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): A Government under siege from its own side, ignoring the advice of its more thoughtful friends and fearful of a mythical force of ultra-patriots, prepared to do irreparable damage to the UK's international relations by charging ahead with a reckless and ill-considered Brexit, is now desperate for an election to turn its huge opinion poll lead into a parliamentary majority.

So much for the May Government and the election of 2017. That Government impaled itself upon its own hubris—and who thought that history would repeat itself so quickly? The thinking of this Government has appeared to be, “We will burn that bridge when we come to it”, and the blame has always been someone else's. A Prime Minister who bemoans his lack of control of Parliament while disposing of great chunks of his parliamentary party, and who struggles to win any vote in the Chamber, betrays a lack of leadership, a lack of control and a lack of statecraft. His premiership is defined now, and no election can save it. This is a make-do-and-mend, hand-me-down Government that will limp forlornly from here to its end and pass unlamented into history. The only question left is how much damage it will do as it dies.

An election now may not, of course, solve anything for the UK. It may return another deadlocked Parliament. There may be a small majority for one party or another, but there may well still be a deadlock in this strange malaise that has so paralysed the English body politic.

You lot have no escape, sadly for the people whom you represent, but Scotland has. This election will demonstrate how the nations of the UK are diverging, and how Scotland is charting a different path. A nation that regards the EU as being generally a force for good, a nation that sees other nations as possible allies rather than probable enemies, a nation that looks outwards instead of up its own fundament, Scotland sits more and more uncomfortably with this place.

This election, when it comes, will lay the foundation for the independence that will follow. Scotland will walk a different path, and we will forge a different future. I pity the people of England who are so poorly served by their politicians, but England's people have overthrown broken systems in the past, and they can do so again. They can cast down the petty tribunes who have sat here for so long squabbling over trifles. This should be the last election to a UK Parliament: Scotland will be independent before another is due. We will have no need to die in a ditch; we will just get independence done without the buffoonery. No one can arrest the progress of a nation or shout down its ambition. This is the sunderance of the UK and the end of the song, and an auld song once ended in Scotland will start again.

Brexit has been the downfall of two Tory Prime Ministers and the decency of the Tory party, it has ripped apart the Labour party, and it has destroyed whatever credibility this Parliament once had.

5.28 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I am in favour of a general election: a general election on 7 May, when the sun is shining, when 16-year-olds are included, and when we can get over Brexit by having a referendum—a referendum on the deal. The Brexiters have been arguing for three years about what the deal should be, and now that we have a deal, we should put it to the people. Why are we not putting it to the people? Because the Prime Minister knows that people will not agree with it. There is a majority in the country in favour of remain, but he knows that he may get a majority of MPs, or a small minority of MPs if the remain vote splits. That is not democracy and, with his Brexit, and any Brexit, we will be poorer, weaker, more divided and isolated.

I very much regret that we are hurtling in this direction, thanks to the Liberal Democrats giving up the public vote and to the SNP; basically there is an unstoppable momentum towards an election. We will probably have an election now. The Labour party will be talking about a better Britain, a fairer Britain, a greener Britain, addressing climate change and not just Brexit, fundamentally giving that vote back to the people, so we are the party of democracy. The Tories will give Brexit at any cost. The Liberals will basically say “Remain, whatever you think.” We will provide democracy, a better Britain and the fourth Prime Minister in four years with Jeremy Corbyn.

5.30 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): This Government are in complete disarray. After yesterday's vote, we now have a Prime Minister who has suffered 10 embarrassing defeats in this House and two historic court rulings against him. He has shown his utter incompetence as Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister came to office promising to deliver Brexit by 31 October, accompanied with the usual sensationalist language about dying in a ditch that we have come to expect from him. It has been clear for some time that this was never a realistic proposition. Sadly, rather than accepting the reality, fronting up and admitting to making an irresponsible pledge, he chose simply to break his promise, costing the taxpayer over £100 million in advertising, not to mention the production and destruction of 10,000 commemorative 50p coins in the process—things are literally in meltdown.

To this day, the Prime Minister continues to try to deflect the blame for breaking his word on to anyone he can think of. I would call it the politics of the schoolyard but frankly at Parkview School we were better behaved than this, and I believe the vast majority of our children and young people would behave more honourably in similar circumstances.

It is clear that a general election is needed because this Government have lost the trust of our country, because we know the damage a no-deal Brexit will do to jobs and industries all across this country, and we cannot trust the Prime Minister to be true to his word. We have consistently said that we will support a general election once no deal is absolutely off the table, and when the date for the election can be fixed in law. We have now reached that point.

**Mr Seely:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Cat Smith:** I will not give way; time is very limited.

The purpose of a general election is to let the people decide the future of our country. It therefore must be conducted in a way that is accessible to as many people as possible. We will therefore be supporting amendments that achieve this.

Students should not be disenfranchised by an election date which will not allow them to vote at their term-time address. This is the address where they live for the majority of the year and where they rightly should be able to vote. That is why our preference is for an election on 9 December.

But we can do better than this. Let us seize this historic opportunity to extend the franchise to some of those most likely to be affected by the outcomes of the general election: 16 and 17-year-olds and EU nationals, who we already give votes to for all other elections anyway. We are now in the inconsistent and unsustainable position where 16 and 17-year-olds living in Wales and Scotland can vote in local elections, but their English and Northern Irish counterparts cannot. It is also fundamentally wrong that many millions of EU citizens who live in this country, have their families in this country and contribute to our country and are deeply affected by the developments in this Parliament are currently denied a vote in Westminster elections, and in the most important general election for a generation. We have accepted the argument that they are affected by the decisions taken at local government elections, which is why we give them the vote in those elections, and there is no sensible reason why they should be denied this right in general elections.

The next general election will be a defining moment for our country, as we have suffered almost a decade of relentless Tory cuts that have pushed our public services into crisis: the NHS is in crisis, local schools are starved of funding and adult social care is on its knees. We need change.

Labour will put forward the most radical, hopeful, people-focused programme in modern times: a once-in-a-generation chance to rebuild and transform our country. We will put control of Brexit back in the hands of the people, with a real choice between a sensible leave deal or remain. Labour is the only party that can and will let the people decide on Brexit. We will tackle the climate emergency with a green new deal, bringing net zero emissions targets forward and providing renewable industries with the investment and support they need, including banning fracking in the UK once and for all. It is time for change. Labour will end austerity and build an economy that works for all, with a real living wage, proper collective bargaining and four new bank holidays. I look forward to making these positive arguments to the country in the weeks ahead.

5.35 pm

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden):** I should like to begin by paying tribute to all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to today's debate and spoken with genuine sincerity and passion. There have been some excellent contributions, and a wide range of issues have been raised. Particularly, I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) and my hon. Friends the Members for Stone (Sir William Cash) and for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson). All those contributions made the same point: people want to get Brexit done. They want to move on, and the only way we can do that is to ensure that we have a general election mandate to ensure that that happens. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey)—sadly, he is not in his place—who gave a heartfelt and excellent speech paying tribute to this House.

I hope hon. Members appreciate that there will be further opportunities for discussion during the course of the Bill, particularly in the Committee stage that follows, so if they will forgive me, I will not go into detail on some of the points that I think will be addressed at that stage. What we really are facing today is the simplest possible Bill. It is a straightforward piece of legislation to allow a general election on 12 December so that we can elect a new Parliament, get Brexit done and allow this country to finally move on. Let me be clear: the Government would rather be getting on with a smooth and orderly Brexit now.

**Lady Hermon:** I presume that as part of the Prime Minister's general election campaign, he will make a grand tour of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, so could the Minister just explain what the Prime Minister will say to the Unionist community there and how he will reassure them that their future is safe in his hands? I can assure the Minister that, at the present time, there are many in the Unionist community who do not feel confident that their future is safe in the Prime Minister's hands.

**Oliver Dowden:** I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution. I do not know exactly where the Prime Minister will go on his election tour, but I am sure he will go to Northern Ireland. He will take the message to Northern Ireland that the deal that he has negotiated will allow the entire United Kingdom to leave the customs union as one and that that deal be based on a mechanism of consent.

[*Oliver Dowden*]

The challenge that we have in getting such a deal through this House is that whenever Parliament has had the opportunity to get Brexit done, it has not taken it, even though 80% of us in this House stood on a mandate to honour the referendum result. Let us look at the record. Parliament voted to extend and delay in March, and to extend and delay in April. Through the Benn Act, Parliament forced the Prime Minister to extend beyond 31 October. Most recently, it voted against a timetable that would have allowed us to leave in an orderly manner, on time on 31 October, as we have promised. So I really fear that if Parliament has the choice of another delay or an extension beyond 31 January, it will surely once again take the opportunity to delay and to extend. The risk that we face is that, as we tick through to 2020, we once again find ourselves back in this Chamber discussing Brexit more and more, and that is completely contrary to what the public want. The public want us to get on with it and get Brexit done.

**Jess Phillips:** I wonder whether the Minister can tell me how we will stop the paralysis if what is returned to the House is exactly what we have now.

**Oliver Dowden:** I heard the hon. Lady make that point repeatedly throughout the debate. The very simple answer is that the people should vote Conservative and vote for a party that will get the deal through and ensure that we finally leave the European Union, as people want us to do.

**Jess Phillips:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Oliver Dowden:** I think that I have dealt with the hon. Lady's point.

Thanks to the Prime Minister's efforts, we have a deal that we will be putting to the British people at the general election, and we will then seek to deliver the deal through the House on the back of a stable and sustainable parliamentary majority that will finally allow us to leave the European Union, as most of us have promised to achieve.

**Jim McMahon:** Now that the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill has had its Second Reading, we should be using this time to take it to the next stage instead of calling an election.

**Oliver Dowden:** The problem with the argument advanced by the hon. Gentleman is that when we had the opportunity to get Brexit done and to get it done by 31 October, he and Opposition Members chose to vote against the programme motion that would have enabled that. The challenge facing us is that every time this House has had the opportunity to deliver on Brexit, it instead chooses further delay.

The deal that the Prime Minister has reached has confounded critics in this House and elsewhere. People said that we would never be able to reopen the withdrawal agreement, but we reopened it. He has nailed the naysayers who said that the EU would never let go of the Northern Ireland backstop by getting rid of the backstop. When people said that we could not ensure that the whole United Kingdom could leave as a single customs territory,

he refused to accept it. This Government have made sure that the UK can leave the customs union as one entire United Kingdom that is free to chart its own course.

The Government's position for some time has been that if Parliament cannot back the Prime Minister's deal, we must surely have a general election. Up until today, however, that has not been the position of the Labour party. We have had the extraordinary spectacle of a Leader of the Opposition who spends every day castigating the Government's failures—indeed, his party busily puts out leaflets demanding a general election—but when that golden moment arrives finally to have that general election, what happens? The Leader of the Opposition has repeatedly spurned it. I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition has finally faced up to the inevitable, ensuring that we will make some progress with this Bill. I am confident that we can make that progress, and that we can get on and have that general election.

When the general election happens, we will have two contrasting visions for 2020. The choice in front of the British people is clear. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has a deal that ensures that we deliver on the promises we made in the 2017 manifesto. We can finally deliver on Brexit and get the job done. Once we have got the job done, we can finally turn to the priorities that matter to the British people. The great one nation agenda being advanced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will allow us to deliver for our hospitals and for our schools.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Many excellent speeches species were curtailed at three minutes this evening. Why is this awful, repetitious performance being allowed to go on for so long?

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister has two and a half minutes in which to develop his peroration, but the hon. Gentleman has registered his disapproval.

**Oliver Dowden:** Thank you for that opportunity, Mr Speaker, but I think I will be able to do so in slightly shorter order, so I hope that I can bring pleasure to the hon. Gentleman.

In the election, we will deliver on a one nation agenda: delivering for our schools and our hospitals, safer communities, more police, massive investment in our infrastructure, keeping our streets safe and tackling the cost of living. The alternative will be the nightmare advanced by the Leader of the Opposition, who wants to make 2020 the year of two referendums: one on Brexit and another on Scottish independence—more energy-sapping, mind-numbing stagnation and more pointless delay, so I urge right hon. and hon. Members to back this Bill and back the general election. Let the Government get Brexit done and allow the country to move on.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Committee of the whole House (Order, this day).*

**Mr Speaker:** Under the Order of the House of today, we shall now—for which I may have to substitute “shortly”—move to a Committee of the whole House.



I say this as much for the benefit of people outside the elected Chamber as for anybody else. I have collected the voices, as the Speaker is required to do, and it is clear that there is an overwhelming majority in support of Second Reading. From Second Reading, we proceed to Committee. When the House sits in Committee, the Speaker does not occupy the Chair. That responsibility is taken by A. N. Other, who will be wending his or her way to the Chamber as I speak. I say with some confidence that another Chair will arrive ere long to take up his or her important duties.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I am deeply grateful to the hon. Lady, who may be indulged at slightly greater length than would otherwise be the case.

**Alison McGovern:** This has been a fractious, challenging, controversial and difficult debate at times. Do you agree, Mr Speaker, that in the context of this debate, it is extraordinarily important that all Members agree that their behaviour, whether in this House or in the potential general election to come, should be exemplary, whatever others do?

**Mr Speaker:** I agree. On the matter of exemplary behaviour, we can all learn from the hon. Lady. I know she did not seek that tribute, but I proffer it gratis in any case, because it has the advantage of being justified.

## Early Parliamentary General Election Bill

*Considered in Committee (Order, this day)*

[SIR LINDSAY HOYLE *in the Chair*]

### Clause 1

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION

5.47 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 2, page 1, line 2, leave out “12” and insert “9”.

*This amendment would change the date of the proposed general election to Monday 9 December.*

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government amendment 14.

Clause stand part.

Clause 2 stand part.

Amendment 3, title, line 1, leave out “12” and insert “9”.

*This is a consequential amendment.*

**Cat Smith:** The Prime Minister came to office promising to deliver Brexit by 31 October, and he has failed. He has shown his utter incompetence, and he simply cannot be trusted. We have consistently said that we will support a general election once a no deal is absolutely off the table and when a date can be fixed in law. After lengthy denial by the Prime Minister, we have now reached that point, which is why the time is right for a Labour Government and real change.

The purpose of any general election is to allow the largest possible number of people to participate and have their say on the future of the country. Up to 9.5 million people in Great Britain are not correctly registered to vote. Young people are less likely to be registered, with almost a third of people aged 18 to 34 missing from the electoral roll. This means their views and interests are being under-represented.

The Government know they are less likely to do well in elections when lots of people are registered to vote, which is why they have done nothing to tackle this issue. The Prime Minister even tried to fix the date of the general election to make it harder for students to take part. Students must not be disfranchised by an election date that will not allow them to vote at their term-time address—the address at which they live for the majority of the year, and at which they rightly should be able to vote. Labour’s amendment to fix the date of the general election for 9 December is the best possible way of ensuring the next election is accessible.

We can do better than that, which is why we would have supported, had they been selected, the amendments to expand the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds and to EU citizens with settled status. We recognise their contributions to our society, and they should have a right to vote on their future as well.

Whatever date the House decides the election will be held on, the Labour party is ready to get rid of this Tory Government, who have pushed our public services into crisis. We are ready to put forward our vision for a

[Cat Smith]

different kind of country: a country where people get the care they need, from a properly funded NHS; a country where everyone, regardless of their family background, gets the education they need to do well in life; a country where regions that have been held back get the investment they need and a chance to rebuild after a decade of neglect; a country where homelessness is a thing of the past, and everyone can access safe and affordable housing; and a country that is led by a Prime Minister that puts the control of Brexit back in the hands of people in a new referendum, with a real choice between a leave deal and remain.

Labour is the only party that can, and will, let the people decide on Brexit. This is a once-in-a-generation chance to rebuild and transform our country, which is why I urge this House to support this amendment, to ensure that this election is as accessible as possible.

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden):** It is a pleasure to speak in Committee on this crucial Bill. As I said in my closing remarks on Second Reading, this is a short, sensible Bill, setting out the date of the next general election. The Bill provides transparency on the date of an election and ensures that it can be conducted in a timely way so that Parliament can meet in good time ahead of the 31 January deadline.

Clause 1 provides for a parliamentary general election to be held on 12 December 2019. I will shortly set out why that is the preferred date and why the Government will resist the Opposition amendment.

Clause 2 deals with the Bill's short title and provides that the Bill will come

“into force on the day it is passed.”

I wish briefly to touch on the subsections in clause 1, to provide reassurance to Members; these are minor, technical points. Subsection (3)(a) removes the requirement for Ministers to review the welfare cap in the current Parliament. Subsection 3(b) ensures that the reporting requirement placed on Ministers does not need to be completed in this Parliament. Both measures ensure that these requirements will align with the new parliamentary Session, following the election.

On the principal amendment standing in the name of the Opposition, we have considered the date of the poll and I wish to set out why 12 December is the best date, for two reasons. First, it gives Parliament enough time to progress essential business—specifically, the Northern Ireland Budget Bill, which is necessary to access the funding that the Northern Ireland civil service needs after 31 October. If that Bill does not receive Royal Assent, the delivery of public services and proper governance in Northern Ireland would be put at risk.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** But would that issue not be resolved by a sitting this Friday?

**Oliver Dowden:** It would be helpful for this House to consider that Bill in good order, as it is an important measure to ensure that nurses, teachers and police officers in Northern Ireland get paid. If we do not pass that legislation, there is a real danger that such people will not get paid. I urge hon. Members to think carefully

about moving the date. The issue at hand is whether to move the date to 9 December, which would preclude our passing that Bill.

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con):** Did my hon. Friend note that the Opposition spokesperson's principal reason for opting for 9 December and not 12 December was that they felt that students would somehow miss out? Students are perfectly able to apply for a postal vote or a proxy vote, and three days will make absolutely no difference to that process.

**Oliver Dowden:** Yes, my hon. Friend and neighbour, who represents St Albans, raises an important point: there is no substance to the point about students being disfranchised. That is because, first, 70% of students choose to vote at their home address, so this would not apply to them; and, secondly, because all the 40 largest universities will be sitting on 12 December. So I do not believe there is any danger of disfranchising.

**Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con):** I remember the leader of the Scottish National party saying last Thursday that we could not have an election on 12 December because it would be cold, dark and wet. Has my hon. Friend been in touch with the Met Office to find out how much warmer and how much lighter it will be three days earlier on 9 December?

**Oliver Dowden:** I stand ready to be corrected, but I did look that up. I believe that having the election three days earlier would allow one whole minute of extra daylight.

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** It does not matter in the Humber if it is 9 or 12 December—I can guarantee it will be a bit windy and probably a bit damp. More importantly, will the Minister dismiss the Opposition's amendment for what it is—a shameful attempt to divide? That is what it is about. The Opposition are trying to build resentment in a group of the electorate that they think are susceptible to their message. It is disgraceful and shameful to try to separate students from the rest of the population, when everyone knows that people can vote by post and by proxy in every election. The Opposition will divide, divide, divide throughout the election campaign, because that is what they do.

**Oliver Dowden:** As ever, my hon. Friend is entirely correct. There will be no impact on the enfranchisement of students. All students will have the opportunity to vote. Most vote at home. Most universities will still be sitting.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Oliver Dowden:** If hon. Members will allow me to elucidate on this point, it may satisfy them. The other reason to have an election on 12 December is that it is a Thursday. By convention, Thursday is the day on which we have such elections in this country. There does not seem to be a strong argument to the contrary to move it those few days earlier.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I point out to the Minister that there is no convention to have elections every two years, but we seem to be content to do that.

I want to take the Minister back to his important points on the Northern Ireland Budget Bill. We all want to see people get paid—we do not want a Republican-style shutdown of government in Northern Ireland—so will he answer the question I asked? Could we not resolve this dispute by sitting this Friday?

**Oliver Dowden:** I again make three points to the hon. Gentleman. First, Thursday is the usual date for such an election. Why change it? I have yet to hear an argument advanced to change it—the hon. Gentleman is essentially making a case to change it from Thursday to Monday. Secondly, we need to have time properly to consider the Northern Ireland Budget Bill. Thirdly, if hon. Members wish to move the election to the earlier date, they need to come up with a compelling reason to do so, other than daylight, which I have yet to hear.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Will the Minister give way?

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

**Oliver Dowden:** I think I have dealt with this point.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. We cannot have everybody on their feet at the same time. It is for the Minister to give way.

**Oliver Dowden:** I will make some progress and then I will consider giving way.

There are principled reasons why we wish to have proper scrutiny of legislation for the Northern Ireland budget. It is essential for teachers, doctors and nurses in Northern Ireland to be paid.

There is a convention that elections are held on Thursday. Once again, the Opposition are trying to move the goalposts. Initially, the argument was that they did not want a general election on 12 December because they were concerned that the Government would somehow seek to ram through the Bill giving effect to the Prime Minister's deal. Yesterday, at the Dispatch Box, the Prime Minister give an assurance on that. Now, they seek to contrive another reason artificially to create divisions in this House over moving the date by three days.

We have had three years to consider this matter. Will three days really make that much difference? That is in tune with a wider point. The public are getting more and more frustrated at this House endlessly coming up with procedural reasons that prevent us from getting on and doing the thing we want to do, as set out in this Bill—to have a general election to allow us to resolve the issue. We will resist the Opposition amendment to move the date of the general election.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): This is just a technical question. If the general election is on 12 December, when will the new Parliament sit and when will we have a Queen's Speech? When this was last done in 1923-24, with the general election on 6 December, the Queen's Speech was not until 15 January, which would make it difficult to get any serious business done by the end of January.

**Oliver Dowden:** I hope I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. The reason the Government wish to have a general election is to ensure that we have a sustainable majority

to pass the Bill that implements the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement. Therefore, the impetus on us is to get that done as quickly as possible. I do not think that he will find delays from those of us on the Government Benches.

6 pm

I wish briefly to touch on amendment 14 that stands in my name. The Scottish National party has raised a concern that the amendment seeks to address. Its concern was to ensure that the registration deadline in Scotland for a 12 December election was the same as for the rest of the country. The Government support the intention of the SNP amendment in relation to this election to ensure that we have an across-UK approach to the registration deadline. This will allow a comprehensive UK-wide communication campaign by the Electoral Commission to advertise a deadline and to ensure that those who want to register are able to do so in a timely manner. The Government's amendment would achieve the consistency in registration deadlines that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and his party desired without any longer term, unintended consequences.

**Neil Gray:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I think that it is clear that the contentious area in this part of the discussion is about whether the election is on 9 or 12 December. No. 10 had previously suggested that it is willing to pull the Bill if the amendments regarding EU nationals and 16 and 17-year-olds are selected and passed, so my question to the Minister is this: are the Government willing to die in a ditch over whether the election is on 9 or 12 December? What is their intention if this amendment passes?

**Oliver Dowden:** I believe that I have set out two sensible and compelling reasons to have the date on 12 December, and I have yet to hear to the contrary an argument about why we need to move it by three days. I really think that we have dealt with this point. I know other hon. Members wish to speak, so if the Committee will forgive me I will conclude my points on amendment 14, which stands in my name.

The Government's amendment removes St Andrew's day 2019 only from the operation of regulation 29(4) and 8(3) of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations. This both restricts the change to this election only and leaves the subsequent register intact. The effect of the amendment is to remove the bank holiday from the calculation of time for registering for the voter deadline. It would instead be classed as a normal working day, but for this election only. We feel that the amendment, as we have drafted it, will, I hope, address SNP concerns, but will limit any unintended consequences of amending the relevant provision of the regulations.

In summary, we are trying to achieve straightforward, simple legislation that ensures that we can have a general election in short order. I urge all hon. Members to resist the temptation to complicate and amend this to allow us to have the general election on 12 December so that we can get a sustainable majority to deliver the Prime Minister's deal and finally move on.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I want to make some comments generally on the Bill as a whole and then to discuss the individual amendments that have been selected.



[Tommy Sheppard]

I must start by saying that, clearly, it is not ideal for anyone to have an election a couple of weeks before Christmas: the nights are fair drawing in, it will be cold and dark, and many of the people in this country will, quite understandably, be looking forward to Christmas and spending time with their family and relatives. So it is hardly an ideal time, but from our perspective in the SNP, we think that this is a necessary requirement now, because we have reached a situation of impasse in this Parliament where it is incapable of resolving probably the biggest political issue that has divided the United Kingdom in my lifetime. There are competing views as to what the end point of the Brexit process should be, and parliamentary democracy in this country, it seems to me, has now reached a point of stasis where it is incapable of adjudicating between those outcomes. It is therefore right and proper that we should go back to the electorate and allow them to reflect on what can happen.

This will very much be the Brexit election. I am pleased that we have moved the Government from their position a few weeks ago, when they did not actually want a Brexit election in which the people would be allowed to cast their views about different outcomes. They wanted to get Brexit done and go to the electorate afterwards. That would have been a travesty because it would have said to the people, “We’re going to have a general election. Brexit will be one of the big topics of conversation, but there is really no point in you expressing a view, because we’re going to conclude the matter before the first ballot is cast.” That would have been a ridiculous and anti-democratic situation. I am glad that we have moved the Prime Minister and the Government away from that approach, even if it does mean that the Prime Minister might be looking for a ditch on Thursday.

Many people have lamented the fact that Parliament has not resolved this matter, three and a half years on. In my view, that is simply because it is without any reasonable resolution. The promise of Brexit has turned out to be a lie. In 2016, people were told that they could vote to leave the European Union and would be better off as a result. That is not true, and hardly anyone in this Chamber would now argue that it was. In fact, it is a matter of how bad the different Brexit options are. That is why, quite understandably, there is now a large body of opinion in this country for whom the conclusion of this process should be to say, “That’s it. It has gone far enough. Stop it now; we want to get off.” An election will allow that view to come to the fore.

The election will also allow the Prime Minister to put his deal before the electorate. And hon. Members should be under no illusions—the Prime Minister has taken an extremely flawed deal by his predecessor and made it immeasurably worse. This series of proposals that the Prime Minister has agreed with the European Union will impoverish people in this country, very much remove the standing of the United Kingdom in the eyes of the world and leave it a much worse place. I do not want that for the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and I certainly do not want that outcome for the people of Scotland. That is why it is right and proper that the Prime Minister should put his case before the electorate. I look forward to him being challenged—not just by Opposition parties, but by Nigel

Farage so that we can see whether the deal he has come up with satisfies the real hard-right Brexiteers, for whom nothing will sate their appetite.

As many people have remarked, the situation in Scotland is quite different; 62% of the people of Scotland did not vote for this mess. Had teenage voters and most people in Scotland born elsewhere in the European Union been allowed to take part in that decision, the figure would have been far higher still, as it would if the question were asked again today. It is my responsibility to represent the people who elected me.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** On the issue of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds, I believe that all men and women are born equal and that everybody in this place should be equal. Amendment 10, which fortunately was not selected today, would have given 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland and Wales the vote, but—

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The hon. Lady is out of order; amendment 10 is not debatable.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I am confused as to why that particular intervention should have been made at this point in my speech, but I will mention the issue when I come to consider the amendments before us.

I think it was the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) who said that the outcome of an election could be another hung Parliament, without a majority one way or the other. That, of course, is true. But an election will allow us all the opportunity to refresh a mandate. I for one believe that there are far too many people in this Parliament who are imprisoned by an out-of-date mandate from 2017 that is against what they would do now, having considered the matter. It will give colleagues, particularly those in Her Majesty’s Opposition in seats where a majority voted to leave the European Union, the opportunity to go there and argue, if they so wish, for a rethink and for this matter to be put back to the public before any final decision is taken. That mandate was not present in this Parliament; it could be present in a new Parliament. That is another reason why an election would be welcome.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** It is a fact that in the 2016 referendum electoral offences were committed by Vote Leave—the campaign that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and their chief adviser were actually involved in. Is not this general election an opportunity to highlight their role and for a new Government to investigate that properly—something that has not been done under this Government?

**Tommy Sheppard:** Indeed, there would be the opportunity to do that. Those transgressions should be investigated and they do undermine the result of the 2016 referendum. That is yet another reason why the electorate should be allowed to look at this matter again.

I want to be very clear that with regard to mandates in Scotland, we will be fighting this general election with three objectives: first, to stop Brexit, not to rubber stamp it; secondly, to get rid of the most right-wing Tory Government in my lifetime; and thirdly, to demand that people in Scotland have the right to choose an alternative future—an alternative path for doing things—

and should not be dragged along against their will. We will put that case to the people in Scotland, and if we win that mandate and win that election, then I demand that other people in this Chamber respect that decision and do not stand in the way of the people of Scotland when they next seek the opportunity to determine their own method of governance.

Let me turn, in closing, to the amendments. I will not discuss amendments that have not been selected, but I simply say that it is a matter of regret that, at this time of political crisis when we are discussing how to get out of it, we are not able to seize the opportunity to extend our franchise and allow two very important groups of people in our community who have a vested interest in the outcome of this decision—more than we do—the opportunity to participate.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): On voting age, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman appreciates—I am sure he does—that those who were 17-year-olds in 2016 were 18-year-olds and of voting age in 2017, when 56% of voters in Scotland voted for either the Conservative party or Labour, both of which, if only at the time in the case of Labour, were committed to delivering Brexit.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I am unclear that that is an argument against 16 and 17-year-olds being able to vote in this election or, indeed, in any subsequent election.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I entirely concur with the hon. Gentleman's point; indeed, I made it more widely on Second Reading. It is a shame that we are not doing this—although obviously we are not able to discuss amendments that have not been selected.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. I think there is actually a broad level of agreement among Members across the House, including the odd one over on the Conservative Benches as well, that the time has surely come to extend the franchise. I hope we do not end up in a situation where we have a general election in December and it will be another five years before we can even consider this possible enfranchisement. It would therefore have been a timely opportunity to seize the issue, but we have chosen not to do so.

On the amendments that have been selected, we are very much in favour of the one suggesting that the election should move to 9 December, and we shall vote for it tonight. The Government said that they wanted an election as soon as possible, so why would they not wish to have it three days earlier than the date—

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con) *rose*—

**Tommy Sheppard:** I think I have taken enough interventions, in fairness—I need to conclude.

**Sir Hugo Swire** *rose*—

**Tommy Sheppard:** No, thank you. [*Interruption.*] No, thank you. Which part of “no” don't you understand?

A 9 December election brings a number of benefits. It enables more of the electorate to participate and it puts an extra little bit of distance between the election and Christmas. Furthermore, it does not inconvenience our ability to conclude our business in this Parliament in any way. We could get our business finished and have

Dissolution at the end of this week, so it is entirely doable. I do not understand why the Government, who have been so determined that there must be an election as soon as possible, are so resistant to doing it three days earlier. Let us do it as soon as possible, in order to get this lot out as soon as possible.

6.15 pm

Finally, and uncharacteristically, I would like to thank the Government for their technical amendment, which simply eradicates the disadvantage that there would be in the electoral registration process in Scotland, occasioned by the fact that we have a bank holiday on 30 November for St Andrew's day. I hope that the Committee will pass the amendment and put us all on a level playing field. With that, I shall conclude my remarks and look forward to the general election to come.

**Sir Hugo Swire:** On the last point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), I should declare an interest: St Andrew's day will also be the day of my 60th birthday.

By 30 November, I shall no longer be a Member of Parliament, because I am not standing at the forthcoming election. I have been here since 2001, and I have to say that the last few years have not been Parliament at its best. It would be difficult to find a rare statement made by any one of us over the past two years. It has been like groundhog day every day, and the public are getting extremely fed up with our behaviour. In fact, I have never known such a disconnect between the body politic and the public, and I believe that any device or attempt to frustrate our having a general election now will be viewed extremely badly by the public, who, as I say, are extremely fed up with our behaviour.

We all understand why the Scottish nationalist party wants to have an election—because it knows that the court case starting in January will lay bare the divisions between those who support Alex Salmond and those who support Nicola Sturgeon. SNP Members know that if the election is delayed until next year, they will suffer at the polls. It is strange for a party that prides itself on looking after one of the devolved parts of the United Kingdom to play party politics with Northern Ireland. [*Interruption.*] The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) laughs in rather a tinny way.

**David Linden:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Hugo Swire:** No, I will not give way. As a former Minister of State for Northern Ireland, which I do not believe the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) is, I care passionately about Northern Ireland, and I am concerned about some aspects of how the proposed legislation affects Northern Ireland. That said, it is my understanding that if the date of the election is brought forward, that will prevent much of the legislation we need to empower the civil service in Northern Ireland to do their job. Why are the Scottish Nats prepared to play politics, and to what end, with the people of Northern Ireland if they care about Northern Ireland, or perhaps they wish to cast them to one side?

I am extremely glad and relieved that the wrecking amendments have not been selected, such as the one giving EU nationals the right to vote in British elections.

[*Sir Hugo Swire*]

I ask again: where can British citizens vote in national elections in the EU? The answer is nowhere. In terms of the sudden discovery that votes should be given to 16-year-olds as a matter of course, everybody realises that that cannot be done in the timetable available; it is another wrecking amendment.

The British people are watching our deliberations this evening. They want an election. They understand that the date for the election is partially informed by the desire to have good governance and good government for the people of Northern Ireland. It is worth remembering that the institutions are not up and running there. It would be foolhardy to bring the election forward by a matter of days and frustrate that, and therefore amendment 2 should be resisted.

**Andrew Percy:** My intervention was somewhat long, so I thought I would make a speech to make a small contribution to this debate.

I absolutely welcome the fact that we are going to have a general election. It is a sadness, in a way, that this Parliament has not been able to run its full term, particularly given that the last one also ran for only two years. This Parliament has not been able to run its full term because, very sadly, people in this place did not do what they said they were going to do in the 2017 election, which was to honour the referendum result.

We have heard some of that in some of the speeches this afternoon. What has gone on since that election in 2017, in which the overwhelming majority of us were re-elected to deliver Brexit? I accept that the SNP Members had a different position, and they have consistently followed the line they took in the general election, but that is not the case for most of the rest of us. What has happened is that we have seen the belittling of the referendum result and talking down to the people who dared to vote to leave the European Union.

We have heard some of that again today. Indeed, the contribution of the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), did the same, implying that Brexiteers and people who voted leave did not really know what they were voting for.

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

**Andrew Percy:** No, I am in the middle of this point.

**Tommy Sheppard** *rose*—

**Andrew Percy:** If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment to let me finish my point, I will then give way to him.

We have seen consistently throughout that people who did not vote for Brexit and are on the other side of the debate consistently tell Brexit voters what it is that we voted for, and they think they have the right to interpret what—

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. No, it is not a debate about Brexit; it is debate about the clauses and amendments. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is trying to widen the debate from where we are. We are on the clauses and amendments. Has the hon. Gentleman now finished?

**Andrew Percy:** No.

**The Chairman:** Right, but let us stick to where we are.

**Andrew Percy:** I am responding to a speech made in the Chamber, Sir Lindsay, and directly to a point that was made.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because I just want to clarify this on the record. At no time has any of us ever said that people did not know what they were voting for in the Brexit referendum in 2016. What we do say is that they were wilfully lied to in that campaign.

**Andrew Percy:** That is exactly the point. It is saying that the people who voted remain knew full well what they were doing, but Brexit voters were misled, they were a bit daft, they were lied to and, uniquely, they could not see through it.

**Patricia Gibson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andrew Percy:** No, I will not give way to the hon. Lady.

Some want to talk about promises made in a referendum campaign about whether people would be poorer or richer afterwards, but I am afraid we will take no lectures from the SNP on this matter.

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): We hear what it believes to be the voice of Scotland, but the SNP is the voice of some of Scotland. What SNP Members do not often say is that more people voted in Scotland to leave the European Union in 2016 than voted for the SNP at the general election in 2017—and that is a fact. A lot of people in Scotland voted to leave the European Union.

**Andrew Percy:** Indeed, that is absolutely true, but, as I have said, in fairness to SNP Members, their position on wanting to cancel Brexit is at least a consistent one, and one on which they stood in the 2017 general election.

We also heard this in the intervention by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), who again suggested that there was some sort of fiddling in favour of leave. This is why this Parliament is so broken, and why this Parliament is—

**Ian C. Lucas** *rose*—

**Andrew Percy:** No, I am not giving way because I have not finished my point. All I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that, after the 2015 election, his party was fined for election expense failings—I think over the Ed stone, as it was called—and Momentum received the biggest fine that any political group has received in the UK. I do not question the hon. Gentleman's mandate from either the 2015 election or from 2017 because his party was responsible in one election for technical breaches when it came to expenses law, or, in the case of the 2017 election, because one of the groups within his party—

**Ian C. Lucas** *rose*—

**Andrew Percy:** I will now give way to the hon. Gentleman.



**Ian C. Lucas:** We are talking not about technical breaches, but about collusion to break electoral spending limits: collusion in which the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Dominic Cummings were involved. That is important. I voted for article 50 and I was misled by a campaign that I found out about after I had voted. I take that seriously. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not. I believe in keeping the law.

**Andrew Percy:** I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has done nothing to deliver on his 2017 election manifesto since that vote, which was to deliver Brexit. It is a prime example of why this Parliament is so broken. Never mind the £1 million that was funnelled to various remain groups towards the end of the referendum campaign; never mind the millions of pounds of taxpayers' money used to campaign for remain; never mind all the institutions of the state that were used—

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Sir Lindsay.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** I am going to deal with the point myself. We are not broadening the debate. Others wish to speak and we are getting bogged down in something that is not relevant to the clause and the amendment. You have answered the question at least five times already, Mr Percy, and I would love to hear from Michael Tomlinson who is next to you. He is desperate to get in.

**Andrew Percy:** We have two hours for this debate, so I hope we will get to hear other Members.

**The Chairman:** Order. You are a former member of the Panel of Chairs. You know exactly what I am relating my comments to. We have allowed a little movement away from the clause and the amendment, and I now want you to speak about them. If not, other Members wish to speak.

**Andrew Percy:** I am responding to points that were made in other speeches and interventions in the debate, but I will of course—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Front Benchers need to calm themselves. I know they are not looking forward to an election because they broke their promises from the 2017 election, but they need to calm down. I will of course follow your ruling, Sir Lindsay, because after all you did me the honour of putting me on the Panel of Chairs.

This Parliament is broken precisely because the votes of the majority of this country—17.4 million people—in 2016 have not been respected. That is why we have to have a general election.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): My hon. Friend says that Parliament is broken. It is not just broken; it is as dead as a dodo. This Parliament cannot do anything—there is constant dither and delay. The public want us to get on and deliver, and a general election allows us to do that.

**Andrew Percy:** My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is why we must bring this Parliament to a close. On the amendment, and whether the date is 9 or 12 December, I am not particularly bothered. I just want my constituents and the people in the constituencies around mine, who

I am afraid have been let down by their Members of Parliament who have not kept their promises from the 2017 election—all the constituencies around me voted by a huge margin to leave the European Union—to have a say for exactly the reason that my hon. Friend stated.

This Parliament has not kept its promises to the people. I am not especially bothered about whether it is 9 or 12 December. All I would say is that if we are worried about voters being confused about an election or unable to vote, changing the day is one way in which people could be confused. We have always voted—I do not know for how long, but certainly in my short years on this planet—on a Thursday. A change in the day could be confusing. If we have to vote on 9 December, so be it, but 12 December should be the date because Thursday is the day we normally vote.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andrew Percy:** No, I will not give way any more.

I want to make a final point about the tone of the forthcoming general election campaign because it will be important. We have heard a lot of attacks on the Prime Minister in the last few days in the Chamber. An analysis out today said that the person who has been on the receiving end of the largest amount of bile and personal attacks is the Prime Minister. We will see more of that in the election campaign.

The 2017 general election campaign was the worst I have ever been involved in when it came to behaviour. I have fought eight election campaigns in my short life. As the Leader of the Opposition is here, I hope he will reflect on the words he uses in the campaign. What happened at the last election was in his name. My staff were spat at in his name and I was attacked in the street by people chanting his name at me on his behalf because of the divisive language he consistently used in the run-up to that election. I will take him at his word that in this election he will encourage his supporters and party members to engage in better behaviour. The 2017 election was, for many of us, an appalling campaign to go through, with abuse, threats, damage to property and damage to constituents' property perpetrated, in some cases, in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I hope the campaign in December is a more civil one on all sides. This is not a matter that one side owns. I hope we will all conduct ourselves somewhat better in the forthcoming election.

6.30 pm

I will conclude, but I have to say that I will oppose the 9 December amendment. If we end up with 9 December so be it, but it is so much better if we stick to the tradition of always voting on a Thursday, which is something that constituents very clearly understand.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am going to make a change in tack from the previous three speakers and actually speak to some of the amendments that have been tabled. However, I first want to pick up on the really important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) at the end of his speech. We all heard about a “kinder, gentler politics”. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and, like him, I look forward to fighting a positive campaign on the issues, seeing that kinder,

[Michael Tomlinson]

gentler politics on the doorsteps and in the conduct of each of us. Perhaps that is a pledge that we can each make right here and right now.

I am also following the contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire). It was a great pleasure to hear him speak. I hope he heard the cheers from the Back Benches, effectively crying for more. We cannot believe that he is retiring at such a young age and that this House will be deprived of his voice in future Parliaments. I say that with all sincerity. It was a great pleasure to hear him make a small contribution to this particular debate, following such a distinguished career in this place. It has been a great pleasure working alongside him in a number of campaigns.

I join the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who I think welcomed, very briefly, the technical amendment tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Minister. I, too, welcome that technical amendment and will be supporting it. I hope it will not be pressed to a Division.

I want to turn to amendment 2, which relates to the date of the election. We eventually heard the hon. Gentleman, after a 10-minute speech, turn to the clauses and the amendment. He gave what I thought were rather weak reasons for why he preferred 9 December to 12 December. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole, I am perfectly prepared to fight an election on a Monday as much as a Thursday, but it seems to me that that is perhaps not the key point.

There are two key reasons why 12 December is to be preferred. The first is in relation to Northern Ireland business. It is incredibly important that the Northern Ireland Executive budget can complete its stages, so that the civil service can be in good shape and ensure that nurses, doctors and teachers are paid.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I was listening very carefully to the speech my hon. Friend is referring to and I was struck that there was no real explanation why it makes a difference where a student casts their vote, whether at home or at university. They can do a postal vote if necessary.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. Evidence shows that 70% of students cast their vote in their hometown in any event. It seems to me to make no difference whether it is during term time or not. In fact, that seems to miss the point. Most terms end on 13 December, not on 12 or 9 December. Most close on either 13 December or the week after. Therefore, this wheeze—it does seem to be a wheeze and a point of division, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole said—does not even work at face value, because students will still be in place on 12 December.

**Ian Mearns:** As a school governor, I know about the disruption caused to schools used as polling stations on a Thursday. If the school has to close, that often means that children will miss not only the Thursday but the Friday, because parents will keep them off for an extended weekend. That situation would be circumvented if the poll took place on a Monday, because parents

would bring their children in from Tuesday to Friday—*[Interruption.]* I am being told by Government Members that that is a load of nonsense, but as a school governor with about 37 years' experience I know, unfortunately, that kids have missed important days of education on many occasions. If the amendment prevented that from happening in some schools, it would be good for that reason only.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Before the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) responds, there is a lot of chatter going on, which makes it difficult to hear the speaker and interventions from others. If colleagues want to have conversations, perhaps they can leave the Chamber. This is obviously a fascinating debate and we all want to get the most out of it.

**Michael Tomlinson:** The fact that you are listening to me, Dame Rosie, makes me so pleased. It makes me smile.

I take very seriously the intervention from the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns). I, too, have been a school governor, although my experience is not as great as his. I bow to him for the number of years he has been a school governor. However, as to whether the poll is on a Monday or a Thursday, it seems to me that his point does not make a difference. I would prefer it if no school days were disrupted and if local authorities could find alternative venues, which from time to time they can. Temporary polling stations can be put up at short notice. I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously, but I do not see that it makes a difference, as to whether the poll is on a Monday or a Thursday. I do not see that that particularly has an impact on the schools: it seems to me that, if a school is going to be interrupted, it may as well be interrupted on a Thursday as on a Monday. I heard his point about the Friday but, in my experience, which is more limited than his, I have not witnessed schools extending the weekend. I understand the point he was trying to make, but I really do not think that it makes a difference whether it is the Thursday or the Monday. My view, for what it is worth, is that schools should not be disrupted, if at all possible, and that we should find temporary polling stations.

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): On the issue of access to polling stations, my hon. Friend may wish to consider the fact that my electoral registration officers in Suffolk tell me that it is particularly challenging to get access on a Sunday to village halls and many of the other places where votes will take place on a Monday. Will he reflect on that, the importance of holding the election on a later day in the week, and the need to stick with Thursdays, which is the convention?

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, because I had not considered that point before. It is a live issue, given that polling stations have to open early in the morning. In Dorset as much as Suffolk, who is going to hand over the key to the village hall? When will it be collected? There are practicalities involved. He has made a powerful point and given a third reason, in addition to my previous two, why Thursday should be preferred to Monday.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some important points. I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). The halls would need to be prepared on a Sunday for a Monday, and we would also potentially have to pay double time for wages, which would involve extra expense. Frankly, however, we should not be using schools as polling stations. We should not be interfering with children's education. Some years ago, my constituency gave up using schools and found alternatives. The most popular polling station we now use is in a pub. There are alternatives that do not deny children their education, whether on a Monday or a Thursday.

**Michael Tomlinson:** The pub is the hub—I have heard that somewhere before—and why should not it be used as a polling station? I often hold surgeries in different pubs across the constituency of Mid Dorset and North Poole. It seems to me that that is a perfectly reasonable place to hold them.

Concerns have been expressed on Mumsnet that nativity plays and the like may be interfered with. If that can be avoided, I would certainly support that.

**Ian Mearns:** I would be very happy to vote in a pub, but many of my neighbours from the Orthodox Jewish community might not be. We should think about religious orthodoxy and the use of public houses as polling stations.

**Michael Tomlinson:** Again, I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention; as ever, he is thoughtful and he has made a considered point. Although those two issues have just been pointed out to me—about Sunday tipping into Monday and using alternative provision—what my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said still stands: if at all possible, we should avoid using schools as polling stations so that they can stay open, whether that is for nativity plays, Latin, maths, or whatever. I would not be against using a public house, as I am not for surgeries, but I take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns).

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman's point is mainly about polling stations, but is he aware that there are big issues in booking a large enough venue to hold an election count? Many local authorities may struggle to find a venue at this time of year.

**Michael Tomlinson:** The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. I had not considered that but I do not think that it is a distinguishing feature, when voting on this measure, between whether the election is held on the Monday or the Thursday. I take that serious point on board but, in my view, if there is pressure on accommodation in December, it would be no different on a Monday than on a Thursday.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have cast aside many traditions over the last few years and that this place has got rid of what we hold dear? If we are to have a debate about the right day for an election, surely that should be done soberly and decently, at the right time. I understand that

many of our EU friends hold elections over the weekend. We should have time for a debate in future and not do this on the back of a cigarette packet today.

**Michael Tomlinson:** My hon. Friend is reinforcing my primary point about why I believe that the Thursday should be preferred: it is the traditional day. I do not have the precise figures, but I am sure that the Minister will when they respond to the amendments. It is traditional that these votes happen on a Thursday. It has happened on other days, but in Mid Dorset and North Poole, that is the routine and we are used to voting on a Thursday.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Ind): I echo what my hon. Friend is saying. It seems absolutely clear that the will of the House is that elections in this country should always be on a Thursday—always on a Thursday! But the silver lining—it is a small one—to the Fixed-term Parliaments Act is that this is the first time that we have had a debate in this Chamber about elections, and there are lots of interesting ideas. My best polling station is a garden room in Woolstone. Where should we have our polling stations? More and more people are voting by post, and what about voting on an app for our young people when they are at university? [*Interruption.*] You see? Already a lively debate has started, so after the Tories win the election on 12 December, let us resolve, as one of the first things we do, to have a proper, full day's debate on the manner and practice of elections in the United Kingdom.

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** The right hon. Gentleman is right: there is time to have a debate on the lines that he suggests, but this afternoon, we are discussing the date of the election. We are not doing that well on the chatter front, by the way, so can we revisit the fact that we need to listen very carefully to the speeches that are being made? A big effort.

**Michael Tomlinson:** Thank you, Dame Rosie. My right hon. Friend has great expertise in telecommunications and he makes an interesting point about technology—I take your point that it does not really take us further forward in terms of the date and this amendment, but he makes an intriguing point. I note that the Leader of the House is sitting in his place. Doubtless if my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage revisits that point on Thursday during business questions, perhaps that can be taken forward at a future date. He has certainly hit upon something. We all have an interest in this and, dare I say it, a small amount of amateur expertise on it as well.

6.45 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the political editor of *The Sun* has just tweeted that the Government have conceded on the 9 December election date. If that is the case, does he agree that we should just get on with the vote?

**Michael Tomlinson:** The editor of *The Sun* has not contacted me personally, so I was not aware of that, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enlightening not just me but the whole Chamber.



**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I want to make a couple of points. First, next week is Parliament Week, and many schools already have arrangements to talk to their pupils about Parliament. That could be enlivened if by then we are in the middle of a general election. Secondly, in Rayleigh we recently experimented with establishing a polling station in the Travellers Joy pub. We had a by-election there recently against the Liberals, and we won, so I am all for it.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his recent victory. As ever, he makes a very sensible point.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** If the news is that a deal has been done about 9 December, it would be instructive if we were to be told, because clearly it would influence our contributions in this relatively short debate. Has my hon. Friend had any indication of whether a deal has been done? I have the same reservations as he does. I have fought a lot of parliamentary elections in my life since 1987. Up until the Ribble Valley, I had lost them all. [*Laughter.*] Times have got better since then. Elections have always been on a Thursday. I cannot remember them ever being on anything other than a Thursday. Does he agree that, if it is switched to a Monday, a lot of publicity will be needed? People must know it is on a Monday. It is also vital that postal and proxy votes are applied for.

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** Quite a few people want to speak in this debate, so I urge hon. Members to keep their interventions fairly short.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I will take your comments very seriously, Dame Rosie, and bring my remarks to a close shortly.

My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. I have not received information directly, from the editor of *The Sun* or anyone else, about the rights and wrongs. Quite often they are whispers in the wind with no truth attached. They might be true on this occasion, but I have not heard. I agree, however, that it would be incredibly helpful to know if that were the case, because then speeches may be curtailed or changed. I repeat my point: whether it is on a Friday, a Monday, a Thursday—whatever the day—we will be prepared and ready. It does seem that there are advantages to a Thursday as opposed to a Monday, but if it happens to be a Monday, so be it. We will get on and fight it.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): I understand that moving the election date to 9 December would imply a Dissolution this Thursday, which would greatly constrain those of us who have made arrangements on Friday and early next week for Parliament Week. There are all sorts of protocols with respect to schools about having Members of Parliament visit them, but we would no longer be Members of Parliament and they would be obliged by those protocols to invite all the candidates, which is very difficult to arrange at short notice.

**Michael Tomlinson:** That was a rather longer intervention than some of my right hon. Friend's interventions, but he makes a very good point. During the campaign, we will no longer be Members of Parliament, which has a

bearing not just on schools and school visits, but on events such as Remembrance Sunday. I understand we are expecting a ruling or some guidance from Mr Speaker on that point.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I just popped out to ask an authoritative source whether we have given way on the date, and I understand that the Government have not given way, but who knows what discussions are going on.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, not least because it means we can hear from other colleagues on this point. It shows that these whispers on the wind are not always accurate. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't—we will find out in due course.

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, quite apart from the consequences for constituency activities, a crucial consequence of an early Dissolution would be for the business of the House and the threat of losing crucial legislation, such as the Northern Ireland Budget Bill, which is essential if Northern Ireland civil servants are to be paid and a Government shutdown avoided?

**Michael Tomlinson:** That is one of the key points. Thursday is the traditional day, but it is indeed important to ensure that the civil service is up and running in Northern Ireland, and that is the main reason why I will support this measure if it comes to a vote.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye. I intend to make a very short contribution to this important debate. I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). He is one of the up-and-coming Members, and he has made some useful and telling points.

This is the fourth time Parliament has been asked to hold a general election. The nation has been in schism, unable to do anything worthwhile as the dreadful problem of Brexit hangs over us. I should have infinitely preferred this Parliament to have sorted the Brexit problem out so that we could have left the EU on 31 March, before holding a general election, but the fact is that we have not sorted it out, and we are now in this position.

We are in this position because the coalition Government, under my right hon. friend the then Member for Witney, passed the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which the Bill seeks to amend. That Act was passed in a very different time. It was passed with the purpose of ensuring that the coalition could not end early, and it was passed in undue haste, without proper consideration of what the consequences might be in a situation in which there was no overall majority in Parliament. I think that one of the first things that whoever gains a majority in the House after the election will want to do is revisit the Act to see whether we want to alter its provisions so that we never get into this situation again.

As I have said, for too long this Parliament has been paralysed. It has been three years and four months since we held the referendum.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Seems longer.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I think that it seems an eternity.

Indeed, 80% of Members voted to trigger article 50, and most Conservative and Labour Members produced manifestos in 2017 in which they pledged to honour the result of the referendum, yet Parliament has still not resolved the matter. I am therefore delighted that we appear to be moving to the likelihood that the House will pass this Bill tonight. The only question that remains—posed by the Opposition’s amendment 2—is whether we will have an election on 9 or 12 December.

My marginal preference is for a Thursday election. As many Members have already said, Thursday elections are a long tradition for a number of very good reasons. Mention has been made of problems with booking halls and rooms that would be big enough for the count, but I think that most competent authorities can deal with that. Indeed, I know from discussions with my local authorities that they have already booked the venues. Those in charge of the schools, halls, libraries, garages, pubs and community centres in which the polling stations will have already been warned and will have already agreed that they can manage an election some time in December.

I take the point about the need to complete Northern Ireland business. I should have thought that we could do that on Thursday if we are to prorogue on that day, but it is vital for it to be completed, because it gives legal authority for public funds to be drawn down.

We can all discuss the pros and cons of the 9th and the 12th, and that is an important part of the debate. I think that there are some pros and cons. The 9th is marginally farther away from Christmas; however, although the venues have already been booked, an election on the 12th would give electoral registration officers a little more time to confirm those bookings, put their staff in place and make other preparations.

The staff do a terrific job during elections. We could not run an election without them. I have talked to them often during the seven elections that have taken place since I was first elected, and I know that they work incredibly hard. They often arrive at 6 in the morning and do not leave until well after the close of the polls at 10 pm. Often in my constituency—I hope no village or parish will take offence at this—the village hall is very draughty and cold, and I have seen them there pretty cold, and I would think they could be, in December, in a pretty cold situation, so I hope that they will have plenty of heaters to keep them warm.

An election now is absolutely essential. We need to resolve by a general election, through a full franchise, and by electing a new Government, a new Parliament, a new Executive, who will have the authority of that general election to resolve the Brexit question once and for all. I sincerely hope that we re-elect a Conservative Government with a good majority, so we can get it resolved.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** I will preface my remarks about the choice between Monday 9 and Thursday 12 December by simply saying, “Thank God that this House now appears to be resolving the issue.” I say, “Thank God,” as the co-chair of the all-party humanist group, so I perhaps do not have quite the same certainty about the deity as many hon. Members and friends will have, but I think it is incredibly important for us, in our

responsibility for all public servants in the United Kingdom and the national interest of the United Kingdom, to resolve the problem between the legislature and the Executive. We have got to a place where ordinary public administration is now extremely difficult to effect because of the uncertainty in this place and the impossibility of the Government actually carrying a coherent programme. So I say, “Thank God” advisedly.

I also say, “Thank God,” Dame Rosie, because of the selection made by you and your colleagues under the Chairman of Ways and Means for this debate, to ensure that it is properly focused on the in-scope issues of the Bill, because obviously the temptation for any piece of legislation to then have attached to it any number of different issues in a Parliament as incoherent as this one in terms of its make-up is self-evident. The discipline brought to our proceedings today is enormously welcome.

I also say, “Thank God,” because of what the selection means for the amendment passed earlier to the programme motion. I managed to miss that vote as I was engrossed in conversation with Baron Williams of Oystermouth about drugs policy and other issues. I was so engrossed in the conversation, and so grateful for getting hold of him after four months to be able to have a conversation with him, that I literally screened the bells out of my mind and so missed that vote. I confess publicly my error and, having thought missing an important vote is impossible for any competent person to do, I put that on the record with due appropriate humility for being so distracted. So there is a godly reason for having been so distracted: the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

I want to put in a word, however, for the poor old electoral registration officers, who will be faced with the challenge of doing an election in pretty short order at a difficult time of year. To ask them then not to go on the customary day of Thursday, and to do it on a Monday instead, will produce all sorts of challenges in terms of their normal availability and polling stations and anything else that would be available on a Thursday customarily. A point was also well made—I have forgotten which colleague did so, but I think that it was made by an Opposition Member—about the need to engage on Sunday to prepare for Monday. Again, we should think to at least some degree about the burden that they will have to carry in preparing for all this.

Then we come to the whole issue of advancing this election by three days. I am as anxious as anybody else to get our governance in the United Kingdom back on a sound footing, so that there is a sound coalition arrangement if a majority is not secured, although I am confident that we would win a majority at a general election. That is obviously part of my enthusiasm for us getting on and getting it done, but no one can take that for granted, as we learned from 2017.

7 pm

We need an Administration who can normally rely on a majority in this House, so if the electorate gift us the need for another coalition, at least we will have the opportunity for the numbers to play out in such a way that we can have a programme for government that is sustainable and can be done on a proper basis.

We have seen the difference between what we were able to do between 2010 and 2015, with a full five-year programme in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and the instability that ensued as a result of the numbers

that came out in 2017. We have seen enormous difficulties, given the importance of Europe as an issue. We have seen people in all parts of the House wrestling with their conscience over the division between their loyalty to their belief in the European ideal and their loyalty to their party.

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** I have just heard reference to the European ideal, and I would be grateful if my hon. Friend told me whether he has any evidence of what that really means. Has he ever heard anyone properly justify why they would want to remain in the European Union, which is utterly undemocratic and dysfunctional?

**Crispin Blunt:** I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, but I suspect I might get into a deal of trouble if I were to follow him down that rabbit hole, Madam Rosie, although I would love to. If you will allow me briefly to reply to that point, I think it is actually about an attachment to internationalism and values that we can convince our young people can be carried out on a global scale as well. If the term “global Britain” is to mean anything, it must mean the values that motivate people with the European ideal of co-operation with our neighbouring states. Britain is big enough to do that on a global scale and to make our young people proud of their country, proud of its international standing and proud of its attachment to the rule of law and the defence of human rights. We are now tantalisingly close to being able to scope a new vision for Britain, and that is one of the reasons that it is terribly important to get on with this election.

**Michael Tomlinson:** My hon. Friend was trying to remember who made the point about Sundays and the potential difficulties involved in holding an election on a Monday. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), rather than an Opposition Member. Perhaps that will help to jog my hon. Friend’s memory and take him back to the date, which is the point of the amendment.

**Crispin Blunt:** I am obliged to my hon. Friend.

Those three days will be extremely important to the electoral registration officers and their teams who are faced with an election in short order, in exactly the same way as they are important to us for the sound discharge of our business here. I heard the business of the House statement yesterday, in which the Leader of the House pointed out the importance of getting a Northern Ireland Budget Bill passed before we dissolve. There is obviously a Northern Ireland interest involved. There is a central divide over the Brexit agreement that the Prime Minister has secured and over our role in upholding the Good Friday agreement. Tensions have risen in Northern Ireland over the treatment of Northern Ireland, and that will of course be a proper subject for discussion in the general election, particularly in Northern Ireland. It would be a pity if good administration in Northern Ireland were further affected by us accelerating our Dissolution so fast that we cannot get the Northern Ireland Budget Bill passed in good order.

**Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind):** It is absolutely essential, in the absence of a functioning Assembly and without any prospect of having the Assembly up and

running any day soon, that this Government take their responsibilities extremely seriously. I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is determined to do that and to get the Northern Ireland Budget Bill through all its stages in short order, but it is also the responsibility of this Government—I do hope the Justice Secretary is listening—to honour their commitment to the victims of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland and to get the compensation scheme and the legislation through this House before we rise, if we rise and dissolve for a general election. It would be morally irresponsible of the Government to allow those victims to go uncompensated until the far end of a general election. That prospect is appalling.

**Crispin Blunt:** The hon. Lady makes an extremely powerful point and speaks to the general thrust of my argument, which is that we will be better able to deliver sound public administration if we give ourselves these three extra days. In terms of parliamentary procedure, if there are unconventional measures that the House is agreed upon, it should be possible to get some of them through with an extra 72 hours, but that would not be possible if we curtailed ourselves with an election date of 9 December.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** One of the pieces of legislation that my hon. Friend talks about is the Domestic Abuse Bill, on which there is widespread agreement across the House. Does he agree that it should be perfectly possible to agree to get the Bill through either before we dissolve, in the wash-up?

**Crispin Blunt:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. If we have non-contentious legislation, the three extra days will be of enormous help in assisting the tidying up of our processes than would otherwise be the case.

There has been a discussion about students and about whether their being at university on 9 December or 12 December would make a significant difference, and that was dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). The bulk of universities break up after 12 December anyway. We also know that the National Union of Students ran an extremely successful exercise to mobilise and register the student vote at university, which saw seats come into play that no one could have conceivably expected, such as Canterbury.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** The fact that students are in university must mean that they are quite bright, so they can work out whether they are registered at home, if it is different to their university town, and that they have the choice of designating only one location. They can then vote there in person, or if they have gone back home, they can have a postal vote or, indeed, a proxy vote. The Conservative party should not fear young people voting in these elections. In fact, we should welcome the fact that they are voting, because our manifesto will be far more attractive to young people than Labour’s.

**Crispin Blunt:** I sincerely hope that is the case. I have made submissions that I hope will make our manifesto more attractive to young people and much more forward looking.



We also ought to remember that there will be three extra days—or five, given that we will drift over the weekend—for people to get their postal votes sorted, which is important if we are to have a December election. I think it is now agreed that the absolutely overriding national interest is to resolve the strategic incoherence of the legislature and the Executive, and we will all need to mobilise people and be part of the campaign to assist people in registering for postal votes if the weather or light will affect their being able to get to a polling station.

All that will also be an additional burden on the electoral registration officers and their teams. For electoral registration officers trying to cope with the demands that we are about to present to them, the three days will be extremely important. There is a good case for widening the take-up of postal votes, not least for students and others who will be able properly to exercise the franchise to which they are entitled.

In conclusion, I hope that the House will consider my arguments. Having the election will resolve the incoherence of good public administration in the circumstances we face today. Dame Rosie, you and your colleagues have prevented us from disappearing down a rabbit hole in order to enable yet further delay and obfuscation by trying to change the nature of the franchise at very short notice. Goodness knows what problems that would then present unto the hard-pressed electoral registration officers on whose behalf I have trying to speak. I hope that the Committee will vote for sound public administration and to support our poor officials who do great work in enabling our democracy to function.

**Sir William Cash:** On a point of order, Dame Rosie. I seek your guidance on the selection of amendments. Am I right in believing that, although there has rightly been an enormous amount of concentration on the figures “9” and “12” in amendments 2 and 3, there is ample opportunity for us to consider the issues of clause stand part? The questions of clause 1 and clause 2 stand part are both important in their own right, and I would be glad to know whether you are able to confirm that—I noticed the Clerk nodding her head.

**The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I can indeed confirm that. I noticed that the hon. Gentleman might be trying to catch my eye, so no doubt at that point he will address the very clauses he mentions.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** [*Interruption.*] Somebody said “too long,” and I think he has a point.

Let us be fair: neither 9 December nor 12 December is ideal. I have not fought a general election in December. It last happened in the 1920s, and I am not that old, even though I may look it at times. The timing is not ideal because, yes, it is close to Christmas and, yes, people’s minds are on other things, but the fact is we are not in an ideal situation.

The referendum was in 2016 and, three and a half years on, we still have not left the European Union because of all the wranglings of this place. There has been paralysis on this issue. We have had extension after extension, and the public have just about had enough.

I recently did a tour of about 12 villages in my constituency over two days, and I talked to a lot of people. They told me, “If we can’t get Brexit done, let’s

have an early general election.” They did not specify whether 9 or 12 December is the best date. In fact, there was speculation that the general election might even be on 10 or 11 December, but that has clearly been taken out of play because we are now talking about only 9 or 12 December.

My constituents told me, “If Parliament can’t get Brexit done, at least give us the opportunity to look again at the composition of Parliament.” A number of our colleagues will be leaving anyway. Some of them were going to leave in 2020, but of course the previous election came early. They decided to hang on, probably expecting this Parliament to go five years, which no longer looks likely.

If, for whatever reason, we do not have an election on 9 or 12 December, who is to say the paralysis we have experienced over the past 12 months on this one issue will not spread to other legislation? I know people argue that we should have gone on after the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill got its Second Reading, but the fact is that 217 Labour Members voted against Second Reading. They did not want any scrutiny at all. They did not care, they were just totally opposed to the Bill going into Committee to see what amendments would be tabled. It is not as if we did not have a chance.

I understand those MPs who say, “Well, we do not like 9 or 12 December, because it is too dark and too wet,” but I just think people want it over. There was an opportunity to have had the election on 15 October. We offered that date, and whoever got elected could have decided to ask for an extension to article 50 or could have continued with the withdrawal agreement Bill, and we would have left on 31 October. That has not happened, so it is either 9 or 12 December.

**Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab):** May I ask the hon. Gentleman to add his support to the important reason for having those extra three days before Dissolution, which is so that we can get the business relating to Northern Ireland through, not just the finance bit, but the bit about historical institutional abuse? Northern Ireland people are feeling very neglected by this Parliament, and doing this would make them feel that at the last minute we did something to satisfy everyone in Northern Ireland who really wants that legislation to go through.

7.15 pm

**Mr Evans:** Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom and the hon. Lady is right to say that we need to ensure that we have time to get the legislation that pertains to that wonderful part of the UK through properly. We must make certain there is sufficient time for that, and that the legislation is not dropped and Northern Ireland has to wait until after the next general election for that to be dealt with properly.

There are lots of other reasons involved in this. We all have staff working here as well, and they need to have proper notice for all the plans they need to make for when we have Prorogation and they leave. A lot of people outside do not realise that when Prorogation comes and this place closes those of us fighting elections are pretty well banned from the parliamentary estate. I made the grave error once of having left something in my office, and I had to arrange to come to my office during an election. I was met by a security clerk, who walked with me to my office, let me into my room—all

[Mr Nigel Evans]

the rooms were locked—and then stood over me watching what I was taking out of the drawers. People do not appreciate all of this. So having an extra three days—*[Interruption.]* I can see the Opposition Chief Whip laughing, but it was proper stuff that I had left behind. *[Laughter.]* Yes, addresses, telephone numbers—who knows? So there is merit in having this time, as some people, particularly those elected in 2017, may not quite understand what is about to befall them when this place closes down.

It is therefore appropriate to have that lead-in and I am still persuaded by 12 December, because Thursday is the traditional day. It was probably chosen because it was the old market day. I know that lots of people have elections on a weekend. Clearly, we could have the election on a Sunday. I am a member of the Council of Europe and a lot of Council of Europe countries have general elections on a Sunday, but I can understand, from a religious point of view, why that might not be totally appropriate. I am even persuaded of having early voting, as whether it was 9 December or 12 December would not be as important for those who all of a sudden are told by their works that they have to be away. They may not know until a day before that they have to be away from their town and they may be away for two or three days, so it is too late for them to get a postal or proxy vote. I therefore rather like the idea of people being able to turn up to the town hall with proofs of identity—yes, photo ID—to prove that they are who they say they are and they live where they say they live, and then being able to cast their vote. Such an approach would mean that the ninth or the 12th, if we had this in play now, would be so important.

I hope that, no matter who wins the next general election, we can have a proper, considered debate about elections and the way they are held. We have heard all sorts of ideas about how schools should not be used, and I fully appreciate this—

**Rehman Chishti:** My hon. Friend uses the word “proper”. Does he agree that, as we head into this general election, it is vital that we have the firmest possible debates, but that they need to be done with civility and respect? In 2017, I had the worst campaign against me by my Labour opponent. On election night, a Labour group assistant on Medway Council said to an elected Member of Parliament who was giving his acceptance speech, “Fuck off back to country X.” My country is this great country and Gillingham is my home town, so do I fuck off back to Gillingham? That kind of—

**The Second Deputy Chairman:** Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. This is about the date of the election. It is not about the conduct of the election.

**Mr Evans:** My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. We all know that, whether it is the 9th or the 12th, it is going to be a lively, vigorous campaign. We need to show respect, whatever the date. I was pushed by some people during the last general election campaign. A lot of people were quite surprised about that. It was outside a pub, after I had done a hustings, and all I can say is that a number of people were shocked.

**Sir William Cash:** My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of holding elections in schools. He might know what I am about to say. In his great constituency, there is a school called Stonyhurst College, which I happened to attend. Can he recall any occasion when Stonyhurst’s premises were used for elections?

**Mr Evans:** I do not believe so. It was used as the venue for the count for the by-election and the subsequent general election, which was fortunately only 12 months after, because I lost the by-election, but then won the general election in 1992.

We do not want to lose any school time. Nativity plays have been mentioned. We do not want to lose nativity plays, either. It has been said that losing some nativity plays at least brings to an end the farce that has gone on here. I fully appreciate that, but we do not want to inflict any sorrow on children who have been rehearsing for their nativity plays. If the election is on 12 December rather than 9 December, it will give schools the opportunity to plan ahead and to make sure that the rooms that are used will not conflict with any nativity plays.

Whether the election is on 9 or 12 December, people who are listening to this debate ought to take the opportunity now to ensure that they have postal votes or proxy votes. I have already bumped into a number of people who told me that they are going trekking in the Himalayas and are going to be away for five weeks. People are going on cruises and all that sort of stuff. I hope that people take precautions now. The most important thing at a general election is for people not to lose their vote and to be able to participate in helping to vote for the next Government of this country. Whether the election is on 9 or 12 December, I hope people vote Conservative and ensure that we deliver the Brexit that they voted for at the referendum.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I do not know if it is just my easy-going charm, but the worst I have ever heard in Pontypridd, West Bromwich and the New Forest is, “Sorry, mate—I’m Labour.” I hope that the *Hansard* reporters will not feel the necessity to record verbatim some of the words that we have heard this evening.

When the Minister replies, I would like him to comment on the implications of the difference of the three days between the two dates that stand before us and how that will impact on the date for nominations, and whether those days will fall either side of the publication of the new electoral register. When the new nomination form is filled out, the electoral numbers have to be recorded, and those numbers will undoubtedly have changed after 1 December. Is that going to present a problem? If so, I wonder if the Minister could draw attention to that.

**Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con):** My right hon. Friend raises an important point. There is an essential democratic process that needs to be conducted before a general election, which is the selection of candidates. I suspect quite a large number of constituencies have not yet selected candidates. Members of local associations need these extra few days to have time to go through that process, and to avoid having candidates imposed from the centre.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** We have had two Divisions in recent weeks on whether there should be an election, so I would have thought that those associations ought

properly to have attended to the question of getting on with selecting candidates. I am sorry to hear that they have not, but there is not much that we can do about that. Certainly, the additional days would be of some assistance.

**Crispin Blunt:** My right hon. Friend should understand that, of course, central parties have a role in overseeing the selections in constituency associations. Therefore, a timetable has been applied to associations, which are anxious to select their candidates, but they have not been able to do so. I know that because of my engagement with East Surrey, which is not keen to have a selection shortlist of the kind that it had in 2010.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I can assure my hon. Friend that the independent members of my New Forest association would not tolerate anyone imposing a candidate or superintending the process, and I would hope that other constituencies would follow a similar line.

I will, if I may, come to the question of students. We have heard that, overwhelmingly, students choose to vote at home, that postal and proxy votes are available, and that 40 of the top universities will still be sitting on 12 September.

I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) was quite mistaken in an earlier intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). He implied that students could be registered at only one address. That is not the case. Students are entitled to register at both addresses. Of course, it is important that they vote at only one of them. When I was the chairman of the Saint Andrews University Conservative Association—a former friend, Alex Salmund, will remember these events well—I saw it as my duty to ensure that all members of the Conservative Association were registered at both addresses, so that, in an election, we would be able to inform them as to where their vote would count for more. I undertook that task. Unfortunately, on the evening of the referendum, I think, in 1979, I was visited by members of Special Branch and charged with 53 offences against the False Oaths (Scotland) Act 1933. I got off the charges, but nevertheless it was certainly a very frightening experience. In those days, universities and university political associations went to great lengths to ensure that all their members were registered at both addresses. If that has continued, then it should not be a problem.

I conclude by saying that, having heard the speech—the very impressive Second Reading speech—of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), I can assure my hon. Friends that I would not be voting for this Bill with any great enthusiasm if she were the leader of the Labour party.

**Sir William Cash:** The clause stand part provisions raise very important questions of principle, which we must consider very carefully. It all goes to the question of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 itself. On Second Reading, I made the point very clearly—for those who are interested in looking at how that disgraceful Act was put through the House—that I was very, very strongly against it. I looked through the Division lists earlier on. I see my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) in his place—I think that he was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister at the time. I incurred the wrath of

the Prime Minister by my absolute determination to do everything possible to ruin the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. In fact, I am afraid to say that we managed to muster only 10 Members of Parliament, and not always that. On one occasion, I found myself with just one other person—the then Member of Parliament for Aldridge Brownhills, Sir Richard Shepherd. He and I ended up as the only ones who voted on that. That is why I am specifically thinking about the manner in which this important Bill is being brought through the House. There was a particular amendment that I took the gravest interest in during the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, and we are now dealing with an amendment to make provision for a parliamentary general election to be held on 9 December as compared with 12 December—the date in the Bill itself. It has already been ruled that clause stand part is an integral part of these proceedings, and I have every intention of making the points that I want to make on that, having had the ruling that I did from the previous incumbent of the Chair.

I refer to a very important website called the Public Whip. When I got my information from the Library today, I noticed that the Public Whip said that I—the Member of Parliament for Stone—was very “strongly against” the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. I can tell hon. Members why, and it is very simple. I was against it because it gave the Whips an undemocratic power and created the shenanigans of upsetting the rule regarding simple majorities for general elections; and that is why we are in the mess we are in now.

7.30 pm

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I was a member of the Government at the time of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, and was therefore bound to support the proposals. However, I recall that one of the discussions that took place was that there should be a sunset clause, meaning that the provision's short purpose, which was to do with sustaining a Government at the time, would have gone away and we would have returned to the other method. I did make the point, as I am sure my hon. Friend has, that when we fiddle with the constitution without proper checks and balances, there will almost invariably be very heavy consequences, but that point was never quite taken.

**Sir William Cash:** Indeed. It is when sunset comes to an end that Dracula comes out of his crypt. I am not referring to my right hon. Friend, of course. What I am saying, however, is that the consequences of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act have been abominable for the proceedings in this House.

**Mr Whittingdale:** May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the perspicacity that he showed during the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, as he has done on so many other occasions? He might recall that the then leader of the Liberal Democrats advocated the Fixed-term Parliaments Act on the basis that it would give much greater political stability to our system in future years. Does my hon. Friend agree that that was about as accurate a prediction as all other Liberal Democrat predictions?

**Sir William Cash:** Absolutely, and of course that legislation was cobbled together for the very simple reason that they wanted to keep in with the Liberal



[*Sir William Cash*]

Democrats. That was the real purpose of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, and it was one of the most pernicious aspects of the coalition.

I understand, by the way, that part of the coalition deal included a plan to get rid of the 1922 committee. The coalition wanted to bring Ministers into that committee, which would have destroyed it. I fired what could be described as an almighty Exocet, and guaranteed that Ministers would not be allowed to vote—on the pro bono advice that we received from a very eminent QC whom I instructed.

A book by Matthew d’Ancona was brought to my attention a few months ago. On reading it, I found—to my astonishment but great interest—that the then Prime Minister, in a conclave with his closest advisers before the coalition began, was talking about the coalition and how he was going to conduct his Prime Ministership, and he said to those advisers, “I have a choice to make. Am I going to go into a coalition with Nick Clegg or Bill Cash?” I found that most interesting.

That is why this clause stand part debate is highly relevant. We have this extraordinary situation in which the whole issue of an early general election is, largely speaking, the product of all the shenanigans on the Opposition Benches and the other shenanigans with our own colleagues in the House, some of whom lost the Whip and all the rest of it. I strongly believe that this business of having a general election, which, but for this Bill, would not have been put through, is connected with the very reason why people wanted a coalition back in 2010, which was to stop people like me banging on about Europe—I remember the then Prime Minister saying that—but they did not have a chance. That point has to be made.

**Craig Mackinlay:** My hon. Friend is making the most excellent points about the drawbacks of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, which he was opposed to. Does he think that there is a salutary lesson here that this place should not legislate in haste at any time? Does he share my concerns about the rapidity and danger of the Benn surrender Act, which will stain this House for many years to come? Its effects are being seen today and will be with us for a very, very long time.

**Sir William Cash:** That is absolutely right.

Over the centuries, Parliaments have acquired their own names. For example, we have had the Barebones Parliament, the Rump Parliament and the Addled Parliament, and there has been the Mad Parliament. This Parliament ought to be called what it has now become—the Purgatory Parliament, with the shenanigans from the Opposition and from those who have been determined to remain in the European Union at any price. I have often had to upbraid them. I remember saying:

“I have heard of rats leaving a sinking ship but never of rats trying to sink a leaving ship.” —[*Official Report*, 18 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 503.]

That remains on the record from some months ago. I say it again for this reason: I believe very, very strongly that it is unconscionable that we should not have this general election. We need it because, above all else, we had the referendum which was itself put into effect by

virtue of this House deciding, by six to one, that it would have it. That was in the parties’ manifestos. Opposition Members voted—some of them did and a few did not—by 499 to 126 for the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017. Every single Conservative Member of Parliament, even the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), voted for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which received Royal Assent on 26 June 2018.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): My hon. Friend talked about rats. The exact quotation, if I recall it correctly, is that there are many examples in history of rats leaving a sinking ship but only one of mice joining one.

**Sir William Cash:** Ha, ha—well, I must say I find that very amusing, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying it.

The name that this Parliament has now acquired and deserves—the Purgatory Parliament—is, I believe, appropriate and right in the circumstances. I would say this to the Committee, as I did some weeks ago on another occasion: in the name of God, go. I believe that this is the moment for this Parliament to depart, in the words of Oliver Cromwell all those years ago. The Speaker has quite frequently referred to 17th-century precedents, so I say again to this Parliament: in the name of God, go. Let us get on with a general election and let us get Brexit done.

**Mr Baker:** Amendment 14 has the effect of aligning the registration deadline for Scotland with the registration deadline in the rest of the United Kingdom, by removing the need for the St Andrew’s day bank holiday in Scotland to be taken into account. I congratulate the Minister on his wisdom in bringing forward that sensible amendment, but I wonder whether he could confirm that Scotland is being treated fairly with this amendment. On the Conservative Benches, we are most concerned to ensure the fair treatment of Scotland. We are very proud that Scotland is in the United Kingdom, and we are determined to ensure the fair treatment of people throughout the great country of Scotland.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Baker:** I knew that one of them would not be able to resist.

**Patrick Grady:** I hate to burst the hon. Gentleman’s bubble, but if the Government had thought it through, that would have been provided for in the original Bill. This may well have been gently pointed out to them from sources other than their own Benches.

**Mr Baker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He has just proven to me that, contrary to the remarks we hear so often from those on the SNP Benches, sometimes the British Government listen to the voice of Scotland, respect the voice of Scotland and act on the voice of Scotland. I am very proud of those on the Treasury Bench and grateful to the Minister for doing just that.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about the voice of Scotland. It is listened to, but he must remember that the SNP are not Scotland. They may sell themselves as such, but they are not Scotland.

**Mr Baker:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who reminds me that he is one of the most powerful champions of the voice of Scotland. Though I wish to pay tribute to him for a little longer, I should move on to amendments 2 and 3, which seek to change the date of the election. Why anyone would wish to move the date from the traditional day of a Thursday to a Monday, I cannot imagine. I am rather concerned that it is based on some perceived advantage of holding the poll on a Monday, which obviously would not be appropriate.

Dame Eleanor, I hope you will forgive me if I dilate a little on some of the other amendments. I received some constituency correspondence today asking me to back amendment 1, which relates to citizens of the European Union. Whatever our love for the citizens of the European Union who are in the UK, and however willing and delighted we are to embrace their work and welcome them to stay in the UK, it would be quite wrong to expand the franchise—

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. I understand why the hon. Gentleman is taking this opportunity to speak to amendment 1, but as that amendment has not been selected, it is out of order for him to speak to it. However, if he were to make his remarks in the context of amendments 2 or 3, he would be in order.

**Mr Baker:** Thank you, Dame Eleanor. I will just say, in the context of amendments 2 or 3, that any attempt to gerrymander the poll to try to produce a particular result would be wrong and outrageous. Some of the other amendments tabled, which went beyond amendments 2 and 3, were quite blatant attempts to produce a particular result. That is wrong, and I am grateful that they have not been selected.

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** Is my hon. Friend aware that, if the marvellous Laura Kuenssberg is to be believed—I am sure she is—Britain would have been the only country in the European Union to allow non-nationals to vote in a general election?

**Mr Baker:** My hon. Friend is right, as is the wonderful Laura Kuenssberg. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, as the Prime Minister has said.

**Ian Blackford:** I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that EU nationals are given the vote in Scottish elections, and they voted in the 2014 referendum. *[Interruption.]* I hear Conservatives shouting “national”; I hate to point this out, but Scotland is a nation.

**Mr Baker:** I think Conservative Members are quite comfortable with the notion that Scotland is a nation, but the United Kingdom is the basis for the electorate for this House, and it is quite right that the franchise should therefore be in citizens, or perhaps subjects, of the United Kingdom.

I do feel, Dame Eleanor, that I should now draw my opening remarks to a conclusion. I will simply say, on a serious note, that this Bill of course has to go through the other place. If the other place were to insert amendments in this simple and straightforward Bill that sought to produce a particular outcome, we would have to say that it has no right whatever to do that and that it would

be quite unconstitutional. I think its Members would be playing with fire and, indeed, they would be playing with their own futures in that House were they to seek to amend the Bill to produce a particular outcome.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Thank you—perfect timing.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made.

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 295, Noes 315.

## Division No. 15]

[7.45 pm

### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cryer, John
Abrahams, Debbie	Cummins, Judith
Ali, Rushanara	Cunningham, Alex
Allen, Heidi	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Dakin, Nic
Amesbury, Mike	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Antoniazzi, Tonia	David, Wayne
Ashworth, Jonathan	Davies, Geraint
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Day, Martyn
Bardell, Hannah	De Cordova, Marsha
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	De Piero, Gloria
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dent Coad, Emma
Benn, rh Hilary	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Berger, Luciana	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Betts, Mr Clive	Dodds, Anneliese
Black, Mhairi	Dodds, Jane
Blackford, rh Ian	Doughty, Stephen
Blackman, Kirsty	Dowd, Peter
Blomfield, Paul	Drew, Dr David
Brabin, Tracy	Dromey, Jack
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Duffield, Rosie
Brake, rh Tom	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brennan, Kevin	Eagle, Maria
Brock, Deidre	Edwards, Jonathan
Brown, Alan	Efford, Clive
Brown, Lyn	Elliott, Julie
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Ellman, Dame Louise
Bryant, Chris	Esterson, Bill
Buck, Ms Karen	Evans, Chris ( <i>Proxy vote cast</i>
Burden, Richard	<i>by Mark Tami</i> )
Burgon, Richard	Farron, Tim
Butler, Dawn	Fellows, Marion
Byrne, rh Liam	Field, rh Frank
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Cadbury, Ruth	Fletcher, Colleen
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Flint, rh Caroline
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Forbes, Lisa
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Fovargue, Yvonne
Carden, Dan	Froxcroft, Vicky
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Frith, James
Champion, Sarah	Furniss, Gill
Chapman, Douglas	Gaffney, Hugh
Chapman, Jenny	Gardiner, Barry
Charalambous, Bambos	George, Ruth
Cherry, Joanna	Gethins, Stephen
Clwyd, rh Ann	Gibson, Patricia
Coaker, Vernon	Gill, Preet Kaur
Cooper, Julie	Glindon, Mary
Cooper, Rosie	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Cooper, rh Yvette	Goodman, Helen
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Grady, Patrick
Cowan, Ronnie	Grant, Peter
Coyle, Neil	Gray, Neil
Crausby, Sir David	Green, Kate
Crawley, Angela	Greenwood, Lilian
Creagh, Mary	Greenwood, Margaret
Creasy, Stella	Griffith, Nia
Cruddas, Jon	Grogan, John

Gwynne, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh David  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham P.  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Killen, Ged  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lee, Karen  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leslie, Mr Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Lloyd, Stephen  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Platt, Jo  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Soubry, rh Anna

Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz

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

Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Watson, Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Chris Elmore and  
 Thangam Debbonaire

#### NOES

Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, Mr Simon  
 Cleverly, rh James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Dodds, rh Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Ms Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, rh Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Ford, Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus



Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Gapes, Mike  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, rh Mr David  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Girvan, Paul  
Glen, John  
Goldsmith, rh Zac  
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Hair, Kirstene  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hermon, Lady  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hoey, Kate  
Hollingbery, Sir George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, rh Boris  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, rh Joseph  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Keegan, Gillian  
Kennedy, Seema  
Kerr, Stephen  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian

Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Lancaster, rh Mark  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Andrea  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Lewis, Mr Ivan  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Sir David  
Little Pengelly, Emma  
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast  
by Lee Rowley*)  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Maclean, Rachel  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mann, Scott  
Masterton, Paul  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
McPartland, Stephen  
McVey, rh Ms Esther  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, Johnny  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Milton, rh Anne  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Moore, Damien  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morgan, rh Nicky  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morton, Wendy  
Mundell, rh David  
Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Robert  
Newton, Sarah  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Paisley, Ian  
Parish, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti  
Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Sir Mike  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Perry, rh Claire  
Philp, Chris  
Pincher, rh Christopher  
Poulter, Dr Dan  
Pow, Rebecca  
Prentis, Victoria  
Prisk, Mr Mark

Pritchard, Mark  
Pursglove, Tom  
Quin, Jeremy  
Quince, Will  
Raab, rh Dominic  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Gavin  
Robinson, Mary  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Rudd, rh Amber  
Rutley, David  
Ryan, rh Joan  
Sandbach, Antoinette  
Scully, Paul  
Seely, Mr Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shapps, rh Grant  
Sharma, rh Alok  
Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
Simpson, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, Chloe  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stephenson, Andrew  
Stevenson, John  
Stewart, Bob  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stuart, Graham  
Sturdy, Julian

Sunak, rh Rishi  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Thomson, Ross  
Throup, Maggie  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tomlinson, Michael  
Tracey, Craig  
Tredinnick, David  
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
Truss, rh Elizabeth  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
Vara, Mr Shailesh  
Vickers, Martin  
Villiers, rh Theresa  
Walker, Sir Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
Warburton, David  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Bill  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Wragg, Mr William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Iain Stewart and**  
**Stuart Andrew**

*Question accordingly negated.*

8 pm

*More than six hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings, the proceedings were interrupted ( Programme Order, this day ).*

*The Chair put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time ( Standing Order No. 83D ).*

*Amendment made: 14, in clause 1, page 1, line 12, at end insert—*

“(4) For the purposes of regulation 29(4) of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 2001/497) (which sets out a period for objecting to applications for registration), regulation 8(3) of those Regulations applies as if 2 December 2019 were not a bank holiday.”—(*Jeremy Quin.*)

*This amendment has the effect of aligning the registration deadline for Scotland with the registration deadline in the rest of the United Kingdom, by removing the need for the St Andrew's Day bank holiday in Scotland to be taken into account.*

*Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.*

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (IGC): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was hoping to move my manuscript amendment on Report. If the

[Mr Chris Leslie]

Bill has been amended, it should be reported to the House, and therefore I would like to move the manuscript amendment standing in my name.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I could not hear the hon. Gentleman very well, but is he suggesting that he would like to re-table or put in some other way an amendment that he had previously tabled and that had not been selected for discussion and a vote earlier today?

**Mr Leslie:** No, Madam Deputy Speaker. Now that the Bill has exited Committee, it is to be reported to the House. I have tabled a manuscript amendment for Report and should now like to move it.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Now that the hon. Gentleman has raised the point, I am aware that he has tabled an amendment. I now have his amendment before me and am reading it. Because the knife has fallen, it is not suitable for discussion at this time.

*Bill, as amended, reported.*

*Question put forthwith (Order, this day), That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 438, Noes 20.*

**Division No. 16]**

**[8.5 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Amess, Sir David  
Argar, Edward  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Atkins, Victoria  
Austin, Ian  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Stephen  
Baron, Mr John  
Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Benyon, rh Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, rh Jake  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackman, Bob  
Blomfield, Paul  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Sir Graham  
Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Steve Baker*)

Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bruce, Fiona  
Bryant, Chris  
Buckland, rh Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Burgon, Richard  
Burns, rh Conor  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carden, Dan  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Jenny  
Charalambous, Bambos  
Chishti, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, Colin  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, Mr Simon  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Costa, Alberto

Courts, Robert  
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crausby, Sir David  
Crouch, Tracey  
Cruddas, Jon  
David, Wayne  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
De Piero, Gloria  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dent Coad, Emma  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Dodds, rh Nigel  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, Michelle  
Dorries, Ms Nadine  
Double, Steve  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Dromey, Jack  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Dunne, rh Mr Philip  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Efford, Clive  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Elmore, Chris  
Elphicke, Charlie  
Esterson, Bill  
Eustice, George  
Evans, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)  
Evans, Mr Nigel  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
Field, rh Frank  
Field, rh Mark  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Forbes, Lisa  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Frith, James  
Furniss, Gill  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Gaffney, Hugh  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Gardiner, Barry  
Garnier, Mark  
Gauke, rh Mr David  
George, Ruth  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Girvan, Paul  
Glen, John  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goldsmith, rh Zac  
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Luke  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Bill  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Green, Kate  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Grogan, John  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Hair, Kirstene  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Hanson, rh David  
Hardy, Emma  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Simon  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Hendrick, Sir Mark  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hill, Mike  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hoey, Kate  
Hollern, Kate  
Hollingbery, Sir George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Hurd, rh Mr Nick  
Hussain, Imran  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkyens, Andrea  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, rh Boris  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, rh Joseph

Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kerr, Stephen  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
 Laird, Lesley  
 Lamont, John  
 Lancaster, rh Mark  
 Latham, Mrs Pauline  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Karen  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Sir David  
 Little Pengelly, Emma  
 Lloyd, Tony  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Lee Rowley*)  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Martin, Sandy  
 Masterton, Paul  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 McVey, rh Ms Esther  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Moore, Damien  
 Mordaunt, rh Penny  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, rh Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pidcock, Laura  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Rashid, Faisal  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Bambos Charalambous*)  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Danielle  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Mr Bob

Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, rh Alok  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simpson, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, rh Rory  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, rh Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick

Thomson, Ross  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Walker, Thelma  
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Stuart Andrew and**  
**Iain Stewart**

#### NOES

Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Clwyd, rh Ann  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Owen, Albert  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Smith, Owen  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Ben Lake and**  
**Mr Chris Leslie**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time and passed.*

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Today's vote lays down precedents which override the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, thus overriding one of Parliament's checks and balances against excessive Executive power. Can you advise how to protect democracy in this place from further such government by fiat?

**Mr Speaker:** We are in unusual times; there have been many examples to evidence that over the last few months. Very specifically, what I say to the right hon. Lady is



[Mr Speaker]

that the will of the House determines what happens in these matters, subject to the overriding principle of adherence to a clear rule. The right hon. Lady strongly objects to what has happened, but nothing that has happened today has been in any way disorderly: a Bill has been introduced; there has been a Second Reading; there has been a Committee stage; and there was a business of the House motion, in amended form, accepted by the House. The right hon. Lady has registered her discontent, which I was very happy for her to do, but beyond that the matter cannot be taken further tonight.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (IGC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. [Interruption.] I know that it is sometimes uncomfortable to speak truth to power. Mr Speaker, would it be in order to record that, in private, many of us have come to the conclusion that the majority of Back Benchers on both sides do not want a general election? As the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) has said, fear, from whatever quarter it may come, will be an abiding thing that will come out of this Parliament, and history will record that. A lack of courage from too many is also a mark of the end of this Parliament. Would it also be in order to record that I know from the conversations that take place in private—as you understand, Mr Speaker—that it is undoubtedly a fact that the majority of Members of this Parliament support a people’s vote rather than a general election?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who always speaks her mind, and I respect that. I know, however, that she will accept that that was a case of the right hon. Lady wanting to tell me and the House what she thought, rather than having any particular interest

in me telling her what I think. But I will tell her what I think. What I think is that we do not work in this place on the basis of what people may or may not say to each other in private; we work on the basis of the decisions that are made by the House, and the House has made a decision in a perfectly orderly way. She has registered her objection to it, and we will have to leave it there. I hope—I sense that there is an appetite for this—we can now proceed with the business statement.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Well, I gently say to the hon. Gentleman, to the hon. Lady—I do beg her pardon—that it is quite important to have antennae attuned to the will of the House, so if she is going to do it, it will be one sentence.

**Christine Jardine:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For three and a half years, the Liberal Democrats have campaigned for the people of this country to have the final say. We would have preferred that to be in the form of a people’s vote, and we would now have preferred the general election to be on 9 December. But, Parliament having decided, we are ready to take this issue back and give people the chance to say whether Brexit is something they want to stop. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Somebody has said from a sedentary position that that was not a point of order, but I must say, for the benefit of members of the public, that that does not distinguish it from the overwhelming majority of what I will call purported points of order that are, in fact, not points of order. The hon. Lady has made her point, and we must now proceed with the business statement by the Leader of the House of Commons, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg.

## Business of the House

8.28 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):** Following the decision of the House to pass the Early Parliamentary General Election Bill, I should like to make a short statement regarding the business for tomorrow. The business for tomorrow will be a general debate on the report from the Grenfell Tower inquiry, led by the Prime Minister, followed by a business of the House motion and all stages of the Northern Ireland Budget Bill. You will be very glad to know that I shall make a further business statement to the House tomorrow regarding the business for the rest of the week.

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** I thank the Leader of the House for his statement—we should not keep meeting like this. The Opposition agree with the business statement.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady.

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call Pete Wishart, I appeal to Members who are leaving the Chamber—say I, playing for time—to do so quickly and quietly, so that the remaining Members can attend to what the hon. Gentleman wishes to say on the matter of this relatively narrow business statement. If people are about to be beetle out of the House walking past the hon. Gentleman, I hope that they will do so quickly so that he is not interrupted as he orates in his inimitable fashion.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** It will not be a point for oration when I get down to the business that the Leader of the House has announced. I join the shadow Leader of the House in saying that we must stop meeting like this for these impromptu business statements. However, we will all miss them and the Leader of the House's genuinely individual style as he announces emergency business statement after emergency business statement. We look forward to the next enthralling episode tomorrow, when we will all be congregated again, and the three of us will obviously enjoy the get-together that we have been experiencing over the past few weeks.

The SNP has no problem with or objection to the business announcement, and we look forward to the debate on Grenfell. I also look forward to our continuing get-togethers, which have become a regular feature of our time in the House. Finally, we are pleased that the Bill passed this evening. It is worth saying that, under the last Division result, the Prime Minister would have had the two-thirds majority that he was trying to secure—*[Interruption.]* I see the Leader of the House laughing and grinning there. The SNP is looking forward to this election and to coming back in increased numbers to ensure that we will oppose the Government's hard Tory Brexit. We will continue to fight for Scotland's right to choose Scotland's future.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** May I just say what a pleasure it is to see the hon. Gentleman's good nature shine through in a question? He normally keeps it so carefully hidden on the Floor of the House, but it is always so apparent in private.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** Does the Leader of the House agree that this is one of those days on which I want to go home and watch Laura

Kuenssberg to find out what the hell is going on in this place? I feel that his statement was not very full. He did not mention the election of the new Speaker and said nothing about this week's Prime Minister's questions. Can he fill us in with a little more detail about what the hell is going on?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** All the routine Question Times will continue to take place in the normal way while this Parliament is in existence. Parliament has to be dissolved in accordance with the Bill, if it completes its passage in the House of Lords, at one minute past midnight on Wednesday. That date is set at 25 working days backwards from the date of the general election, with an exemption to cover the bank holiday in Scotland for St Andrew's day. I accept that I am not giving further business, but that is fairly normal at the end of a Parliament when we will have to look at what items need to be washed up and dealt with. I can therefore absolutely assure the House that I will come back with further statements as necessary.

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** Does the Leader of the House anticipate that the House will be meeting at all next week? Does he anticipate that we will be electing a new Speaker before the House dissolves?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** That will depend on the progress of business and the date of Prorogation. We will have to see how rapidly business progresses, but the Dissolution date is Wednesday, so it is perfectly possible for the House to be sitting on Monday and Tuesday next week.

**Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC):** Will the Leader of the House ensure that all staff employed by Members of this House are given urgent advice about what might be necessary for them to do, particularly where their Member may be retiring or might not be re-elected?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** That is an extraordinarily important point. When talk of an early general election first started in September, the House authorities started working on updating the information that is available to staff and to Members—both potentially returning Members and retiring Members—to ensure that they are fully informed of what happens and what the conditions and provisions are. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point, and I know that the House authorities will also have heard it. If the information has not already been distributed, it will be distributed as a matter of urgency.

**Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab):** Just to follow up the point raised by the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), I tabled an amendment to the Early Parliamentary General Election Bill that was not selected, and it said that any member of staff who has worked for a current Member for a continuous period should be considered for additional redundancy payments, given that, if the Member were to lose their seat, they will get only a month's redundancy payment and they will lose their job on 12 December.

Will the Leader of the House look at that with the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and the House authorities to ensure that the staff of Members who stand down or lose their seat are not disadvantaged over the Christmas and new year period?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** That is an important point. We are all very grateful to the staff we have supporting us, both those working for us as constituency MPs and those working for the House authorities. This House is extraordinarily well served by people who are dedicated above and beyond the requirements of duty. Those of us who, as constituency MPs, deal with a busy postbag often find that our staff have dealt with problems for our constituents before they have even brought them to our attention.

We are very lucky with the staff we have, and I am always keen that they should be treated as well as possible. I will certainly undertake to make representations on the hon. Gentleman's behalf to IPSA. It is always difficult to find a fair balance where taxpayers' money is being used, but my sympathies are very much with staff and in favour of looking after them well.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House clarify whether the election of a new Speaker will take place next week? Many Members will obviously have a view on where they wish to be if that election is taking place.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Unfortunately, I have nothing to add to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House ensure there is robust guidance for parliamentary security and security forces across the United Kingdom, particularly given the outcome of Lord Bew's report on intimidation and bullying in public life, so that all candidates from all backgrounds can stand in the next general election without fear of abuse?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** That is a point of fundamental importance to our democracy. I had a meeting earlier today with the head of security in the House of Commons and with a representative of the Metropolitan police, and we discussed a number of security matters relating to Members. Obviously, it is important that candidates feel safe, too, and I am sure the Home Office will send out guidance to returning officers. It is important that, as the hon. Lady says, people from all backgrounds feel safe standing for Parliament.

We are in a tense period, as I think everybody recognises, and the temperature around the issues we are facing is higher than it has been previously, and therefore there is more cause for concern than perhaps there was in elections in 2015, 2010 and before. I take what the hon.

Lady says very seriously, and I will bring it to the attention of both the Home Secretary and the House authorities.

## PETITIONS

### West Cumbria coal mine

8.38 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I present a petition on behalf of 1,852 residents of Cumbria who oppose the proposed West Cumbrian coal mine, believing, as I do, that in the fight to prevent climate catastrophe, it is vital that we keep fossil fuels in the ground. The petitioners request that the Secretary of State call in the application for his own determination at the earliest opportunity and that he rule against the opening of the mine.

*Following is the full text of the petition:*

*[The petition of people of the United Kingdom,*

*Declares that a local petition has been collected against the proposed west Cumbria coal mine which should not be opened on account of the impact on the climate.*

*The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call this application in for its own determination at the earliest opportunity and that it rules against the opening of the mine.*

*And the petitioners remain, etc.]*

[P002536]

### 19A First Bus Glasgow service

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents to maintain the 19A First Bus Glasgow service and to establish a free municipal bus service.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Glasgow North East,

Declares that the 19A local bus service between Robroyston and Glasgow City Centre and operated by First Glasgow is a lifeline for local residents and allows them to frequently access vital local services and the city centre of Glasgow; the provision of public transport in this area is already poor, and this service cut, and the move to an hourly motorway express service with no Sunday service, would only isolate the communities in Robroyston, Provanmill, Germiston and Royston further.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons instruct that the Secretary of State for Scotland engages with First Bus and the Scottish Government to do all within his power to maintain the 19A bus service and to promote the creation of a free to use municipal bus service across the entire city of Glasgow.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002537]



## Minerals Mining (Barford)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

8.40 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): On a personal note, may I say, as you leave the Chair, Mr Speaker, that it has been a pleasure to serve briefly under you in this debate? I welcome the Deputy Speaker to his place.

I should clarify the issue I wish to raise this evening, as earlier today the Annunciators displayed the topic wrong, describing it as “mineral mining in Bradford”. I hope that the Minister has been duly informed that this is about mining in Barford, in my constituency. I do not want to disappoint anyone, but that is exactly what I will be speaking about.

This is not a parochial issue; it is an issue of principle, relating to a village, Barford, of 1,500 people in my constituency. It would be easy to consider that this is a one-off debate and issue, which may be parochial for that particular village, but it is about principle. Much of today, as with yesterday, last week and the months before, was spent discussing Brexit, and I am sure many people would like a break from that, but the issue I am about to elaborate on relates to environmental standards as much as it does anything else. Many of us on these Benches have been speaking out about how we wish to defend environmental protections and how important it is to us to ensure that they are maintained at the highest level and that we have dynamic alignment with European regulations.

The proposals are for the quarry site to be in a little hamlet called Wasperton, adjacent to the village of Barford. It has been identified by Warwickshire County Council as part of its minerals plan. The purpose of the site is the excavation of sand and gravel. For more than a year, I have been supporting the community in its campaign, because the site is huge. It almost dwarfs the village; the area is an level area of approximately 85 hectares of arable farm land, about 50% of which is high-grade agricultural land—BMV, or best and most versatile”, land. The land is currently owned by St John’s College and the proposed quarry site would lie just 350 metres from the edge of the village of Barford. The location is important because, of the identified sites across the county of Warwickshire, site 4, near Barford, is the only one with a large village and a school nearby. Under the current plan, work at the quarry would take place just 350 metres from the southern edge of the village. The proposals are due to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration in a few weeks’ time. We expect a report on the outcome of deliberations in spring 2020, and for the plan possibly to be scheduled for adoption in December 2020.

I recognise that there is a need for such minerals. For all authorities up and down the land, it is a challenge to find the sand and gravels needed for the construction industry. In its plan, Warwickshire County Council states that

“the main issue for this plan to address is the shortfall in sand and gravel. Without adequate sand and gravel, there will not be enough aggregate to serve the construction industry in the County and the sub-region.”

Of course, the premise for that is a calculation based on need, and assumptions are the basis of that calculation. Fundamental to that is how the calculation has been arrived at.

The construction of housing has already been identified as overstated. The local five-year housing supply figure identified 17,000 homes for construction in Warwick district, yet the Office for National Statistics forecasts a need for half that figure. There are other parts of the country where that overstatement is reflected, although maybe not to the same scale. That overstatement is a critical part of my argument, but there are also other issues to address.

There is the matter of access to the site. As the council’s plan states:

“Generally, mineral extraction sites are not approved if they require lorries to travel...on minor roads and centres of population including both towns and villages. Any site submissions with predicted transport/highway problems will be rejected unless it can be demonstrated that the issues can be satisfactorily mitigated.”

At the first public consultation stage, eight allocations were required, to deliver 8 million tonnes. Following a further decline in sales, the plan required only 6.5 million tonnes, which could be delivered through six allocations. The sites are spread geographically across Warwickshire, but two sites have been withdrawn—one much further to the south, nearer Stratford-upon-Avon, and another immediately south of the proposed site.

The council claims that the Wasperton site should serve Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick and Leamington in terms of its development needs, but I am not convinced, and neither is the public. I would summarise the situation in the following points. First, there is an excess to the actual need for housing, as I have already pointed out; according to the ONS, there is an over-supply of houses. Secondly, the site is 350 metres from the village. Thirdly, there is the site’s proximity to the village school. The site is directly to the south of the village, so the village is threatened by dust and silicates blown over by prevailing winds, from the sand that would be excavated.

That fundamental question of whether the site is actually needed is perhaps the most concerning issue, but there is also the role of the landowner, St John’s College, Oxford. I wrote to the president in the late spring and I was not particularly pleased by the response I received. The college is the wealthiest in Oxford—it does not need the money. Why has it put forward this site for development, when it will be so harmful to the lives of all the residents—the children—of Barford and Wasperton? There was a disingenuous claim that it was making the land available for housing development; it was not. This land will be opened up and dug up. Despite being high-grade agricultural land, it will become an eyesore, open for the extraction of sand and gravel. Even the student body at St John’s College passed a motion to stand against the project. There is widespread concern and dismay that a college with the wealth of St John’s should be allowing this to happen. It does not need to be conceding to sell the land to allow this mining. The national planning policy framework states that MPAs should make provision for a sand and gravel landbank of at least seven years of permitted reserves, but, as I have already said, there is sufficient landbank. It currently stands at eight years, but the numbers in the calculation of how many houses are required do not suggest that it is needed at all.

[*Matt Western*]

So why do we need this material—not just the quantity of housing, as I have said, but the materials that are used themselves? The assumption is that we will continue to use sand and gravel in the same quantities as in the past, but that is not sustainable development. It is not sustainable for our environment, because sand and gravel in construction use so much energy—whether it be in the forging of bricks or other materials such as concrete and so on.

I stated that there are other concerns that relate to proximity. They are the concerns that the villages and communities have themselves. Essentially, it is about the dust emissions and the impact on residents' health and on children's health. Although the county council have proposed measures to reduce dust, they will not prevent the prevailing winds carrying dust over the village, and the proposals do not offer any guarantee that the quarry will not have negative health impacts. The dust from the quarry will contain silica, which can be extremely harmful to the elderly and to young children. As I said, with St Peter's primary school so close by, 170 students will be put at particular risk.

At this point, I would like to remark on the fantastic campaigning work being done by the school. It sees the risks. It recognises the threats, and it is determined to ensure that this quarry is never realised. On that point about the toxicity of the air, the Environmental Working Group, which is a US-based body specialising in research and advocacy, says:

"None of the air quality standards for silica are adequate to protect people living or working near sand mining sites. The danger of airborne silica is especially acute for children...Silica air pollution has become a danger for residents near open sand mining and processing. Children, older adults and others with existing disease are especially at risk."

When we talk about silicates and these very fine materials, we often think about PM10s and PM2.5s. The Minister and I have had exchanges in other debates about the threats of these particles to human health. I believe that she shares with me a real concern about the sort of environment—the air quality—that we should have, particularly for young people. These particulates remind us of those microfibrils in asbestos and how damaging they are to our lungs, particularly to developing young lungs and other organs. These particulates should not be allowed to enter into the atmosphere, certainly not within a couple of hundred metres of a primary school.

The Environmental Working Group has concerns for residents living within 1,500 metres of any excavation site because of this dissipation of dust particles. The evidence that it has produced shows that silica levels measured near open sand mining in Wisconsin and Minnesota—there is no difference between those sites in that part of the world to those in the UK—were at least 10 times higher than the 3 micrograms per cubic metre, which is the recommended limit.

Let me turn to the infrastructure and its unsuitability, including the inadequacy of local highways, which cannot accommodate the development and the air pollution caused by 60 heavy goods vehicles accessing the site each day. There are also wider environmental issues—for example, the irreparable damage to high-grade farmland including versatile land, the 400-year-old hedgerows and trees, and three grade II listed properties, the closest of which is just 100 metres from the quarry site.

Let me mention the example of just one of the agribusinesses on this super high-grade farmland—a fine farm that produces top quality salad ingredients, producing two crops a year. We have to protect such farm producers. The alternative is often to have these crops air freighted in from other countries, but we can produce them locally, and that should be encouraged and protected. The situation also gives rise to a social issue, as long-term farming tenants will be displaced as a result of any quarry.

The Government and the Minister should be aware that there have been more than 750 written letters of objection and a further 300 objections registered online—all opposing Warwickshire County Council's plans. To put that in perspective, there are only 1,500 villagers. The campaign has been relentless and I commend the villagers for their work. I have been determined to support and stand by them throughout. I have written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to raise planning concerns. I met the county council and many residents of the village of Barford. As I mentioned earlier, I also wrote to St John's College itself.

The housing numbers on which this plan is predicated are wrong; they have been overstated. The Office for National Statistics has said that they are significantly higher than the required figures. We are assuming that we are going to be using sands and gravels in the same quantities as we ever did to construct housing and buildings in the same way that we have always done. But there is a revolution in the way in which housing is being built, so it is wrong to make that assumption.

I have mentioned the proximity of the proposed quarry site, which is just 350 metres from the village and a little bit further from the school. The huge issue of air toxicity needs to be addressed. In other countries, there is a legally established minimum exclusion zone. For example, the regulations in Canada state a minimum of, I think, 600 metres. Why are we not adopting that idea? These are the sort of standards that we should be including in the Environment Bill, and in how we consider our environmental practices should we leave the EU.

The community are clear in their demands. They want the Government to legislate to restrict the mining of mineral materials that release silica dust to sites that are a safe distance from residential areas, and they would like the minimum distance set at 1,000 metres. This is not difficult. It should be the sort of legislation that the Government are capable of introducing. This is the only site in the Warwickshire plan that is near to a large village and a school, which is why it should be excluded from Warwickshire County Council's minerals plan. As I said, this land is high-grade farmland. We need high-grade farmland to produce the foods that we depend on so that we have food resilience in this country.

Finally, let me cite—I am sure the Minister will not mind—the Government's own national planning policy framework, which, I remind her, according to DEFRA, seeks to protect the best and most versatile farmland. This is such a case. I ask her to intervene and ensure that this quarry is not allowed.

9 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt

Western) on bringing this debate to the House. I know that he cares about the environment. He took over from me on the all-party electric vehicles group, so we have a connection in caring about the environment, emissions and suchlike. He is right to raise issues that relate to his constituency.

I do, however, hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates there is a due and proper process to be followed in the consideration of local planning, and that given the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, I am unable to comment on the detail of individual minerals local plans. I am sure he knew that I would say that. The Government are committed to ensuring the independence of the examination process for local plans, and local people must have confidence that the examination of local plans for their communities is fair and open, and that decisions are made impartially. I understand that Warwickshire County Council is proposing to submit the Warwickshire minerals plan to the Planning Inspectorate in the coming weeks. Therefore, neither I nor my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—with whom I know he has had many exchanges on this issue—are in a position to directly address the specific concerns raised by his constituents. Consideration of the Warwickshire minerals plan will be done in accordance with the planning system.

I am, however, happy to discuss the crucially important topic of protecting our constituents, local communities and the environment from any impacts of development. National planning policy and guidance requires mineral planning authorities to plan for a steady and adequate supply of aggregates, including crushed rock, sand and gravel, by designating specific sites, preferred areas or areas of search. Designating specific sites provides more certainty about when and where development will take place. However, I fully understand the concerns that people such as the residents of Barford have when development is proposed in their local area, particularly where these concerns include potential development that may result in environmental impacts on their communities, homes and businesses.

We therefore need to be sure that we have clear and strong environmental regulation and planning controls that work for the environment, for people and for business. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the Environment Agency and local planning authorities each have distinct roles with regard to pollution and planning controls to enable this to happen. Anyone with concerns must be confident that the system is designed to listen to those concerns. That is why all the steps of our planning system are supported by a public consultation process through which stakeholders may consider the proposals and voice any concerns they may have to the local planning authority. As we heard, over 1,000 people responded to Warwickshire's minerals local plan consultation in 2018. Clearly, that is a large number of people for the small area of the village.

Once the local planning authority has prepared and consulted on a local plan, as Warwickshire has done, it is submitted to the Secretary of State, who will appoint an inspector to carry out an independent examination. This process is dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate. The examination will assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with the legal and procedural

requirements and whether it is sound. The four tests of soundness are set out in the national planning policy framework.

**Matt Western:** I totally accept that process and how the cogs of local government and so on turn, but my question is actually around the assumptions. Those of us who are quite close to the changes in the whole construction industry and the sorts of housing that we will have in future would say, "Will we be requiring these materials in the same quantity as we have done in the past when modular housing and other forms of construction are coming through and therefore the dependence on and need for sand and gravel will be greatly reduced?"

**Rebecca Pow:** The hon. Gentleman makes a sound point, but that is all assumption, and we have no data. Councils have to work on data in preparing their five-year plan for housing allocation, as they have to with minerals. That is why we have a system for how these things work. They might change in future, but that is all just supposition, if I might be so bold as to say that.

The planning inspector will consider the evidence provided by the local planning authority to support the plan and any representations put forward by local people and other interested parties. The proposed allocation at Barford will be considered as part of that examination, and the inspector will take into account the issues and viewpoints raised in the representations made, including those from residents in Barford regarding the allocation at Wasperton farm. The residents can make the case about whether this amount of crushed gravel is needed right now, but the council has a process for deciding whether it wants to abide by that guidance.

Unfortunately, by its very nature, new development, whether it be housing or mineral extraction, will have some impact on the local environment. It is for that reason that there are clear and defined measures by which development proposals and their potential impact on residents, local communities and the environment are assessed. The national planning policy framework includes a requirement for local plans to be accompanied by a sustainability appraisal, which plays an important part in demonstrating that the local plan reflects sustainability objectives. That has to be taken into account.

The sustainability appraisal of the Warwickshire minerals plan incorporates a strategic environmental assessment, which included an assessment of the site allocation at Wasperton farm. A habitats regulations assessment was also undertaken, which considered the potential of significant effects on habitat sites or species located within Warwickshire and the vicinity. The proposed mineral local plan policy for the allocation at Wasperton farm includes a number of requirements in relation to access, environmental matters and phased restoration of the site. Those considerations will all need to be taken into account if individual planning applications are made.

Given that the proposed site allocation at Wasperton farm is pretty large—85 hectares—any future planning application for quarry activities will need to be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment. That process assesses the potential for environmental effects, including those to land, including agricultural land; air quality, which needs to be considered by the local authority against the local air quality plan; dust; the health of local residents; noise levels; transport; the landscape; and



*[Rebecca Pow]*

local and long-distance views, which I understand was raised by the residents of Barford. It would be remiss of me not to highlight that the process also gives consideration to the potential positive impacts of such a development on the local economy, employment and suchlike.

Similar to the local plan-making process, the environmental impact assessment process requires consultation with stakeholders. That process will allow Warwickshire County Council to determine any planning application, should one be submitted. The local planning authority will also have the power to set conditions to which any approved application must adhere, and the local planning authority can take action if it is deemed that any condition is breached.

I fully appreciate that I have been unable to address the specific concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman and the residents of Barford, but it is right that he is raising those concerns on their behalf, as their Member of Parliament. That is the right thing to do, and I would probably do the same for the residents of Taunton Deane. I hope that my explanation of the planning and permitting system and the measures by which we seek to manage any potential environmental impacts has provided some reassurance.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.9 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 29 October 2019

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

## Colne to Skipton Railway Link

9.30 am

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the proposed reinstatement of the Colne to Skipton railway link.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. It is interesting that the Government have sent the heavy rail Minister to respond to the debate. I hope he will make the commitments to Colne-Skipton that we all want, about long-overdue investment. It is of course my role, as Member of Parliament for Hyndburn, to champion prosperity and encourage investment in the area for the people I represent. That is why I have been so vocal on the issue. If we reinstate transport in the area—particularly the rail link—it will provide an opportunity for east Lancashire and beyond. I thank all the MPs who have come to the debate, and the council leaders and campaigners who have brought the campaign to the place where it is today—where a serious proposition is being considered. That is testimony to their hard work. I particularly want to thank Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership for the campaign that it has run over many years, which is appreciated by all in east Lancashire and west Yorkshire.

What we are talking about is 12 miles of railway, which stands between east Lancashire and west Yorkshire—a third trans-Pennine artery that connects the two, which was taken away many years ago. It would not take a great deal of money to put that rail link back. At the heart of the issue, for many constituents, is the north-south divide. There is a grievance about the fact that little money is spent in the north, and particularly in the area I am concerned with.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does he agree that the fact that we have to fight for 12 miles of railway track seems to make a mockery of the northern powerhouse?

**Graham P. Jones:** My hon. Friend is a tireless campaigner on rail and on the matter in question. She was at the forefront of campaigning to reinstate the Manchester link, from east Lancashire—albeit it is a second-rate one; at least we have got it now. She is quite right. The Institute for Public Policy Research has said that in London, for instance, £708 is spent on transport per head of population, but the average is £289 for the entire north of England. No wonder there is a north-south divide. People in the north see Crossrail 1, which is not yet completed, and Crossrail 2 already set up. That is after past projects such as Heathrow, Thameslink, and even Westminster tube station. All of that investment has cost the Exchequer billions of pounds, and there has been little for the north. It is right that people in the north feel that the Government should commit to the small stretch of 12 miles that we are discussing.

I hear arguments all the time about whether the reinstatement of the line would be economically viable. When will we use different indices for transport investment? The deprivation figures came out two weeks ago and the sub-region in question is the poorest in the country. If an economic case is to be made, there will never be an economic case for the poorest sub-region; at best it will be marginal, so there will never be investment and the indices will continue to plummet as they have. At some point the Government must step back and say that deprivation indices are a reason to invest. That would be the case in most other countries. It would be a question, not of using an economic model about the viability of the line, but of whether we are investing in people. That is the question: are we investing in people, instead of trying to count pounds, shillings and pence and reinvest in London and the south?

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): I am reluctant to say this under the chairmanship of the senior Merseyside Member, but although my constituency is in the Liverpool City Region, all points north and east, from railway stations such as Rainford, Garswood and Newton, go outside Merseyside. In my constituency people feel a strong Lancashire identity. Will my hon. Friend, who is a great champion of his constituency and of transport in the north, agree that we should work across boundary lines as the old county of Lancashire on issues of transport?

**Graham P. Jones:** My hon. Friend makes two points. First, St Helens is occupied Lancashire and needs to be liberated. He is right to say that St Helens looks north towards Lancashire, but there is also a serious point to be made about the importance of connecting east Lancashire to the port of Merseyside and the support that we get from Peel Ports, which involves passing through constituencies such as St Helens North. It is also about giving people in St Helens the opportunity to look in all directions—particularly north—and to have an east-west link available through Preston and the East Lancashire line and over the Pennines. My hon. Friend is right to raise that. The north-west itself benefits from any transport infrastructure investment, wherever it is, because it allows more mobility.

Before I discuss the line itself, I want to conclude what I was saying about the Government's broken economic model, which is just about pounds, shillings and pence, and all the investments in the south. We apply that metric to railways but not to anything else. The Government are happy to hand out grants for town centres or housing, with no expectation of any return. However, as soon as it comes to the railways, there is an expectation of an economic model with some return. The Government abandon the policy that they apply in other cases for deprived areas. I do not understand the logic of that. Surely the logic should be that if transport will bring prosperity, industry, jobs and wages, that is what we should subsidise. We should subsidise rail investment and the railways if we want to lift people out of deprivation—not titivate town centres or whatever else the Government hand out grant money to. The current system for looking at investment is broken.

**Julie Cooper:** My hon. Friend raises an important point about investing in prosperity and people. The Todmorden curve link is an example of what he has

[Julie Cooper]

said. It took years of campaigning to get that short link, but the evidence in Burnley and east Lancashire is that completing that section of railway has brought investment and much-needed jobs to the region.

**Graham P. Jones:** My hon. Friend is right. I do not have to hand the figures for Manchester Road station in Burnley, which is on that link. It is a circuitous route. It is not the old 30 minutes direct into Manchester; it is 60 minutes. None the less, passenger numbers at Accrington station have gone from, I think, 289,000 to 469,000—or thereabouts. I may be corrected afterwards, but it is not far off. That is a huge increase in numbers since the line was put in. The reinstatement of Colne-Skipton could only add to patronage and use of the lines, and investment in those areas.

The reinstatement would probably cost about £360 million. Let me talk about that number. The Government think that £360 million for a deprived area would probably not be money well spent. Not only would it be an investment in people, but if the railway is there for 100 years it comes to £360,000 a year. That would be the capital cost, instead of millions for titivating town centres. I might compare that with my local clinical commissioning group, which spends almost £1 billion in the east Lancashire area annually. We must get some perspective. There is serious ill health and deprivation in the area, but we are reluctant to invest in people and we try to cut margins on the railway. Economically that does not stand up. The Government's policy of investing in other things and giving away grant money seems to me to be a case of looking in the wrong direction. We should be investing where it matters.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): There are a lot of MPs here to support the proposition that the hon. Gentleman is putting forward, and I am glad to add my support. Does he agree that the secret to investment in any area is connectivity, which he has referred to, and that the key to that is a functioning railway line? Does he further agree that the proposed reopening of this line would enable not only better commuting, but more investment potential for these two towns and indeed the whole area, which should be the primary reason for the Government to pursue this proposal?

**Graham P. Jones:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right; all these little bits of links, as I mentioned in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), add value to other sub-regions; they are not just an advantage or an addition for that particular sub-region. These things really matter, and with this particular line we are talking about potentially connecting the port of Hull with the port of Liverpool for manufacturing and the shipment of goods, as well as passenger services. That has a broad connectivity that goes beyond east Lancashire, which is why there is support all the way from Merseyside to Hull for the reinstatement of this line.

Yet we are sitting here with 12 miles missing in the middle, between Skipton and Colne. I want to see that line upgraded to a twin-track railway for freight—I think it is gauge 12, although I will stand corrected if it is not—and built to modern standards. We need to put

back that line, which was cut in 1970, because it will connect two big industrial heartlands and provide opportunity for both passengers and freight. The decision to cut the line back in 1970 was a terrible one, which has mirrored the deprivation indices for east Lancashire, but since then we have seen an increase in passenger numbers on Britain's railways. In fact, they have doubled.

That is certainly what would happen here. Think of the Borders Railway: what a success it has been. The Government said it would not be a success and ScotRail said it would, and who was right? It was not the people in Westminster or the people in the Department for Transport; they were wrong. The people who were right were the people north of the border. That line has been a huge success, and there should be a lesson there to us all about listening to mandarins in Whitehall instead of investing in and listening to local people.

Most of the route between Skipton and Colne is flat and level, and can be walked in a few hours. Some bridges need to be rebuilt, and in a couple of places—particularly at Earby—major road works are needed. However, in the words of the DfT's 2018 report presented to the Transport Minister last December, there are “no showstoppers” preventing us from putting those 12 miles back.

As I said previously, the Skipton to Colne link has widespread support throughout the local community. It is important to say that it is also backed regionally and by businesses, and regularly features in the media. I think it is on the list of 13 schemes that the Government are considering for rail line reinstatement. The campaign has more than 500 individual paid-up members and 50 businesses are signed up, as well as other organisations. Key businesses include Peel Ports, Drax—which is having problems getting to the power plant there—and Skipton Building Society, among many.

The project also has the support of all the MPs in the area. I note that the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) is here; he is a campaigner for the rail link and I pay credit to his campaigning, as I do to that of others—I do not think there is anybody, either candidate or MP, who is against the reinstatement. We have even had co-operation from Yorkshire, and that is remarkable. We just need some signs saying, “Welcome to Lancashire” when we reinstate the line.

**Julie Cooper:** On the point about the widespread support for this project, does my hon. Friend agree that it is hugely disappointing that the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), visited and made some very positive comments, which raised hopes in the area, only to have them dashed recently?

**Graham P. Jones:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. We have had highs and lows on this issue that we should not have had. There has been a bit of dither and it has gone on for too long; today's debate is about asking the Minister to make a firm commitment as we are going into a general election.

Returning to look at the service more widely, if passenger services were to go on the new Skipton to Colne railway line, they would be building on an existing success story. The Airedale line, which runs from Leeds and Bradford via Shipley and Keighley to Skipton, was modernised in the 1990s. Since then it has seen strong



growth, and the Airedale line train services are now very popular. Last year alone, over 1.2 million passengers used Skipton station. The Airedale line is often described by experts as the flagship railway line of the north, and we need just 12 miles to connect to that.

It seems very straightforward that this line should go in and connect to such a successful railway line, just 12 miles away. What it would bring to the towns of Pendle, Burnley, my own Accrington and the Hyndburn constituency, with a population in excess of a quarter of a million, would be a remarkable transformation. We would be on a new network with new opportunities. That is not an insignificant population; it is a significant population in the immediate catchment area alone. I do not include Blackburn, Ribble Valley or Preston, which are also on the line—in fact, the line goes right through to Blackpool—and would also benefit, as would areas further afield, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North has said of St Helens.

The project will help not only east Lancashire, but the north-west and the north, so we must look at the wider advantages. There is a sticking-point at Earby, I admit, but as the DFT report says, I do not think this is a deal-breaker. A solution must be found that will minimise the impact on local residents, and I am mindful of that, but it is not something that cannot be overcome by engineers.

I will return briefly to mention that freight and manufacturing are a crucial issue. This is a manufacturing area; I often hear the hon. Member for Pendle say that east Lancashire is a manufacturing hub, but if it is a manufacturing hub, why do we not have a freight rail link in? Why are we not investing in this line and managing to ship goods around the world via the two ports east and west of east Lancashire? I am asking the question. Having the heavy rail Minister here, as I pointed out earlier, is important, because we must not do what is being suggested and put in light rail passenger transport. We must invest for the future, for business, for manufacturing and for prosperity—not just to transport passengers around.

I will touch on an important point at this stage. Network Rail has said to me in reply that it does not have a freight rail terminal anywhere near east Lancashire. There is an ideal site at Huncoat power station in my Hyndburn constituency, a brownfield site that is being redeveloped. I ask the Minister to comment on this: while I know these are matters for the private sector, if those 12 miles go in for heavy goods and the Government actively invest in this rail line, it is obvious that they should actively pursue a rail freight terminal for east Lancashire.

We have the road network, which at certain times is not full to capacity—a long way short of capacity, particularly in the evenings. It would serve the manufacturing base of east Lancashire if this line were put back in to the ports and beyond and we had that rail freight terminal. That is a crucial issue. If we are going to put the investment in, let us put in the other corresponding investments too.

If the project was given the go-ahead in early 2020, we could expect a new passenger service to be running as early as 2025-26. This is not a massive scheme for the DFT. It is something that we, as a nation and as a

region, should be pursuing, and we should be pursuing it actively, not hesitating or holding back. This conversation has gone on for too long.

As I come to the end of my comments, I note that the proposal is backed by Transport for the North, which has provided evidence that the scheme should go ahead. It has published its report on the strategic transport plan for the next 30 years, the TfN STP, which has conclusively shown that there will be a massive and transformational boost to the deprived economy of east Lancashire, should this reinstatement go ahead. That will be achieved by bringing all of east Lancashire within one hour of central Leeds and Bradford, and improving connectivity with elsewhere. The scheme has TfN's full support, which is worth saying, and it is part of the section of TfN's investment programme titled: "Specific Interventions before 2027—Proposed Early Phases of Northern Powerhouse Rail and Additional TfN Priorities". TfN is an active stakeholder, along with the Department for Transport and Network Rail, trying to help and input into the development of the scheme.

I say this with a general election possibly around the corner: we in the Labour party have committed to reinstating this link for heavy rail without hesitation. Furthermore, we have committed to electrifying this line, which is needed because the Airedale line is electrified. I am also pretty certain that the Labour party will support private sector investment in a freight rail terminal in my constituency.

We need to move quickly, for Britain, the north and this region, but we also need to look beyond: when the east Lancs line is done, we need to start looking at the Accrington to Stubbins connection. We need to put back what was taken away and make these once-proud towns proud again. Let us put in the investment that they deserve. When the cotton industry was thriving, 25% of our economy's foreign currency exports were derived from it and off the backs of those workers. They deserve better today, and that investment should be put in. We in the Labour party are committed to doing so as a matter of course.

Finally, I am interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on those deprived communities and how he can stop their fall down the deprivation ladder. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) is here. Burnley is the eighth most deprived town in the country, Blackburn is ninth and my constituency of Hyndburn is 16th. The hon. Member for Pendle is here, and he can perhaps say where Pendle is on the ladder; I think it is about 20th or 22nd. Those four constituencies, which would benefit from the proposed line, are among the poorest.

This is about investing in people. When we use metrics in considering whether to put those 12 miles of track back in, we should look at life expectancy, which is 10 years lower there than everywhere else, and we should look at the £1 billion cost to the CCG of not investing in people and leaving deprived communities to fail. Given that the railway will last for 100 years, we should not look at the small amount of £360 million and say that there is no economic return, and effectively—as happened on Merseyside—throw these people under a bus. I am interested to hear the Minister's reply.

[Graham P. Jones]

9.53 am

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. As a former Transport Minister, I wish to make a few comments.

The biggest challenge facing our rail network is dealing with the growth that we are experiencing. Capacity is the biggest question. We have more services on our network now than at any point in British history, with 140,000 services per week, and we have more passengers on our network than ever before, with 1.8 billion passenger journeys per year. That is more than 1 billion more passengers carried on our railways every year since privatisation. A huge transformation has happened in our rail network.

That has been achieved without compromising safety—we have a fantastic safety record, which is obviously at the heart of the rail industry. The challenge is putting more capacity into our network to meet the demand, having turned this industry around from a declining to a succeeding sector. That will be met in a variety of ways. The first, which attracts most attention, is obviously the construction of new lines, including HS2 more than anything else. That is a controversial project for some, but I am a big supporter of it. We will also see capacity delivered via bigger and longer trains. The new rolling stock is transformative—just look at the new Azumas serving the east coast main line. We will also deliver capacity by opening new lines and reopening lines. That is at the heart of this project: reopening an important line that will connect Yorkshire and Lancashire.

I support this project. It is quite straightforward: it covers only 12 miles, there is existing trackbed, and it will connect people and jobs. The Minister will consider a variety of good reasons as he takes his work forward, but let me highlight some. First, the area already has congested roads, particularly in Colne—in fact, the M65 seems to end in Boundary Mill's car park. The rest of Colne can also be quite congested. Improving public transport in the area would be one way to improve the quality of life in Colne.

**Julie Cooper:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we are to take the Government's commitments on the environment seriously, at the heart of it should be a commitment to enhancing public transport?

**Andrew Jones:** There is absolutely no doubt that transport is a significant contributor to the carbon in our atmosphere, which is why the Government are taking action. I agree with the hon. Lady's basic principle, but to say that the Government are not doing anything would be wrong, because there has been record investment in public transport and in our rail network, with the control period 6 budget of £48 billion being the biggest in British history. But yes, the environmental impact of improving rail connections for the people whom this line would serve would be a real enhancement and is one reason why this is a good project.

The economic case was made by the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones), and it has been made consistently by the two Members at each end of the proposed line, neither of whom can speak because they are Ministers—one of them is here. The Minister for

Africa, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), is a long-standing champion of the scheme, for all the reasons we have explored in the debate. Improving his area is his top priority. At the other end of the line, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith), is also unable to speak, but I know that he is in support. However, it is not only the areas at both ends that the line would serve; transport connections would improve for communities much more widely. That would certainly be true of Burnley and the Aire valley, which would be clear beneficiaries, as would the Hyndburn area.

The trans-Pennine line is critical for the north of England's economy, but it is congested. The Government are responding with a £2.9 billion trans-Pennine rail upgrade, but to really transform the northern economies we need to add capacity in lots of different ways. The trans-Pennine rail upgrade, Northern Powerhouse Rail and the Skipton to Colne line all have a role to play, which is why I am pleased that the Government are taking this project forward through its development phase.

As a former Transport Minister, I have met campaigners and businesses who have been strong in their support for the project. We should pay tribute to their tenacity in keeping going, because it is not always easy to get transport projects off the starting blocks in the United Kingdom, and tenacity is a key ingredient in doing so. I met haulage businesses and people seeking to move significant amounts of freight from one part of the country to another, as well as people who simply recognise that some parts of the north have more vacancies and some parts have people who need work, and that transport is required to connect the two.

I am afraid that I must gently challenge the hon. Member for Hyndburn, who said that the Government are not seeking to invest in the north. If we look at the data published by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and covering the three-year period that we are right in the middle of, we see that the data from the national infrastructure and construction pipeline shows that the northern region has higher per capita transport spending than the midlands or the south—it is £248 per person for the north and £236 per person for the midlands and the south.

We can combine that with the fact that the biggest project currently underway on the railways other than HS2 is the transport and rail upgrade, and we can look at the fact that rolling stock in the north is being renewed for the first time in a generation. In only a few weeks' time, the Minister will be able to say something that no Rail Minister has been able to say for a generation, which is that trains in the north are of a higher calibre than they have probably ever been, and they will be better than in any other part of our country.

**Graham P. Jones:** The hon. Gentleman offers a different perspective from that of the Institute for Public Policy Research, which says that there has been a lack of investment in the north. I simply say to him that the public will ask this about the investment that is supposed to be going into the north, "East Lancashire is very deprived; whereabouts in east Lancashire will it go? I am an east Lancashire resident—show me the money."

**Andrew Jones:** I have obviously seen the IPPR reports and the claims made, which frankly I think are not

correct. The methodology of its reports is flawed in lots

of different ways. That is why it is important to go back to the authoritative figures produced by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which give us the data.

I think that we need more investment in transport right across the country, because I am a great believer in transport's ability to drive economic growth, create opportunity and improve the environment. We should not spend time using methodology that is deeply flawed, frankly, simply to make a political point; we should look at the authoritative data, and I have already highlighted the numbers.

I will go back to my point about rolling stock, because this is a great opportunity for the north. We have not had decent rolling stock for a generation. The Pacer trains may have been a good idea at the time, when those who were managing our railways were taking cost out, because they were in precipitate decline. Those trains may have been the right answer then, but they are not the right answer now. That is why it is such a good thing that they are going. Many have already gone—a number went last week. We will see that continue to happen in the weeks ahead. This is not just on Northern; we are seeing new rolling stock fleets across trans-Pennine as well, and the new Azumas are entering service on the east coast main line. The transition from being utterly inadequate to having top-quality new rolling stock in the north is fantastic, and we should celebrate it.

**Graham P. Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way just on that one point?

**Andrew Jones:** Go on then.

**Graham P. Jones:** As I understand it—I will stand corrected if the hon. Gentleman can tell me otherwise—the new rolling stock will not be on the section from Burnley to Colne to Pendle; that section will have revamped old stock. Can he update us on that point?

**Andrew Jones:** Some of the rolling stock that will be entering service across the north is indeed refurbished rolling stock. The rolling stock entering service on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line is cascaded stock that has been refurbished to a condition that is as good as new, and it is absolutely fantastic. The response from the travelling public of Harrogate has been very positive, because it is a step change from the Pacers, which have served my community for a very long time.

I do not accept the basic position of Opposition Members that the Government have failed to invest in the north and are failing to modernise, because that simply is not true. There is not just the new rolling stock and the trans-Pennine upgrade; we also have the northern hub, which is connecting Piccadilly and Victoria in Manchester. The Todmorden curve opened in 2015, following a £10 million investment, and reconnected Burnley to Manchester—I think that was the first time that service had ever been operated. Those are good examples of investment in east Lancashire that is transforming the local economies, because transport investment is a driver of economic growth. That is why the current Government have been so strong in their consistent delivery of transport investment.

May I close by urging the Rail Minister to press on with his good work as he invests, modernises the railway and recognises the benefits that it brings to communities



[Andrew Jones]

right across the UK? This is one project that has to be considered and taken forward, for all the positive reasons that we have discussed in this debate so far, and which has been championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle and others right across the area. As the hon. Member for Hyndburn said, it has support right across the political spectrum, at local and national level. For those reasons, I urge the Minister to press on.

10.5 am

**John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), a fellow Member of Parliament from Yorkshire. He made a very knowledgeable speech. Indeed, it was a statesmanlike speech, following the statesmanlike speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones), whom I congratulate on securing the debate.

I am a relative newcomer to this issue, on the basis that I was not re-elected to Parliament until 2017, but I have asked a number of questions on the issue, and I notice that every time I or someone else asks a question from the Labour side, there is quite rightly somewhere in the answer the line, "I am sure the hon. Member will recognise the contributions of the hon. Members for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) and for Shipley (Philip Davies) and the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith)." I do indeed recognise that. This is an all-party campaign. We even had Northern Ireland backing us earlier in the debate. The campaign certainly unites the great counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire like nothing else.

I have discussed the issue a couple of times with the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon. Obviously, he was formerly the Government Chief Whip. I saw him on the Airedale line two or three times on a Friday evening. I would be going to the pub; he would be going back down to London to run the country. But we would have a word about this scheme, to which he is committed. In a way, I am surprised, given such heavyweight commitment and given that it is now two years since the feasibility study was announced, that more rapid progress has not been made. Obviously, I understand that people such as my good friend and parliamentary neighbour the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon have had other things on their mind, but I say gently that we do now need to advance this cause more rapidly.

There are advantages to the Skipton to Colne scheme—we have heard some of them mentioned—that other schemes do not have. One is speed; the potential to implement this scheme speedily is something that no other trans-Pennine option has. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn mentioned, the line closed in 1970. The tragedy is that it survived Beeching and then was closed in 1970. It was opened in 1848. I was interested in hearing about potential dates, if we could get going, as to when it could be reopened. We should certainly commit today to start having the line rebuilt to celebrate its 175th anniversary in 2023, because unlike other lines that potentially could take freight across the Pennines, it has a relatively short-term horizon.

The economic growth arguments have been well made, but they apply equally across the Pennines in

Yorkshire. It would be a massive economic boost if people from my constituency of Keighley could commute to Manchester—could have the option not just of Leeds and Bradford, but of Manchester. There could be holiday traffic to Manchester airport as well. This scheme could provide a great economic boost to Yorkshire as well as Lancashire.

I, too, place on the record my particular thanks to SELRAP. The last six months have been a strange period for those of us who have been campaigning on this issue, because all sorts of reports have been coming out about the nature of the Government's feasibility study; all sorts of rumours have been coming out. I want more than rumours. SELRAP has been briefed, as have other stakeholders, by Government officials and Network Rail, but Ministers have been reluctant to put the information formally in the public domain. I therefore have a series of questions, on which I hope Ministers can help us.

What is the estimated cost of this scheme? My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn mentioned a figure of £200 million or £300 million. Some rumours are that the Steer consultants are saying that it is more like £800 million or £900 million. Unless we can see the report, it is hard to analyse it.

There has been a great deal of debate about freight. Officials have intimated that the case for freight does not yet stack up and they are now going to look at other potential freight routes across the Pennines and how long it would take to implement them. I would have thought that after two years that work would already have been done.

Estimates for passenger traffic are now in the public domain. SELRAP tells me that the consultant's estimate for a new park-and-ride station at Earby is a mere 40,000. Well, I am told that at Colne there are already 80,000 passengers a year, with poor rail links to the rest of Lancashire and Manchester. Skipton has 1.2 million passengers a year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn mentioned. There is strong support from industry, but SELRAP tells me that Peel Ports and Drax were not formally interviewed by the consultants until this September.

I watched the rugby this weekend, as I am sure many others did. South Africa were holding on against Wales in the last few minutes, looking to kick into touch. Some campaigners are saying—I cannot possibly believe it—that the officials are intimating that this scheme is not being rigorously pursued and that Ministers are looking for the touchline until a general election. I would not credit myself with such cynicism. There are growing fears among some campaigners that this is not a priority, but it should be a priority.

Across the parties, we share a belief that the towns of the north, as opposed to the great cities, have not had a great deal. The towns fund is welcome. The prospectus for the towns fund comes out this week, with £25 million for Shipley and Keighley. I am very grateful for that, but this scheme would trump that in economic benefit. It would be a symbol of the Government's commitment to towns. Whatever happens in the election, I hope that we can make rapid progress on this.

I had a brief chat with the shadow Chancellor recently, who reminded me that he signed an early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for Pendle in 2012. The

shadow Chancellor was in the top six signatures, such as his commitment. The hon. Member for Pendle managed to get an eclectic group in the top six. He also managed to attract the support of George Galloway, so there definitely was broad support. I was pleased to see that.

Transport for the North has been mentioned. It is important. Whichever Government are in office after the next election, Transport for the North needs to go to the next stage. As well as being a partner for Government, it needs to be a strong advocate for the north and, if necessary, take a slightly different line from Whitehall. It is a challenge for John Cridland, who chairs that group. He is coming to the end of his five-year term in 2020. He was at the Confederation of British Industry for five years. He said he was a “Star Trek” fan at that point and believed in five-year journeys. I do not know whether he believes in a second term at Transport for the North.

I understand that John Cridland is on the Government’s review of high-speed rail. It is interesting that he wears those two hats. If he suggests that high-speed rail will not go to Yorkshire or, if it does, that it will go via Manchester, it will be an interesting position for the man who chairs Transport for the North and is meant to be an advocate for the north. I think he has a chance, on this issue, to come out and publicly say, “Transport for the North won’t brook further delays from Network Rail or the Department for Transport but wants a decision this year.” We might get an election for Christmas—we will have to see what happens today—but above all we want the Skipton to Colne line to get the go-ahead by the new year.

**Sir George Howarth (in the Chair):** There is ample time available. I remind the Front-Bench speakers that they are under no obligation to fill up that time. I also remind the Minister to leave some time for the mover of the motion to respond.

10.14 am

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) for securing this debate. In his characteristic style, he set out a concrete case for the Skipton-Colne line. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to this crucial debate, which is really about the future economy of the whole of the north. It is a pleasure to respond to this debate.

We are talking about just 12 miles of railway. Investment in this piece of infrastructure could be transformative for the north; that is why Labour has committed to that as part of our rail enhancement programme. If there is to be a general election, we will be eager to press ahead with this scheme, which is about rebalancing the economy. It will not only provide crucial opportunities to transport passengers and goods, but transform our economy and the opportunities for people in constituencies such as those that my hon. Friends represent.

We see major investment in the ports in Liverpool and on the Humber, but we must get the connectivity between them right. When I have discussed this with Transport for the North, it has stressed the importance of improving the trans-Pennine route, to which, I regret

to say, the Government have not given the necessary enhancement for freight passage, which is important for establishing an east-west connection. The Skipton-Colne line—the west-east line—will complete the circle, ensuring that we get proper transportation.

I have spoken to businesses in the north, particularly Drax, which would benefit greatly. It says that the line would not only bring about improvements in the transportation of biomass along the transatlantic route to Liverpool, but improve the resilience of the infrastructure. Drax also depends on Immingham port, but we know that there are flooding risks there, so to secure our energy supply, we need to ensure there is an opportunity in the east and the west. At the moment, if biomass travels around our country, it either goes south, via Birmingham, or further north. These 12 miles of connectivity would make such a difference to Drax, which receives around 24 consignments each day. There would be the opportunity for storage of additional biomass along the line, which would build up the resilience of our energy sector, so this is an important project for us.

If the trans-Pennine route had a full upgrade, it would deliver for not only freight but passengers. Reliability is no longer a consideration for this Government, but it absolutely would be for Labour. Labour committed to electrification, and then the Government did, too; but then they withdraw that offer. This is a crucial project. We can go further than that: if we get freight connectivity right, we can reinvest and make the northern powerhouse actually happen, because this is about the wider economy in the north.

We need a modal shift for freight from roads to rail. That is crucial because of the environmental catastrophe facing our planet, for which we are responsible. Around a third of our carbon footprint is in the transport sector. The Government have not made the necessary progress on that. We believe that modal shift will be a game changer. In the transport sector, we need a 15% reduction of our carbon expenditure, year on year, for the next 10 years. The shift from road to rail, not only for passengers, but particularly for goods, will make a big difference.

We want to open up opportunities. Labour is putting forward a smart logistics strategy that not only connects industry to the rail freight sector, but opens up more opportunities for light freight and the accompanying development of rolling stock. We also provide for a transition between passengers and goods; we will look at peaks and flows in usage and time, so that rolling stock can accommodate both. We will ensure that far more goods can be transported across the network, while also investing in passenger enhancements. Of course, Labour’s plan, which, we must remind ourselves, will bring rail back into public ownership, so that the public have real control over our network, will also ensure connectivity across the network, which will bring the enhancements that people want.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn reminded us about the investment issues. I have to agree with him that, as the research shows, the north has not been well served. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) raised the issue of Pacer trains; I have to relate my experience from the weekend. I was on a Pacer train travelling from York, and of course rain was pouring in through the ceiling. It is

[*Rachael Maskell*]

2019! That shows the challenges that we face with our trains in the north. We need to ensure that things move forward.

We have a genuine opportunity here to invest in freight. The line will play a crucial role in rail infrastructure, which will result in the growth of new manufacturing and reinvestment in industry in the north. Of course, if we have strong freight paths, manufacturing can become more reliant on just-in-time manufacturing processes, smart logistics, as I have highlighted, and the movement of goods on our railways.

It is vital that that economic opportunity is brought to the north. The whole northern powerhouse investment in rail, including the trans-Pennine rail route upgrade and investment in the Skipton-Colne route, could bring around 850,000 good-quality jobs to the north. We Labour MPs understand the value of that; it is in the title of our party. This is about investment delivering for local people. We want growth in those opportunities.

We also want the development of new passenger routes. We need to make sure that new housing developments are connected to our main infrastructure. We want better connectivity in planning across the country, to ensure that all investments, including in the economy and in housing, are linked to our rail network. We would then have a strong passenger offer and a strong goods offer; our infrastructure investment will deliver both those things.

I also highlight the opportunity that establishing the right connectivity between ports in the east and the west will bring about in the wider economy of the country. We are a crucial link between the rest of Europe and the Atlantic and Ireland. Better connectivity through the Skipton-Colne route could well mean that we become a proper transport path, whereby goods touch base in our country, and companies use us as a corridor for goods. Again, that is really important for economic growth and opportunity, but will also create a new transport role for the UK in Europe. This investment will not just be expenditure; it will drive revenue for the Treasury, so it is really important that we consider the overall investment programme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn talks about what will happen over the next 100 years. It is worth reminding ourselves that we are coming up to 200 years of the railways. I am sure that the annual spend he calculated will go down significantly if we bear in mind how well we build our railways and their longevity.

My hon. Friends the Members for Keighley (John Grogan), for Burnley (Julie Cooper) and for Hyndburn have highlighted that this debate is not just about infrastructure, including track and trains; it is very much about people. It is about jobs, opportunities and aspiration, which is very much what Labour wants from any investment.

Network Rail has put forward its proposals, but it is being challenged by Transport for the North, which believes that engineering can be streamlined in such a way that costs can be reduced. We will see what happens with that challenge. However, when we are considering investment, we must think holistically, as my hon. Friends have pointed out. We should consider not just the

hardcore infrastructure, but the opportunity that such infrastructure opens up, including opportunity for new investment in jobs, and of course the wider returns.

The proposal before us will be transformative of the north, even though it covers only 12 miles of infrastructure. Labour is absolutely committed to opening up such opportunities for the economy and communities, and to the growth of our railways. We will schedule our enhancement programmes so that they are completed in a sequence that means that they will drive opportunity, not only for cities but, as my hon. Friends have said, for towns.

We will stretch that opportunity over a 30-year planning process. We can then schedule the jobs and the skills required to see real enhancement grow across the network, and to bring revenue back into the Treasury and, of course, the Department for Transport. That will then allow for reinvestment as we grow our public transport and freight paths. We will see that crucial modal shift and the necessary environmental change.

We are really optimistic. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough says that his Government have really invested in public transport; we remind him that, looking at the whole of transport, his Government have cut 3,000 bus routes, and buses play a vital role in building connectivity across the whole transport system.

**Andrew Jones:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachael Maskell:** If I may, I will just finish—

**Andrew Jones:** I will just correct the hon. Lady on this point.

**Sir George Howarth (in the Chair):** Order. If the hon. Lady says she is finishing her sentence, she must be allowed to finish her sentence.

**Rachael Maskell:** We see the whole of the transport network—rail, buses, active travel—all working in a well co-ordinated way. I am happy to give way.

**Andrew Jones:** It is always fascinating to hear a Labour transport spokesman doing their very best to justify—

**Rachael Maskell:** I am a spokeswoman; I am not a man.

**Andrew Jones:** Yes—I beg the hon. Lady's pardon. They try to justify why so little happened under the long period of Labour Government, when they electrified just 10 miles in 13 years. This Government do not cut bus routes; this Government do not operate bus routes. This Government have actually maintained their support of the bus network through the bus service operators grant, and extra funding was announced by the Chancellor in just the last few weeks. Can the hon. Lady perhaps help this debate by clarifying how much money will be required to deliver this magnificent wish list that she has just identified? Could she perhaps quantify the investment required and detail where it might come from?

**Rachael Maskell:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. He will see in the programmes that we have set out, particularly on rail, that we will repropose



current expenditure across the network that is being wasted on privatised projects, and that investment will go back into driving down costs. In fact, the rail industry says there will be a 30% saving if we put in place the scheduling that we propose. We want savings to be made from current wastage, and greater investment in driving forward and delivering our enhancement programme.

We are talking about just £360 million for this project and the opportunities that it will bring. I can commit today to Labour being right behind my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn and all the rail campaign groups, as well as the local councillors, who have done so much work over the years to support projects such as this.

10.28 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. Already you have chastised my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), and for him to get chastised, something really bad must have happened—

**Sir George Howarth (in the Chair):** Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to see me chastise somebody, he is going the right way about it. [*Laughter.*]

**Chris Heaton-Harris:** My word—I know when I am put in my place, Sir George. However, I was just making the point that my hon. Friend is one of the most mild-mannered men in this place, and he would never deliberately do anything to upset anybody.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham P. Jones) on securing this debate on the Colne to Skipton line. He made many a point about how my Department often gets its investment decisions wrong, so I thank him for making the case against nationalisation so well.

I thank the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) for her contribution, and I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place. I also thank the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn)—or occupied Lancashire, as I believe it is now called—and the Skipton and East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership for all the work that it has done in the area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough is a former Rail Minister. In fact, he is my immediate predecessor. I know that when I remark on his comments I am, as someone said to me just before the debate, standing on the shoulders of a giant, so I am wary and I listened to his comments assiduously. I note his ongoing strong support for the project. He is absolutely right to highlight the new and refurbished rolling stock that continues to enter the northern rail market—a demonstration of the Government's commitment to deliver on their promises to the north of our country. He also served under the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who, as was noted by the hon. Member for Hyndburn, visited twice to see what could be done with the project in February 2018 and January 2019. I am well aware of his long-standing and continuing support for the campaign and project.

Before I get into the main part of my speech, I should mention, as the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan)

noted that I do all the time, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith) and also my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), who is sitting to my right. The two of them attended a symbolic ribbon cutting of the project in 2014. The hon. Member for Keighley mentioned the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle, which many people signed. I know the shadow Chancellor signed it, but I believe he was in a position at that time of signing just about every early-day motion. His support for the project was none the less welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle mentioned the project in his maiden speech, as well as in other speeches. In research for this debate I read his contributions from the Westminster Hall debate that he secured on 26 April 2017. It is good that we have strong cross-party backing for the project.

I gently remind the hon. Member for Burnley that after years of campaigning for the Todmorden curve under a previous Labour Government, it was a Conservative-led Government who invested the cash to facilitate travel between her constituency and Manchester when the link opened in 2015.

**Julie Cooper:** The Todmorden curve railway link would never have been made had it not been for the Labour-led Burnley Council.

**Graham P. Jones:** And Hyndburn Council.

**Julie Cooper:** And Hyndburn Council. I beg your pardon.

**Chris Heaton-Harris:** I remind the hon. Lady that the MP at the time, who also campaigned, was from a different party, but that is not the point.

I share the interest of the hon. Member for Hyndburn in ensuring that the corridor between east Lancashire and Yorkshire, in which the former rail line is located, has the transport infrastructure that it needs to flourish and grow. I agree that the potential role of a reopened Skipton-Colne line needs to be considered carefully. It is the case, as he kind of made clear, that the Government are investing in transport in east Lancashire and the north more widely. As he knows, the Government are committed to creating a northern powerhouse to rebalance our economy.

Investing in and fuelling the northern economy provides a great opportunity for the north to be at the forefront of the UK's economic success for decades to come. I am a midlands MP. I welcome investment in the north because it drives investment in the midlands, too. A national benefit would flow from that. I want to gently correct, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough did, the incorrect IPPR study of investment in the regions. As he correctly pointed out, the investment is £236 for the midlands, £236 for the south and £248 for the north. However, it does not matter because the investment continues to grow, with projects coming forth that really will drive economic growth. Our continuing commitment to transforming rail connectivity across the north is evidenced both by the Prime Minister's recent announcement on Northern Powerhouse Rail and the continued development of and investment in the trans-Pennine route upgrade programme.

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

As the Prime Minister reminded us when he visited Rotherham a few weeks ago, the north gave the world the railway. He said:

“And yet two centuries later, in this birthplace of the railways, we can do so much better.”

When he was in Yorkshire the previous week he reaffirmed his commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail and slightly challenged people by saying that he eagerly awaited the emergence of the plans. He also noted that there has been significant Government investment, with 2,000 additional services now operating every week, £500 million on new trains and £100 million on refurbishment of the rest of the fleet, including wi-fi and power sockets as well as the electrification of the railways in the north-west. A huge amount has gone in.

Before I turn to the Colne-Skipton line, I want to highlight the significant transport investment already under way in Lancashire and across the north to support the northern powerhouse programme. Through the growth deal process, the Government have provided the Lancashire local enterprise partnership with £8 million to support the Hyndburn Burnley/Pendle growth corridor investment, designed to maximise the benefits provided by the M65 in that corridor. Our third growth deal with the Lancashire LEP provides further funding for the M65 corridor—junctions 4 to 6—which will bring further benefit to east Lancashire and the constituents of the hon. Member for Hyndburn. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle who pushed for a study of the work. He is a very busy Member of Parliament.

I am sure the hon. Member for Hyndburn is aware of the proposals for the Colne to Foulridge—or A56 villages—bypass. When consulting on its east Lancashire highways and transport master plan in the autumn of 2013, Lancashire County Council set out six possible options for the scheme. It identified two that would potentially impact on the reinstatement of the railway at a future date. I understand that Lancashire County Council has not actively developed the options any further, pending the outcome of a centrally funded Highways England study that is under way.

More widely in east Lancashire we have, through the LEP, funded improvements to the Blackburn to Bolton rail corridor, and have enabled a more frequent service to operate between Blackburn and Manchester Victoria. That is not the first improvement that we have delivered on the rail network between east Lancashire and Greater Manchester. Thanks to our regional growth fund, under the coalition we reinstated the Todmorden curve, which the hon. Member for Burnley mentioned in her intervention. As part of the Great North Rail project, we have invested in improvements across the region. That is bringing major improvements to the northern rail network, one of the largest rail networks in the country, creating better journeys for passengers, supporting trade and creating, as the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) would like, a stronger economy.

Through the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises and investment in modern trains, we are delivering a host of better, more comfortable, more frequent, faster and more direct journeys. All the Pacer trains, which were possibly once loved but have absolutely outstayed their welcome, will be replaced by a mix of brand-new trains and trains refurbished and upgraded

to an as-new standard. Investment in the northern rail network includes improvements to the Calder Valley line between Manchester, Rochdale and Bradford and Leeds—the other key current rail link in the central trans-Pennine corridor—and includes line speed improvements and improved signalling, resulting in increased resilience, more capacity and improved journey times. That is good progress, but we need to go further.

For the Hyndburn constituency, our investment has meant more frequent, hourly Sunday services to Colne from May 2018 and additional funding for the East Lancashire community rail partnership. As part of Northern’s £500 million investment, passengers in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hyndburn will benefit from new trains on the York to Blackpool service via Accrington later this year.

Finally, the Department announced in March 2019 that Highways England would work with Transport for the North on a study looking at options for improving road links between the M65 and North and West Yorkshire. The output of that study will inform consideration of the case for future investment. Those are all important building blocks of the northern powerhouse.

The line from Colne to Skipton was closed in 1970. The Skipton East Lancashire Rail Action Partnership, which is possibly one of the best action groups I have come across in my short time as Rail Minister, and certainly one of the most effective—I think I had a letter from the group two days after I was announced as Minister—was established in spring 2001 to protect the former railway track bed from development so that it could, in due course, be reinstated. As I have detailed, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said, former Rail Ministers have met the partnership many times, and I join them in paying tribute to its work over the past 18 years to raise the profile of the case for reinstating the 12-mile link between east Lancashire and Yorkshire.

The hon. Member for Hyndburn will be glad to hear that the Skipton-Colne scheme is clearly referenced as a scheme in the “determine” phase of the rail enhancements pipeline published earlier this month. As my officials outlined at last week’s meeting, hosted in Westminster by the hon. Gentleman, the focus of that phase is on establishing the case for progressing the scheme. That means identifying the improved outcomes sought for passengers, freight and the wider economy, and considering a wide range of potential interventions that could deliver those benefits.

The Government assess the case for progressing schemes through a five-case business case that takes fully into account the wider strategic and social case for investment, in addition to economic, financial, commercial and managerial aspects. We remain committed to enhancing rail connectivity across the north. The ongoing work on Skipton-Colne makes a very important contribution to that, particularly on the important issue of the provision of capacity and capability for trans-Pennine freight.

The first stage of feasibility work carried out last year confirmed the engineering feasibility of reinstating a rail link between Colne and Skipton to modern railway standards. It also confirmed the strategic case for a rail link between east Lancashire, which has local authority districts that the hon. Gentleman himself described as the most economically deprived in England, and the

Leeds city region, as well as for improved rail connectivity for freight between Mersey and east coast ports and inland terminals.

The hon. Gentleman will recall that during a visit to Colne earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell, the former Secretary of State for Transport, announced that he had asked for further feasibility work to be carried out, in order to challenge the cost of the scheme and to establish whether there would be sufficient freight demand, before making a decision on whether a reinstatement scheme should progress to the next stage of the rail enhancements pipeline.

I thank the hon. Member for Keighley for highlighting the towns fund, which will hopefully help towns and communities across his constituency and the north in general. He raised a couple of questions about the feasibility study. I am happy to share the December 2018 strategic outline business case with the partnership, so that it can understand the sorts of issues that we rightly have to tackle as a Government to ensure that the criteria that we have set are fulfilled, and that we can deliver projects that offer value for money and deliver the required economic outputs. Perhaps that can be the hon. Gentleman's Christmas present. It is not quite the Christmas present that he asked for, but it is part of the way to it.

There are lots of important considerations, because there are challenges for the project. I am sure that the project can answer those challenges, but it is important to highlight them so that they are open and public, and so that people can work together to overcome them, as I believe has been the case up until this point. The first consideration was the initial finding that the economic case for reinstatement was quite poor without provision for, and extensive use of, the route for intermodal trans-Pennine container freight traffic attracted from road. We need to ensure that that can be delivered.

Before the feasibility study, there was insufficient evidence that the route would attract a sufficient volume of intermodal container traffic. There is evidence that other trans-Pennine routes, with necessary enhancement of capacity and gauge, could offer shorter journey times, and thus more efficient utilisation of rail assets—both staff and rolling stock. I am aware of the extensive work being done, and that has already been completed, by SELRAP, right hon. and hon. Members, and local businesses, as demonstrated by some of today's speeches, to estimate what level of local freight could be expected. That work is very helpful indeed.

We must always address concerns about the high estimated capital cost of the scheme—questioned by the hon. Member for Hyndburn—which is relevant to both the economic case and the general affordability of the scheme. The first stage of the further work carried out by my Department's technical advisers is nearing completion. It has been carried out in close collaboration with Transport for the North, Network Rail and the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, with very helpful in-depth discussions with a number of freight customers. That work, which is continuing, suggests, first, that a high proportion of potential trans-Pennine intermodal container traffic could be carried on a low-floor wagon that requires a loading gauge that is smaller than the W12 gauge provided on a number of other trunk routes, and only marginally larger than the minimum current clearance on trans-Pennine routes.

Secondly, routing freight via Skipton-Colne is not only slower than other potential routes but engages a capacity bottleneck—as was mentioned in passing—on the eastern side of the Pennines, crossing the eastern approach to Leeds station. That is absolutely not insurmountable, but it does need to be addressed as we move forward.

Thirdly, we have confirmation that future demand for the key flows in question—Liverpool-Drax biomass and intermodal containers—is really sensitive to the end-to-end journey times that can be achieved, due to the impact on resource utilisation, so we need to work with those companies to ensure that there is a business case that works for us all.

Network Rail's order of magnitude cost estimates are not inappropriately high, given the current state of the project's development. However, further discussions are in progress with Transport Scotland, as the hon. Member for Hyndburn highlighted, regarding the Borders railway, as it appears that its out-turn costs were, per mile, much lower than Network Rail's early estimates for the Skipton-Colne link. We are therefore trying to learn from what has gone on elsewhere, because we want to drive value for money.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am really interested in what the Minister has to say. There seems to be an overengineering of a number of rail projects at their inception. Is the Department reviewing the way that infrastructure projects are approached, so that they are appropriately engineered?

**Chris Heaton-Harris:** The whole point of the pipeline is to try to do exactly that, and to learn from previous projects, when things are delivered late and run over cost and when things are delivered within budget. Network Rail is going out of its way to learn from those projects, so yes, I can give the hon. Lady that assurance.

We need to investigate a number of issues further before any conclusions are drawn, hence the need for the current process. Those issues essentially boil down to the two questions that I outlined: what are the likely costs, including gauge clearance, of creating viable timetable paths in the short and medium term for additional freight, and what levels of freight traffic is the route likely to attract? We are pressing on with that work, including through a Network Rail feasibility study on trans-Pennine gauging, which was announced last month, so that we will have a complete picture in a few months. My officials will continue to update the campaign's project development team as the work progresses. We will continue to do all we can to answer the questions that I have raised and recent work has raised, which will hopefully mean that we can work together to move this interesting and popular scheme forward.

To conclude, I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn and SELRAP on the continuing commitment to this issue that they have shown, as well as the other right hon. and hon. Members with an interest in this matter—both those who could be present today and those who could not. I repeat that the Government are keen to reach an early conclusion on what role a reinstated line could play in improving passenger and freight connections across the Pennines. Given the current phase that this scheme finds itself in, my focus, and the Government's, is on establishing the case for progressing it.



10.50 am

**Graham P. Jones:** I thank you, Mr Howarth, for chairing this debate. I also thank the hon. Members who have contributed to it, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), who probably agrees that rail passengers in his constituency would be liberated by the reinstatement of this rail link, and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). She rightly pointed out that Burnley Borough Council, along with other local councils including Labour councils, led on the Todmorden curve initiative without much input from Lancashire County Council, which was very disappointing for a transport authority. We do not congratulate Burnley Council enough.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (John Grogan) and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), the former heavy rail Minister, who has been backing this project for quite a long time. He probably feels that he has been backing it for so long that it must happen one day. I suggest that if he votes Labour at the next election, that day might come sooner, rather than later or never.

The Minister touched on the issue of the M65, which I did not bring up. To summarise briefly, that is another key pipeline project that must go ahead in conjunction with the rail link. I raised that issue quite a while ago, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley, and have been a vociferous campaigner at the vanguard of the campaign to ensure that we get that connection through to the north-east, to Leeds and to the M1.

The Minister said that the Government were investing heavily in the north. I gently point out that if he is serious about investing in the north, he should back the budget for Transport for the North and the Northern Powerhouse Rail project, which comes in at £39 billion; I hope that commitment is not going to recede. The Government seem undecided about how much they will spend on Northern Powerhouse Rail, with some figures as low as £12 billion, rather than the £39 billion that is required. I also hope that the Government will commit to the northern infrastructure pipeline, a £7 billion investment to get some of the projects up and running quickly. They have not done so yet, so the idea that they have made some commitment to investment in the north that is equivalent to what is invested in the south does not bear scrutiny.

The Minister talked about cost, affordability and value for money. We are back to those words again; we are telling deprived communities, "You are not worth it. You are not getting anything. Hard luck." This is a £360 million project; over 100 years, that is £360,000 a year. East Lancashire clinical commissioning group spends £1 billion a year, and that figure does not include West Yorkshire's clinical commissioning groups, which probably spend more. Building this rail line will cost 0.3% of the health budget, so let us get some perspective. When we talk about levels of deprivation, building this line is an easy answer. In the context of a health budget, this rail infrastructure investment is a minuscule amount, particularly if we look at the whole corridor. It probably amounts to less than 0.1% of the health budget for that corridor, where deprivation levels are some of the most severe in the country. I do not understand the Government's thinking in denying this investment at this stage; we should press on and do it. As my hon. Friend the

Member for Keighley said, there is no better time than the 175th anniversary of the opening of the original line. Let us get the shovels in the ground.

The Minister mentioned value for money. Is it not about time that we get local contractors and local people in? This is a deprived area. Why are we not bringing in local contractors to do some of this basic work, such as the trackbed work, which does not require engineering?

**Chris Heaton-Harris:** European procurement rules.

**Graham P. Jones:** It does not matter. That does not excuse us from bringing in local contractors to do some of the most basic work, lowering the costs. We do not always have to bring in experienced contractors from the south on high-value contracts; that does not serve the cost analysis very well. I do not think that affordability, cost and value for money should be the drivers of this particular scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley was right to say that Christmas could have come early for us all if the Minister had committed to this rail line, but he has not. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who gave a very good speech, rightly suggested that it is about time that we brought the railways into public ownership so that we can make these decisions, instead of their being made by consultants and outside bodies. Local, democratically elected people should decide what is best for their local communities, not some of the experts who have failed east Lancashire.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the proposed reinstatement of the Colne to Skipton railway link.

10.56 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Liverpool City Council Funding

11 am

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the funding of Liverpool City Council.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. Liverpool has borne the brunt of a decade of austerity. Massive cuts in Government funding have hit the council hard, combined with benefit changes that have hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. I pay tribute to all those who work across public services in Liverpool, who do their utmost to deliver the best services. Last Friday I visited the fantastic Mab Lane Primary School in my constituency, which serves a community with high levels of social and economic need. The headteacher, Laura Morgan, provides truly inspirational leadership in a school that is making a real difference to the life chances of children, and therefore to the local community.

Liverpool City Council tells me that, when adjusted for inflation, it has £436 million less to spend each year than it did in 2010, which equates to an overall budget cut of 63%. As a result, Mayor Joe Anderson has warned that the council faces its

“worst financial crisis since the Second World War”,

with a £57 million budget gap in the coming year.

In those bleak circumstances, the council held an emergency budget meeting last month, where the finance director, Mel Creighton, publicly addressed the chamber for the first time. She said:

“We have gone as far as we can go—the next decisions we make will be very difficult ones.”

The city has exhausted its reserves; it has just £16 million remaining. If those reserves were used for day-to-day services, they would last about a fortnight. After that, there would be nothing left.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate on behalf of the city and people of Liverpool. Does he agree that that council meeting was an extraordinary example of people from across the city of all political persuasions coming together to back a motion that went to the council that said they wanted an urgent meeting with Government Ministers to set out the situation? We have that opportunity today to say that, party politics aside, Liverpool will be unable to continue in the current vein if something is not done urgently to address the serious situation.

**Stephen Twigg:** The hon. Lady’s intervention precisely anticipates my next paragraph.

At that unprecedented meeting, members of the Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and Liberal parties agreed unanimously on a call for urgent action from the Treasury. Liverpool MPs, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), have echoed the call for an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State. To echo the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), I ask the Minister whether the Government will meet Liverpool’s Mayor, MPs and

councillors as a matter of urgency to look at ways in which the Government can help to address Liverpool’s perilous financial situation.

There is an inherent unfairness in the way that local government funding is allocated. The Government use core spending power as a measure. Their figures show that had Liverpool been subjected to only the average reduction in support for all authorities, it would be £77 million a year better off. Instead, since 2010 there has been a dramatic reduction in Liverpool City Council’s spending power while the spending power of other authorities has increased. For example, Surrey County Council’s spending power has increased by £65 per household in the same period.

In authorities such as Liverpool—and next-door Knowsley, Sir George—with a high level of deprivation, a large proportion of properties are typically in the lower council tax bands, for which higher Government grants have compensated. Since 2010, however, support from the Government has been reduced as they have sought to offset austerity by allowing local authorities to raise more taxation locally. The difficulty is that 60% of dwellings in Liverpool are in the lowest council tax band, whereas the national figure is about a quarter. Liverpool’s council tax base is further reduced by the number of dwellings that qualify for discounts and exemptions.

If Liverpool’s tax base were comprised of the same proportion of households in each council tax band and the same proportion of households that qualify for discounts and exemptions as the national average, the city council estimates that it would generate more than £100 million extra in council tax every year. Surely we need to address that issue of fairness. Will the Government seriously consider the Mayor of Liverpool’s proposal for a royal commission on local government funding to ensure that a fair funding formula can be adopted across the country?

Despite all that, the council has managed to continue to prioritise services for the most vulnerable in our community. In the last year it has spent £12 million on support to help prevent people becoming homeless and on assisting rough sleepers. It has spent almost £3 million on the citizens support scheme that it set up to help residents in short-term crisis to meet their needs for food and other essential items. That has provided a lifeline for some of the city’s most vulnerable residents after the abolition of the discretionary social fund. The mayoral hardship fund continues to provide vital support for some of the city’s most vulnerable people. Spending on discretionary housing payments, which support people struggling to pay their rent, has gone up by 12%.

I pay tribute to Mayor Joe Anderson and councillors from all parties for taking action to protect the most vulnerable families who have been left struggling and worrying about how they will pay for essentials. The support that the council has been able to provide stands between many families and destitution.

I also thank the vibrant voluntary and community sectors, including the Merseyside Law Centre, formerly Merseyside Welfare Rights; St Andrew’s Community Network, which is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden); and the Alt Valley Community Trust. I volunteer monthly at the north Liverpool food bank at St John’s church in

[Stephen Twigg]

point in the interest rate for the Public Works Loan

Tuebrook, so I see the great need in our communities and the fantastic role that the voluntary and community sectors play, alongside the city council, in seeking to protect some of the most vulnerable.

**Luciana Berger:** The hon. Gentleman is making an impassioned case, for which I thank him. Further to his important acknowledgement of the contribution that voluntary and charitable organisations make, I particularly commend the work of Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services, without which many small organisations would not have been able to pursue their ambitions. At a time of decreasing funds, LCVS has gone above and beyond to support many small organisations to have the infrastructure, resources, tools and expertise to deliver vital local services.

**Stephen Twigg:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to put on the record the amazing contribution that LCVS makes, as do similar councils in other parts of the country. In the 12 years that I have been in Liverpool, I have been struck by the strong sense of community and the sorts of organisations that come out of some of the most socially and economically deprived communities, some of which I mentioned. I can imagine how much worse the impact of those cuts in Government support would have been if it were not for the great work done by LCVS and some of the other voluntary organisations to which I referred.

The reality is that the council faces a near-impossible challenge: when services are needed most, it has fewer resources with which to respond. The Association of Directors of Children's Services calculates that the number of statutory responsibilities for local authorities in children's services has gone up by something like 50% since 2011. We need an urgent review of the financing of statutory services to ensure that they are adequately resourced, because otherwise there is a real risk that we will fail the most vulnerable people again.

The city council is pioneering new technologies to combat climate change. Liverpool has set the bold aim of becoming the world's first climate-positive city by the end of next year, which would mean the city would remove more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits each year. The council is working alongside the Poseidon Foundation to help offset its carbon emissions by incorporating blockchain technology into the day-to-day operations of the city council. Reflecting the challenges of climate change, the council recently declared a climate emergency. It is crucial that the Government work with the council and local community to ensure that the funding and support is there, so that we can respond fully to the scale of the climate emergency.

The city council has also been innovative and ambitious in seeking to deal with the desperate financial situation that it faces—for example, it has been pioneering in its Invest to Earn strategy, generating income through investments in the private sector that can then be ploughed back into support for local services. The council has relied heavily on the Public Works Loan Board for low-interest loans to invest in the purchase of assets that can bring in new revenue streams and grow the local economy. It is very concerning that the Treasury has now announced an increase of an entire percentage



Board. The city council is doing all it can to mitigate the impact of austerity, but the interest rate increase will make that task more difficult.

Decisions made by Governments since 2010 have resulted in poverty becoming more entrenched for many of my constituents. We have now had the latest English indices of multiple deprivation, and Liverpool ranks third. Almost a quarter of the population of Liverpool live in income-deprived households, and around a third of children are growing up in poverty. The high level of need, which results in demand for services, cannot be met solely by a council tax base that, as I have said, is low. We desperately need a fairer funding deal.

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the imposition of universal credit, which is very much a political decision by the Government, has only added to the woes of the most vulnerable people in our city? I pay tribute to him, and to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). We could be heading into a general election very soon, and they have been part of the Merseyside community for the past 10 years. I pay tribute to them for all the work they have done in this place to raise the issues of poverty and the most vulnerable people.

**Stephen Twigg**: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for his kind words, and I echo his comments about our friend, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree. He is absolutely right about the impact of universal credit and, before that, other changes—for example, the reductions in disability benefits and the introduction of the bedroom tax. That combination of factors has been significant in contributing to the challenges that the city council faces.

I am proud that Liverpool City Council has managed to keep delivering vital services and has done its best to protect some of the most vulnerable people, but the city now faces a budget gap that the council estimates to be £57 million, and it has just £16 million left in the reserves. Something surely has to give. The city council, the Members of Parliament and the entire city are united in saying to the Government that we want a fairer funding settlement that genuinely reflects the real levels of need in the local community. My concern is that if this is not put in place, we risk losing crucial services that our most vulnerable constituents rely on every day.

I hope that the Minister can give us some hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I particularly hope that he can address the two specific requests for a meeting and for the Government to consider a royal commission on local government funding, because many of the issues faced by my constituents in Liverpool are faced by other communities across Merseyside, across the north-west and, indeed, across the country.

11.14 am

**The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth (Jake Berry)**: It is a pleasure to appear under your chairmanship, not for the first time, Sir George. With a general election looming, and given that there are marginal seats across north-west England, it might be the last time for a while.

I am proud to have been born in Aigburth, to have attended Liverpool College, and to have spent my entire

life before the age of 18 living in the great city of Liverpool, so I was really keen for the opportunity to respond to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate, which is important not just for his constituents, but for north-west England. As a fellow north-west MP, I think a thriving Liverpool city region is about creating a thriving northern powerhouse.

I want to focus briefly on facts, because the hon. Gentleman talked a lot about the role Liverpool has played in cutting the deficit since the economic crash of 2007-08. I do not want to get into the politics of what might or might not have caused the crash, but it is absolutely clear that in an environment of reducing budgets, local government across our United Kingdom—but particularly in England, for the purposes of this debate—has played its part. However, the core spending power in Liverpool has increased every year since 2015; the increase this year will be some £9.2 million. I hope that reflects the fact that we are moving from a decade or thereabouts of recovery to one of renewal, in which local authorities must play their part, as an economic partner of Government, in driving the wider economy.

Wider investment in the Liverpool city region is so important to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and the constituents of other hon. Members; I am sure they would want me to focus briefly on that, before I address the two questions raised in the debate. I was really pleased that £172 million from the transforming cities fund went to the Liverpool city region. Having spent a considerable period of my life going around south Liverpool on a bike, and given that we are looking to address the climate emergency, which Liverpool City Council has been very forward-thinking in bringing to the fore, I was pleased to hear that £16 million of the fund will be invested in walking and cycling infrastructure in the city.

Another £460 million will be invested in the Merseyrail system—the Liverpool tube system, as it was described to me by a friend from London who recently visited the city. I went to school on those trains, sometimes via a slightly roundabout route. For my first job, I used to travel on the Merseyrail from Cressington station all the way to Moorfields. The trains were pretty terrible 20 years ago—or even 35 years ago, when I used to get them. I am very pleased that the money, which comes from a partnership between the council, the Liverpool city region and the Government, will be invested in the transport infrastructure.

Those of us who have spent long periods of our life sat on the Runcorn bridge will agree that the £1 billion invested in the new Mersey Gateway—£600 million was direct Government funding—shows the Government's ambitions for the region. Many of those ambitions have been focused through the Liverpool city region devolution deal; the core funding for the devolution deal is some £900 million over the initial period. More importantly, it is about taking power, money and influence away from Whitehall and returning it to the great city of Liverpool. Those of us who grew up there in the 1980s know that Liverpool is rejuvenated, and has undergone a renaissance since the very dark days of deprivation, industrial decline and political chaos. The devolution deal is a really important step in ensuring that the renaissance continues.

I do not have to tell any MPs here who represent Merseyside seats, including you, Sir George, that Liverpool

[*Jake Berry*]

is the only city ever to have had its own Department in Whitehall. At one point, Liverpool contributed more to the Exchequer than the entire City of London. Arguably, Liverpool is the city that invented globalisation, and it certainly has always had the mercantile economy at its heart. Anything we can do to drive jobs and growth back into the city is something that we should work on together.

**Stephen Twigg:** I am a strong supporter of the city region devolution. The deal the Minister describes is welcome. However, the strong sense in Liverpool is that what the Government have given the city region with one hand does not make up for what they had taken away with the other, particularly from some of our most deprived communities. Does he recognise that concern?

**Jake Berry:** I will come on to address the hon. Gentleman's specific points, but it is worth focusing on what happened in Liverpool. Across this House, we want to be optimistic for the people we represent, and there is real optimism in Liverpool. There are challenges, and have been for as long as I have known the city, which is my entire life, but on many occasions, sometimes in this building, people from across public life want to talk down to Liverpool. I want this debate to be an opportunity to celebrate everything that is fantastic about that city.

**Luciana Berger:** I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and the Minister their categorisation of Liverpool as that vibrant, optimistic and positive city. Over the course of what will soon be a decade, however, the city has done so much in spite of the Government, and not because of it. My hon. Friend laid out many things that have happened, and I have a whole list in front of me of cuts, including to our fire service, the police service, the health grant formula—that is the current reality—or the early intervention grant to give every child born in Liverpool the best chance of the best start in life. Despite the cumulative impact of all those things, Liverpool has soldiered on—but that does not take away from the reality of what the city is contending with after nearly 10 years of cuts.

**Jake Berry:** It will come as no surprise to the hon. Lady that I disagree with her. Lots of what I am talking about—the £900 million devolution deal, the £1 billion for the Gateway crossing, the £330 million from the local growth fund, and the £140 million upgrade of Lime Street station, which I am pleased about, because it was awful when I was growing up, and it is a fantastic building now—is a partnership. I hope that this debate can be about what Liverpool, the Government, the mayors and the metro Mayor can do together to drive the city. I know that that is the spirit in which the hon. Lady would wish me to respond to the debate.

Liverpool City Council has some challenges with funding, as well as other issues. It has £100 million of uncollected council tax arrears, which it should do something about, because that is very high from a national perspective. Its chief executive's remuneration package is £461,823, which is absurd and not something that should be supported by the council, although it is,

because it will have been voted on by the council. In fact, the council has 57 employees across Merseyside who earn more than £100,000 each. The age of austerity might be writ large over many parts of the council, but it has not yet reached the chief executive's remuneration package, and there are things that the council could do, such as recover some of the £100 million of council tax arrears.

The partnership approach, however, which I hope Members across the House support, is part of the story of renaissance in Liverpool. I agree with the spokesman for Liverpool City Council who, earlier this year, said that Liverpool is undergoing a regeneration boom, with £14 billion of development schemes being delivered or in the pipeline. I pay tribute to the work of the city council in transforming the city, despite having maybe played its part in the decade of recovery from the global economic crash. Despite reductions in the amount of money the city has to spend, it is thriving and booming. People do not need to take my word for it, because anyone can visit the city—in fact, I recommend that they do. And we have not even talked about having the best football team in Europe, although that might be controversial; I do not know whether any Evertonians are present.

Why does all that matter? It matters because the Government are serious about delivering a northern powerhouse—a growing northern economy for all our constituents, including mine and yours, Sir George. Liverpool must be at the heart of that regeneration, and of the renewal of the north of England. That is why I am so pleased that the Prime Minister recently set out his agenda to level up all the powers of the metro Mayors—to ensure that Steve Rotherham has the same powers as Andy Burnham—so that we can drive Liverpool's economy. I fully support that, and I hope and believe that Steve Rotherham, who has had discussions with me and with the Prime Minister about that agenda, will come out in support of it.

That is also why we have levelled up education funding. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, started the debate by talking about a school in his constituency, and I echo his tribute to all those working in our public services in Liverpool, Merseyside, the wider north-west and our entire country. That is why we are increasing funding for the NHS and the number of police on our streets. It is the poorest in our society, wherever they may be in England, who rely most heavily on the NHS and public services. That is why I applaud the Prime Minister's ambition to level up.

**Stephen Twigg:** I welcome the additional powers for the city region Mayor, and I pay tribute to Steve Rotherham for his work. I absolutely echo what the Minister said about the renaissance in the city centre, but I represent suburban east Liverpool, and it does not always feel that way in some of the communities that I represent. They are much more reliant on the council services that I focused on in my speech, so I am absolutely with him on the importance of the city region and investment in it, but we need to ensure that the basic services get their funding as well.

**Jake Berry:** I accept that. In my penultimate point, I will address the two points raised by the hon. Gentleman about the real purposes of the debate. First, on an

urgent meeting, I am not able to promise that the Secretary of State will meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues urgently. However, I am more than happy to meet them myself, which is a promise that I can make. I am sure that he will be in touch, or my private office will be in touch—subject to the limited opportunity that might be available if the election motion passes today. If it is at all possible, I will certainly do that. I have always taken great pride in being from Liverpool. In fact, my grandparents lived in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, in a place called Hayman's Green, just behind the village centre in West Derby, so I know his constituency extremely well.

Finally, on the royal commission, the future of local government funding is something that would of course be set out in a Budget, but it appears that we will not have a Budget before 6 November. I suggest that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, keeps a close eye on what might be in a Budget. However, I reassure him on the point about the proportion of council tax properties in different bands. Since 2016-17, distribution of resources in the central grant system has taken into account the banding of council tax and business rates payers in the city. We believe that we have addressed that, which historically has been a major problem for cities such as Liverpool.

In conclusion, I hope that the hon. Gentleman, like me, occasionally gets the opportunity to visit the Pier Head. When I do, I look at the "Three Graces" buildings, including the Royal Liver building and the Cunard building, and all the fantastic architecture, and I am always struck by the fact that those buildings show their best face to the world. In fact, the back of the buildings, facing Saint Nick's church, are relatively plain. Their best face looks out to sea, and that is what Liverpool has always done and will continue to do. After we leave the European Union, a global Britain can be led once again by a global Liverpool.

**Sir George Howarth (in the Chair):** Before I bring the proceedings to a conclusion, I use the privilege of the Chair to thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for the service that they have given. I also wish them well in the future, whichever direction that may take them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.28 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Endometriosis Workplace Support

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered endometriosis workplace support.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. This issue affects not just the Minister's Department, but the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions.

I thank Dr Larisa Corda, who is an obstetrician, gynaecologist and fertility expert—she is in the Public Gallery—the many hundreds of women who have contacted me, and the very brave women who have made the journey to London today to support this debate. I will not reveal the names of the people who have written to me even if they are happy for me to do so, because I want to maintain their confidentiality and ensure that it remains their choice. In opening the debate, I will cover the following areas: the disease itself; the poor diagnosis and medical expertise in dealing with this debilitating condition; its impact on women's lives; its impact on workplace activity; and the protections that many women feel are not honoured, despite strong workplace health assessment laws.

The disease is often described as cells from the womb growing in other places, but that is a gross underestimation. I believe that that simplistic description is among the reasons why women find it hard to get employers to understand the terrible condition that they are suffering from. According to Dr Corda, since the start of this year more than 100 women have taken their lives as a direct result of this disease.

Endometriosis comes with many symptoms, which occur not just at the time of a woman's period. The most common are abdominal cramps, back pain, severe menstrual cramps, abnormal or heavy bleeding, painful bowel movements, pain urinating, painful sex, difficulty becoming pregnant, and nausea or sickness. According to [endometriosis.org](http://endometriosis.org), people with endometriosis are more at risk of several diseases. The risk of ovarian cancer is 37% higher than for the general public; the risk of endocrine tumours is 38% higher than for the general public; the risk of kidney cancer is 26% higher than for the general public; the risk of thyroid cancer is 33% higher than for the general public; the risk of brain tumours is 27% higher than for the general public; the risk of malignant melanoma is 23% higher than for the general public; and, according to [cardiosmart.org](http://cardiosmart.org), a heart attack is 62% more likely. That series of statistics does not describe the impact of the symptoms; I will give some real-life examples later, but the stark truth is that 30% to 50% of women become infertile from the disease.

**Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this incredibly important debate. I am sure millions of women around the country will be enormously grateful that he is raising this issue at the highest level. Does he agree that one of the challenges that many people face is that there is a significant lack of understanding of the condition?



[Tracey Crouch]

That leads to all sorts of things, including dreadful delays in diagnosis and a lack of understanding in workplaces of what the chronic pain really means to those women.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** My hon. Friend summarises the biggest issues that those women face. I will talk about the real-life experiences of the women who have contacted me, but one of the most important things—I hope other Members will expand on this—is that there are support networks out there, because women often suffer in silence. As I said, this subject goes beyond the DWP: certainly, the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care have a role to play.

In June 2015, the BBC carried out a study on 15,000 women in Scotland. It found that women with the condition had a 76% chance of miscarriage, which is unbelievably high. The article reported that women with endometriosis had a trebled risk of ectopic pregnancy. The chance of premature birth was 26% and the chance of having a caesarean was 40%.

Later, I will talk about the impact on women of abnormal and heavy bleeding and bowel movement impacts, which can be distressing in the workplace. I am aware that the issue I am about to talk about falls under the authority of the Department of Health and Social Care, but it is vital to add context and explain why this disease has a knock-on effect in the workplace. I ask the Minister to ensure that this debate is fed into the relevant Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care.

The House of Commons digital engagement team put out a survey only last Thursday, and there have been 2,610 responses, 1,083 reactions, comments and shares on Facebook, and 215 retweets. I want to cite some of the quotes from it. Again, I will not put the names out there; I will just set out the reports.

“At 18 I am currently being put through medically induced menopause to try and fight back against my endo, it’s horrific, it’s debilitating and it’s exhausting. The pain I have I cannot even describe, and two operations later I am no further to being pain free or living a normal life. My next step is a hysterectomy, I haven’t even had children yet and this is what is being recommended to me. My life has been overtaken by operations, drugs, injections, sickness, anxiety, depression and a whole load of awful nights with no sleep and no rest. I am currently finishing my A Levels and I am absolutely terrified of what life will be like after. My dream is to become a primary school teacher, but I think that dream is unachievable. How will I find an employer who will understand that I often have to lay in bed because as soon as I move I will throw up, or that I have had to have time off work because I’ve got to have my ovaries removed? It’s about time that endometriosis is taken seriously, and people understand that life is so challenging and excruciating, but we carry on, smiling through the pain, simply because we have no alternative.”

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for securing this very important debate. Like the woman whose case he is discussing, I had a chemical menopause at the age of 37, but many women have to go to the GP at least 10 times in order to be referred to a specialist. Does he agree that we should include this issue in statutory sex and relationships education, so that when young girls and women experience

gynaecological problems or even heavy periods, which may be a sign of endometriosis, they seek help at the earliest opportunity?

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I am most grateful to the hon. Lady, who speaks with a great deal of personal experience. We have been friends for a long time—since we came to this place. We are two West Yorkshire MPs, despite being on different sides of the aisle. I am grateful to her for making those points. As I said, it is important that the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care take this forward. Other Members may wish to try to secure debates that are responded to by those Departments. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will certainly feed those issues in.

I apologise for citing a lot of stories, Mr Pritchard, but it is important to set out the context. Another lady said:

“I had stage 4 (severe) endometriosis. I had a 7 year wait for diagnosis. From my referral to the hospital, I had a year and a half wait for surgery. My surgery was lifesaving as my bowel was 50% blocked with a mass of adhesions that had grown through the bowel. I was in constant pain, slept for 3 or 4 hours a day and was unable to care for my son properly, I considered putting him into care. If it wasn’t for him, I would have given up on everything. Despite being told in 2010 I ‘probably had endometriosis’ I was still given pain killers and mefenamic acid for years to manage the pain and symptoms. Throughout this time the endo was worsening, it is progressive. Had I been diagnosed earlier I may not have needed the bowel resection I needed and will have bowel issues for life. I was on the pill for 15 years, which is still considered a ‘treatment’. It is not. The same year I came off it (2010) I was at the GP with SEVERE bowel pain during my period (It was fused to my womb). The pill masked the symptoms, but it was quietly progressing. Please ban the use or presentation of the pill as ‘treatment’.”

**Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab):** I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this incredibly important debate. One in five women will suffer from this disease, and it has been shown that, as that story shows, it can take up to seven years to convince a doctor. That is completely unacceptable. We have an issue in this country with what has been called the gender pain gap. We need to put more money into research and funding to look at proper cures and support for women when they need it most.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I entirely agree with those sentiments. As I said, I hope this debate will go beyond the Department for Work and Pensions. I thank the hon. Lady for that contribution; it is spot on.

Endometriosis affects 1.5 million women in the UK. It takes an average of eight years to diagnose and there is not really a cure.

I will share a few examples from women who have spoken out through the digital platform. One said:

“I have suffered with endometriosis since the age of 15 and I was diagnosed aged 22. The worst thing about endometriosis is the lack of awareness. Even some doctors haven’t even heard of it which is very frustrating! I’ve had 4 surgeries to try to alleviate the symptoms. Unfortunately, this hasn’t worked. I want to try to basically create more awareness of endometriosis, especially online, as much as I can.”

Another woman said:

“I was diagnosed with endometriosis in May 2016. I would say 2 years was spent actively pursuing a diagnosis. But the previous 9 years I often went to the doctors, complained of pain and heavy

flow and I was told 'it's just a bad period, it's normal'. The hardest part of endometriosis for me would be the mental health side of things, coming to terms with the fact my body has limits and my life probably isn't going to take the direction I thought it would."

Someone else said:

"I was 17 when I was diagnosed with endometriosis. I've had 6 surgeries since. The thing I hate most about endometriosis is not being able to plan ahead because you don't know how your pain is going to be that day. You could be absolutely fine, or you could be crippled."

A young woman said:

"I was diagnosed with endometriosis on the 14 February last year, I was only 15. It took me 3 years to get diagnosed. For those 3 years, I was told I had unexplainable abdominal pain."

Another story comes from a woman who said:

"I was diagnosed when I was 25 when I had a miscarriage. I had been struggling since I was a teenager with all the common signs of endometriosis. It just wasn't picked up until I had my first surgery. What I hate most about endometriosis is that it takes time away from my children. Especially when I have to just go and rest in bed. I would love to be able to make it more aware for children, especially young girls and in schools, to be able to support them through this and see the early signs and educate GPs on the signs and symptoms."

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I thank the right hon Gentleman for giving way and congratulate him on securing this hugely important debate. Does he agree that local groups, such as Endo Warriors in my constituency, which do such important work to educate young people in schools and to ensure that early signs of endometriosis can be picked up by doctors and health professionals, are absolutely vital and have such an important place in our communities and constituencies?

**Alec Shelbrooke**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who raises a very important point; there are many support groups out there. I will come to the workplace impact, for which the Minister is responsible, but one of the things that I want this debate to achieve is to highlight to women far and wide that there are lots of support groups in different areas of the country. More importantly, I hope that the debate will be heard by the Department for Education. To strengthen our point, we may have to come back to debate the issue with each separate Department, and we should ensure that we do so.

Another sufferer said to me:

"I have suffered with endometriosis since being 19. I had always had heavy periods and then my symptoms escalated to constant bleeding, pain on intercourse, really bad pain in the lower tummy and lower back. I was backwards and forwards from anywhere between 6 months plus, who constantly checked me for STDs. They'd do swabs, send me on my way and they'd come back clear, and I was in that cycle. I was in work one day when I was given an awareness form for endometriosis. Every symptom listed, I ticked. I'm now 36 and I've had 22 laparoscopies. At 29, I had a hysterectomy. When they removed my cervix, they found the endometriosis in there."

A young woman who has given me a huge amount of help in preparing for this debate told me:

"My journey with endometriosis began when I was 11 years old, when I had my first period. From a young age I was going back and forth to the doctors for leaking through my clothes at school, just after being to the toilet. I have always been active in football and dancing but found myself struggling with the disease due to the pain, lack of energy and continued leaking through my clothes."

We are talking about an 11-year-old girl. She continued:

"Initially I was told they thought I had endometriosis but was too young for the surgery required for diagnosis. I ended up going through surgery for a womb polyp and ovarian cysts. To date, I have now had 10 surgeries, all with general gynaecologists. Finally, I have been able to see an endometriosis specialist after 10 years of suffering. I had surgery on the 8th of April 2019 which was the diagnostic surgery I had been waiting for. The specialist surgeon found years of missed endometriosis due to untrained surgeons. Unfortunately, a shortage of worldwide endometriosis specialists means this is not uncommon for women suffering."

This disease has had a huge impact on my mental health. Alongside other personal family issues, the daily pain I have been going through has made tackling day to day life harder. Whilst I have had friends and family support me, I have also lost friends because they don't understand this disease. I have tried to take my life multiple times because of it. The problems have also extended to my fertility. I have had miscarriages and a medically advised abortion. Not only was this a devastating and horrific experience for me but had a dramatic impact on my work life as well as personal."

Another lady said to me:

"As soon as my periods started when I was just 12 years old, the problems began. I suffered extreme pain and heavy bleeding, to the point where I passed out several times. On speaking to my GP, I was told 'every girl has this, it's normal'. The doctor prescribed me oral morphine for the pain, but most of the time it barely touched it. Finally, I was offered a laparoscopy in February 2016. The surgeon told me I had endometriosis, but that they had treated it and I wouldn't have any further problems. I was so happy and relieved, little did I know the fight was far from over. By October the symptoms had returned. On speaking to my doctor, I was told it couldn't have come back after surgery, it was part of being a woman and I simply needed to be more positive. Eventually, I got referred to an endometriosis specialist hospital where an MRI scan showed my left ovary and bowel were stuck to my cervix and I had 100% got endometriosis back. This means more surgery."

I am so grateful to the members of the public who engaged with the digital engagement platform. A woman from Newcastle shared her workplace experience. She said:

"I have been disciplined for being off sick. I am terrified to go off sick again, so I have to force myself to work even when the pain makes me vomit. If I go off sick again, I know they will sack me, this has been made very clear. I work for HMRC and I know this is a massive issue for other members of staff as well."

Another lady said:

"I have been fired from all my jobs, my last workplace bullied me and mocked my illness, nothing was done via HR and I was made to leave instead. I have never had support from any workplace."

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for securing this extremely important debate. As a member of the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis, which is ably chaired by the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), I have been privy to many of these stories. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a major barrier to support in the workplace is the taboo around menstrual health? Surely, we have to get people talking about that. One idea may be to encourage employers to become endometriosis-friendly, so that people get support and HR departments understand that it is a real illness and not something that someone should have to endure.

**Alec Shelbrooke**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that important point. That goes back to the earlier example of the lady who suffered for so many years and who got a diagnosis only when she had ticked every single box of a workplace survey. That is why we need a

[Alec Shelbrooke]

debate with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—we need to work across so many areas of Government. The hon. Lady is right: any issue of women's health, but especially menstrual health, is still taboo. Someone asked me why I secured this debate. The primary reason is that I have worked very closely on this with a previous constituent of mine, but I also think it important that a man stands here and says that women's health is not a taboo subject. We are all human beings and we all have health issues. We should all stick together and help everybody, regardless of how embarrassing we might find the subject. There is nothing embarrassing about health and we need to look after people.

The stories that I have given all share the same underlying theme: "I was told by doctors that it was all part of being a woman." Given the backdrop of the personal trauma that women with endometriosis suffer—years without a diagnosis, personal relationships breaking down and strain on personal finances—they should at least be able to expect the law to protect them in the workplace, like anyone else who suffers with a disability. The truth, however, is that a whole host of employers are completely unsympathetic to the disease, and often dismiss employees because of a "poor sick record".

**Dr Dan Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes a very good case and highlights the challenges faced by many women with endometriosis. He will recognise that many people have other chronic health conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis or rheumatoid arthritis, which can also be life-limiting in the ways that he has outlined. For clarity, is he saying that endometriosis is a special case, or do the principles that he is outlining actually apply to many other chronic health conditions, the sufferers of which often find that they are also discriminated against at work?

**Alec Shelbrooke:** Of course, all employers should support people in the workplace who have any of the whole host of chronic illnesses that my hon. Friend mentioned, but quite a few of those illnesses get diagnosed relatively easily, or in a shorter time than endometriosis. One of the problems is that there is such a long diagnosis time—I will refer to that later. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) made a point about better education in the workplace. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) that this is not about singling out one disease—the whole range of workplace diseases must be covered—but it creates many issues when women cannot even get diagnosed, and cannot tell an employer, "This is what is going on."

I was given a copy of this text message, which a lady received:

"Hey Karen,

I hope you are doing a bit better, i am sorry to hear you have so much going on physically.

We have had to pause your email access due to confidentiality as you are signed off sick. I am aware you may be off for a few months, so we will end your contact at this point as you are off for a prolonged period of time.

Should you wish to reapply when things work out for you please get in touch through the usual route.

I hope this all makes sense for you, and you can take the time you need to recover and get things back to normal.

Many thanks for all your input, and maybe hear from you again in the future."

That last sentence perfectly encapsulates an utter lack of understanding and support that is far too commonplace.

I quote from an email I received this morning from the Open University, highlighting the work of PhD student Victoria Williams. She has given the following statistics, based on her doctoral research on the workplace:

"In a study of 7,000 women across 52 countries, over 40% had given up or lost their job because of endometriosis...Others are being pushed into part-time roles or becoming self-employed whether the motivation or support is present or not...Women lose an average of 10.8 hours per week due to pain...Women lose an average of £5,757.72 per year due to lost work days...Many suffer in silence in the workplace in a bid to protect their jobs, careers, credibility and reputation. Women live with the daily predicament of disclosing symptoms which may drive accommodations or negatively fuel workplace discrimination...Endometriosis is a condition that is closely connected to menstruation alongside a history of shame, secrecy and lack of knowledge, it is classed as a taboo topic that constrains requesting and/or receiving organisational accommodations and support. Currently there is no advice for working with endometriosis from government bodies, occupational health specialists or the CIPD."

One woman told me,

"I have had to have extended probations, sickness meetings, 'what are you going to do to make this better' and you have to sit there knowing you can't do anything as there's no cure."

Going back to the lady in my previous story, when she had to have the medically advised abortion, a manager said, "Should've worn a condom." The lady said it was hard to describe how disgusted she was, as the manager knew what she was going through.

A catalogue of women starting jobs only to fail the probation period due to sick leave is, I am afraid, an all too common reality. However, it would be remiss of me not to name an employer that women have told me has tried very hard to help sufferers. NPower allowed one severe sufferer to work from home, on flexible working, and was understanding of hospital appointments and surgeries. Let me take this opportunity to highlight an employer that shows that it is not impossible to support women in the workplace with this terrible disease.

My ambition for today's debate is to raise awareness, especially of support groups, such as the one that the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) mentioned, and others such as the Northern Endometriosis Sisters Support and Period Powerful Hub, to mention just two. I want better education in schools for young girls, as we can easily overlook the problem that a young woman with a single-parent father may have in understanding these issues. As I said, I hope that this debate will be recognised by several Departments, but I ask the Minister to ask the Department for Work and Pensions to do a full assessment of how the Department recognises endometriosis as a disability.

For too long, women with this disease have been dismissed as lazy, unreliable, dishonest and a nuisance. It surely must be illegal for a manager who is told of a sufferer's condition to dismiss it out of hand by saying, "Should've worn a condom." Women have described having to cope with blood seepage through their clothes, but another common factor can be a complete loss of



bowel control, and having to dash to the bathroom unexpectedly. To have such an embarrassing and distressing situation used against them, and sometimes to be mocked in the workplace, must surely be illegal. The Equality Act 2010 is a piece of legislation we should all be proud of, but as with all law, it should evolve and change, especially when previously unrecognised situations come to the fore.

I want an assurance from the Minister that he will instruct his Department to do an assessment of how the blatant breaches of law on workplace humiliation, employment protection and, quite frankly, workplace bullying can be addressed, since this silent disease, which often has no physical appearance, can be so easily ignored by employers.

**Dr Poulter:** One of the challenges that the Minister will face when responding to the debate is that while there are medical guidelines from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and I think there are some National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on how to diagnoses and support women with endometriosis, those guidelines are not particularly well known among all the medical community. I wonder whether more should be done by the Department of Health and Social Care to improve diagnostic rates. If more women had a confirmed diagnosis, it would strengthen this Minister's hand in taking action in the workplace.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I was just about to say that I need the Minister to work with the Department of Health and Social Care, because without a proper medical sign-off, this situation will keep arising, and by the time a diagnosis is finally made, many women have already seen their life destroyed. The Minister will have heard my hon. Friend's intervention.

I close with some rhetorical questions. Why is a disease that affects 1.5 million women in this country so unrecognised, and so easily dismissed? Why is there not women's health education in schools, to help young women through their life journey and illnesses they may be suffering from? Why do we have such poor medical diagnosis? How have we been able to go so long without in-depth training for gynaecological surgeons who can help tackle this disease? Fundamentally, and pertinent to this debate, why, despite decades of work on the protection of employee rights in the workplace, do employers try to not only ignore this disease, but shuffle sufferers out of the door?

More than 1.5 million women in this country have been desperately crying out for far too long. Let today be the day that we stop failing so many women in our society.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mark Pritchard (in the Chair):** Order. Due to the interest in this debate, I am afraid I must impose a three-minute time limit on speeches. I call Ivan Lewis.

2.58 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind):** It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) not only on securing the

debate, but on the eloquent way that he presented his arguments, which were excellent and enabled us all to unite around them.

I will speak briefly on behalf of a constituent who wants to be identified, Katie Adwas, who came to see me only last week. She is a teacher, and actually she has a supportive employer. She explained to me what it is like to live with constant pain every second of every minute of every hour of every day, and how exhausting it is to do her job and get through the day. Unless we experience that, it is very difficult to relate to and understand. It makes everything she does in her life so much more difficult.

Although she recognises the need to focus on the world of work, she feels very strongly about the need for a focus on earlier diagnosis, better treatment and funding for research, which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. It took 10 years—an entire decade—for my constituent to be diagnosed with endometriosis, by which time she was already at stage 4. She initially went to see her GP regarding a problem connected with her periods. As a consequence of that, at the age of 16, she was not only prescribed antidepressants but told that, as a woman, she would have to live with that kind of thing. The right hon. Gentleman alluded to that. At primary healthcare level, GP training is crucial; if that does not happen, we are destined to continue to have many problems.

Katie has also had a number of operations specifically to try to save her fertility. She wants to start a family, but she made the point that, unfortunately, surgery is not always successful. It can lead to the removal of appendix and ovaries, which, along with the condition more generally, can have a horrendous impact on someone's mental health. We need to be concerned not just about the physical consequences of this condition, but about the long-term and ongoing mental health problems that, for understandable reasons, many women experience.

Katie very much wanted me to be her voice today. Other women in my constituency have been in touch too. I think we heard that one in five or one in 10 women across the country suffer from this condition. That is an extraordinary statistic. As policy makers and legislators, we must recognise that we have failed to act to date, and that we now have an opportunity and a responsibility to take decisive action. It is incredibly important that there is a joined-up approach across Departments. As the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell said, it is clear that there are a number of Departments with responsibility that can make a difference on these issues.

It is also incredibly important that the Department of Health and Social Care does not say, as it often does, "We are not willing to focus on specific conditions; we are willing to have generic approaches to groups of conditions, but we are not willing to train people on, raise awareness of or recognise particular conditions, which need a much greater level of central intervention. It is obvious from the neglect that this condition has experienced for a long time that it needs central intervention. Centrally driven changes in policy are essential. Of course, delivery has to come on the ground—that is about awareness raising, training, early intervention and education—but we also need a specific focus on this condition.

3.2 pm

**Jackie Doyle-Price** (Thurrock) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on the sensitive way in which he introduced the debate. He posed three questions at the end of his speech. The answer to all three is: “Because it affects women.”

I have never been one to claim that we are disadvantaged as women, but I have seen over time that so much discrimination still happens. Never was that clearer than when I served as a Health Minister. Over and over again, I was approached by female colleagues from across the House—we are all very good at fighting for ourselves—who told me about how they had felt diminished at the hands of the NHS when sharing their experiences of quite common conditions.

At the heart of this debate is the fact that 51% of us have periods, so there should be far better understanding of menstrual health and what constitutes a healthy period. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) for her work in this area. She highlighted to me the under-diagnosis of endometriosis, despite the fact that, as we have heard, it can be a debilitating condition for some women and it is very common.

I had the pleasure of addressing the hon. Lady’s women’s health conference, where I met representatives from Endometriosis UK. They had three jars, which contained physical representations of how many sanitary products someone would use if they had a healthy period, if they had heavy periods or if they had dysmenorrhoea, which affects people with endometriosis. That was a revelation. If only young women were shown that when they started their periods, they could manage their menstrual health so much more effectively. I met a woman from Endometriosis UK who was in her early 20s. She had struggled with endometriosis and very heavy periods throughout her teens, to the extent that she had had to have time off school. Seeing that representation had been a revelation for her; she had been able to get the treatment she needed and carry on with life.

That brings me to my final point, which I pitch to the Minister for him to consider when he responds to the debate. We all expect our employers to have good policies on staff wellbeing—we encourage that with respect to mental health and physical health—but we really should encourage them to do much more about really common conditions that can be managed effectively with support. I thank everybody for attending the debate—especially the men.

3.5 pm

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Last year, during a round of crucial Brexit votes, I collapsed in the Opposition Whips Office and was taken to A&E over the road. I ended up staying in St Thomas’s for almost a week, hooked up to an IV and pumped full of antibiotics and painkillers, before I was eventually diagnosed: a cyst on one of my ovaries had ruptured and caused an infection. Last week, during a similar round of crucial Brexit votes—it felt very much like groundhog day—I was back in A&E with the same problem, in excruciating pain.

I have not told many people about those instances, but I wanted to speak in this debate because I have realised that, unfortunately, my experience of women’s health is far too common. Last week, I was sent away

with painkillers and told, “Cysts rupture in women all the time.” It seems very much that things are allowed to go without treatment and without any knowledge of the cause because they happen only to women.

In her brilliant book “Period”, Emma Barnett makes the point that part of the reason for our failure on women’s health is that we simply do not talk about it. We do not talk about our periods because they are seen as shameful, unhygienic and unclean, and as something that should be kept secret and private—tropes that have been used to subjugate and silence women for centuries. Barnett is absolutely right: societal norms that do not allow discussion of periods and their wider consequences for women’s health mean that women do not seek treatment for their pain—as, for too long, I did not—or that, when they do, they are shrugged off, as I was last week.

On leaving hospital last week, I cried all the way home, in part because of the pain but mostly because I was furious that I had been so instantly dismissed and told I simply would have to live with a syndrome that would cause so much pain and risk on a monthly basis. I knew that countless other women would have been dismissed just as I was and gone home feeling exactly the same, because it is really hard for someone to advocate for themselves when they are in pain and feeling ill. I realised that we have to start normalising discussion about something as totally normal as periods. The current lack of education, awareness and medical research dismisses women and our health problems. It tells us that our pain is less important, and that our fertility is irrelevant.

I really welcome this debate and thank everybody for being here. I commend the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) for securing it. I am so grateful to women such as Emma Barnett for using their platform to highlight the consequences for women of our failure to address their health, and for risking all the opprobrium they receive for speaking out. I hope that together we can seriously move this agenda forward, and demonstrate to millions of women that their voices are heard and that we will no longer allow them to suffer in silence.

3.8 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): That was a brave speech by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on introducing the debate.

Since the BBC covered this subject on 7 October, many of our constituents have raised issues with us. I will not repeat them all; I will just pay tribute to Carla Cressy, a local constituent who came to see me at a surgery, described her condition and encouraged me to set up the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis. We have with us the hon. Members for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), who are all very active members of that group. I thank them for all their support.

When it comes to appreciating the severity of endometriosis, I was concerned to learn that the universal credit manual states that “endometriosis is rarely disabling”. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be keen

to explain the progress that has already been made on this subject, and I kindly ask that that guidance is re-examined and corrected. If workplace support is to be suitable, we have to make sure that managers truly appreciate that the condition is not just a little inconvenience; it affects everyone's lives and can often be disabling. If we truly want progress towards meaningful workplace support, we need to address the concerns of 1.5 million women. I echo the words of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough. We should encourage employers to become endometriosis-friendly and make sure that there is access to statutory sick pay for those who suffer from it.

I end with these thoughts: the House cannot get Brexit done, but the all-party group on endometriosis will get endometriosis support done. We are launching an inquiry and will invite Ministers from all the different Departments to contribute. When it is done, the inquiry will not simply gather dust; we will make sure that there is real action.

**Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) on his all-party group efforts. May I briefly pay tribute to Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals trust, a centre of excellence for the condition and the second busiest centre in the country? Does my hon. Friend agree with me that the Department of Health and Social Care, our GP surgeries, our clinical commissioning groups and our hospitals must do more to publicise the condition and publicise how women can seek the help that they need?

**Sir David Amess:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We might ask his trust to come and give evidence to our inquiry.

A great service has been done in initiating this debate. It means that we are able to talk about the issue and encourage sufferers. We have heard that one of our own is suffering immensely from this disease at the moment, but our all-party group's inquiry will make sure that we do far better than we have done thus far to support women who suffer with endometriosis.

3.12 pm

**Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** I thank the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) for securing the debate. I have campaigned on endometriosis ever since a constituent came to me and explained the long wait she had had, the difficulties she had faced, and the pain she had been suffering. I will take one moment to congratulate her because she has just had a baby, having previously been told that she was possibly infertile, so huge congratulations to her and her family.

I am delighted that endometriosis is now in the education curriculum and part of sex and relationships education. I met the Minister for School Standards and he agreed to include it, so that is great news. In the short time I have available I want to focus on my list of asks for the Minister. One ask is about people with endometriosis having the statutory support that they need and not facing discrimination. Such support includes personal independence payment and other disability allowances. Guidance on endometriosis and its impact on work should be clear so that those assessing an individual's application understand the debilitating impact that endometriosis can have on a person's life. I am slightly

concerned that when people who have a severe form of endometriosis go for a PIP assessment, they are not taken seriously and the severity of what they suffer is not taken into account.

We must ensure that those with the disease have access to statutory sick pay as well. The current definition and criteria for statutory sick pay fails to recognise long-term conditions such as endometriosis, and statutory sick pay is available only to an employee for a linked period of sickness to a maximum of three years, which penalises people who have chronic long-term conditions such as endometriosis where the symptoms can be felt for life. Those with endometriosis need to be supported through both guidance to employers and statutory sick pay. It must be recognised that chronic conditions may result in intermittent rather than continual symptoms. Again, the guidance does not seem to match the particular circumstances of endometriosis.

I also want to ask the Minister to work with Ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that those with endometriosis have access to the right support at the right time, in order to limit the amount of time they need off. I do not feel that the NHS has woken up to the scale of endometriosis, and services do not appear to be planned to support all those who need it. It needs to be taken seriously by commissioning services.

My final ask is that the Department of Health and Social Care looks at supporting the research that has been done at the University of Hull, which has looked at developing biomarkers for endometriosis to reduce the amount of time that it takes to diagnose. They need only £10,000 in seed funding, which would make a huge difference.

I have much more to say, but in the time remaining I will simply echo what many other Members have said: it is time to take women's health seriously. Will the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care work together to deliver a difference for the many women who suffer?

3.15 pm

**Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** For many people, endometriosis is a condition that they have never heard of, or are certainly not familiar with, yet it has blighted the lives of far too many women. The latest figures suggest that one in 10 women suffer with it. For those women, "suffering" is the correct term to use. In addition, it is associated with being the cause of infertility in 30% to 50% of cases. Shockingly, the average diagnosis time after symptoms first appear is seven and a half years.

Although the condition is not recognised as a disability as such, many women living with it will testify that it can be very disabling and debilitating. At this point, I wish to give a shout out to my constituent, Ann Devlin, who lives in Largs. She has lived with the condition and is what we might call an "endo warrior", since she has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the condition and to support other women who live with it. She is energetic, cheerful and resilient in the face of the sometimes great challenges that the condition has placed on her life, but she still inspires, helps and supports others who face similar challenges. I pay tribute to her strength. I know how often the condition has crippled and consumed her, and too many other women. I have huge respect for all that she has done.



[*Patricia Gibson*]

I also pay tribute to the work of my husband, Kenneth Gibson MSP, who worked extremely hard to ensure that there was a specialised endometriosis unit to serve women in the west of Scotland to complement the services already provided in units in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. It was simply not fair that my constituents had to travel from North Ayrshire and Arran to Edinburgh for specialist care for this condition, and he has worked hard to secure that change. He has campaigned incessantly for better treatment and greater awareness of the issue, and he was the first to bring the issue of endometriosis to the Floor of the Scottish Parliament in a debate in 2001, and again last year. He is the only Member of the Scottish Parliament to have secured debates on the issue in its 20-year history.

This debate is timely as we seek to address support in the workplace for this condition. Otherwise women find that their contribution to and potential in the workplace and wider economy is lost. Women often lose out on sick pay for the recurring nature of the condition, so that needs to be addressed. It has a huge impact on women's lives in the world of work as they might require time out for medical treatment and consultations. They suffer pain and fatigue, and the seven and a half years before diagnosis makes it very hard for employers to treat their condition with the seriousness it deserves. We have to keep talking about it. We must keep shining a light on it and raise awareness and understanding. That in itself will do much to ease the burden of women with the condition.

3.18 pm

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on securing the debate and on the excellent way in which he introduced it. As many Members know, I have spoken in the past about the challenges that my wife faces as a fibromyalgia sufferer, and I can see many parallels between the two conditions, given the debilitating physical symptoms and their unpredictability, as well as the lack of understanding from the public and employers about the conditions and the delays in getting a diagnosis.

I want to speak briefly about the experience of a person I spoke to who suffers from endometriosis. She told me that before she was diagnosed she had regular periods of extreme pain, which she described as more severe than giving birth. She said the contraction-like pains would last for several days a month, which made it difficult for her to look after her children and go to work, yet she did not feel that she could take time off for what her GP described as bad period pains. She went back and forth to her GP for three years and was given increasing amounts of pain medication. Outrageously, she was told that, as a woman in her 40s, she was not expected to have to put up with it for much longer. I simply cannot believe that was the advice. She was eventually diagnosed and had treatment, and she is now on the mend.

Endometriosis UK has called for those with the condition to have access to statutory sick pay. As it stands, the current definition of SSP penalises people with chronic long-term conditions such as endometriosis, whose symptoms can be experienced over many years.

What about people who work in the gig economy? How realistic is it for people in agency work or on zero-hours contracts to take time off when they are suffering, knowing that they may not get a call back when the next shift becomes available? We need to think about wider protections.

We also need to make it easier for employers to feel comfortable in talking about endometriosis with their staff, who will hopefully feel more supported if they can have an open dialogue. An endometriosis-friendly employer scheme would be helpful in that respect and would effectively mean people could manage their conditions better in the workplace. Some of the examples given by the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell about how people have been treated in the workplace show that there is an awfully long way to go.

This is a good opportunity for the Government, and for Parliament, to lead by example and become endometriosis-friendly employers. I would be happy if we could support that scheme. We must step up the fight here to ensure that all women who suffer from that terrible condition have the support they need in the workplace. That means strengthening workplace protection so that women do not feel that they need to fight their employer as well as the condition itself.

3.21 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on bringing this matter to the attention of the House. As the father of three sons, I must admit that the subject of periods and “women's concerns”, as my mother used to call them, was not my forte. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) will know what I am about to say, as I have told her before—and I commend her for all that she does and for the event that she held in Portcullis House. It was helpful for everyone to be aware of the issues.

In my office five out of six staff members are female, and two of those girls suffer from endometriosis. I have overheard too many conversations to ignore the issue and leave it in a pile marked as women's concerns. I married my wife some 32 years ago, and at the time she suffered from endometriosis as well. The doctor told her, “If you have some children, that will clear it up.” Well, we had three children, and it did not clear it up—that is a fact.

I did a little research, with the help of the House of Commons Library, and the briefing states:

“It is not known how many women are affected by endometriosis in the UK, there are no official figures collected on prevalence but a figure commonly cited is that it is estimated to affect 1 in 10 women. In 2015, the Royal College of Nursing reported that ‘the exact prevalence of endometriosis is unknown but estimates range from between two and 10 per cent of the general female population but up to 50 percent in infertile women.’ The NHS does collect data on hospital admissions where endometriosis was the primary condition—in 2018-19 there were 23,000 hospital admissions where the main cause was endometriosis in England.”

I will always bring in the perspective of Northern Ireland, where nearly all the 380 women who took part in BBC research said endometriosis had badly affected their mental health, career opportunities, sexual relationships and education. The latest figures show that in Northern Ireland the number of women waiting for a gynaecology out-patient appointment rose from

7,700 in 2012 to 17,000 in March. That is a massive increase of about 120%. In 2010, 221 patients were waiting for a laparoscopy, and by March this year the number had almost tripled to 606. That shows that the issue is becoming more prevalent. Of those waiting, nearly half have been doing so for more than six months. Those women are being failed by the NHS. Yet we expect them to continue to go to work with immense pain, feeling ill and sometimes unable to move. Worse, we live in a society where we have been trained not to talk about it. We talk about migraines openly in the workplace, but the debilitating disease of endometriosis is just as deserving of consideration and support in the workplace.

I firmly believe that we must begin a campaign to raise awareness of the problem for women, and of how gentle support can and must be put in place. That support can range from more frequent rest breaks to a change of activity during flare-ups in manual labour jobs, and even flexibility in sick day procedure. It is just a matter of understanding, being compassionate and sincere and trying to help—having empathy. I believe the change must start from here and work its way through all public sector jobs. I look to the Minister, as always, to understand how and when he intends to implement that support system.

3.24 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Thank you for accommodating me in the debate, Mr Pritchard. I had not intended to make a speech but was inspired by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), who spoke of her own experiences.

Many Members may know that one of the main issues that I have championed since coming to this place in 2015, besides constituency issues, has been women's health. Largely that has been the result of my own experiences. I have an endometrial disease and, thankfully, I was lucky with respect to workplace issues. I worked in the NHS through most of the time in question, including diagnosis, so my employers were reasonably understanding when I went through chemical menopause at the age of 36 or 37. I want to stress how important it is for women to seek help at an early age if they experience abnormalities or, as in my case, very heavy and painful periods.

The thing that really encouraged me to seek help was when I went to Asda after work one day and fainted from the pain. I have never experienced childbirth, so I cannot compare it, but it was the most chronic abdominal pain. I worked in a hospital at the time. I will not use the words that I said to the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for fear that they might be unparliamentary. I chose not to see the gynaecologist in the hospital where I worked because I thought, "If he has been looking at my nether regions I don't particularly want to bump into him in the hospital canteen," so I got a diagnosis at another hospital in the neighbouring trust in south Yorkshire. The gynaecologist was a mature gentleman and was very rude, saying to me, "Put up with it; you're a woman, and women have periods." I found that absolutely devastating and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley, I went home and cried. I thought, "I have to put up with this. This can't be right."

Years later I got a diagnosis—at the hospital where I worked, ironically. That gynaecologist has since emigrated

to New Zealand, although I am assured that it was nothing to do with me. Within minutes of meeting me he said, "I know exactly what's wrong." I had already had three lots of surgery—two laparoscopies and one hysteroscopy. He allowed me to have the chemical menopause or a hysterectomy. I chose the chemical menopause because I still harboured hopes of having children. Thankfully, I was one of the women virtually cured by it. It brought some other health challenges. There is a message in that, about empowering women to ask for a second opinion. There is nothing wrong with doing that.

Traditionally in this country—thankfully, things are changing gradually—legislation has been made by men. If I have a headache or break my leg, men can empathise, because they have heads and legs too. But if I have a problem with my periods or my womb, we are still playing catch-up. I feel that the tide is turning. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), whose speech was excellent.

3.27 pm

**Mr Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I appreciate that I am late in coming to the debate, Mr Pritchard, but it is an important issue, and I thank the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) for obtaining it. The issue is not recognised by most people. In particular, women end up taking a huge amount of painkillers—not just during their periods but when the pain is excruciating and they are unable to move or do anything. That has a huge effect on their kidneys. I have had a kidney transplant, and I understand that. People say, "Just take some more painkillers," but that is not the way to solve it. We must look at how employers deal with it, and how the NHS deals with it. That is the most important thing, and I wanted to make that point because I have a friend who is a sufferer.

3.28 pm

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on securing the debate. I put a shout out on social media yesterday and was overwhelmed by the responses I got from women across my constituency and beyond. When I posted something about the debate, asking people to watch it, a post came in from a woman who said, "It nearly killed me." That goes to the heart of the issue and conveys the severity of endometriosis symptoms.

A statistic that I was not aware of, which came up early in the right hon. Gentleman's speech, is the 62% increase in the rate of heart attacks among those who suffer from endometriosis. One of my staff members had a hysterectomy because of endometriosis, and she suffers from a number of other health issues, which we have done our very best to accommodate and support her through. I have seen the pain that she went through. A number of my friends suffer in this way; one of them, Sabrina, got in touch with me. I remember working with her in Aberdeen, and recall the pain and suffering that she went through—and, sadly, the lack of support that she often received from employers, was significant.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned an anonymous person who had got in touch with him and who worked

[*Hannah Bardell*]

at HMRC. Another woman from HMRC—she does not want to be named—got in touch with me, and said that she feels unable to miss work appointments, and that the condition has had a deep emotional impact and caused her huge anxiety. She said:

“I work in a male dominated civil service department and have had my concerns ignored, and a previous manager even refused to document the condition as it made him feel uncomfortable.”

The fact that so many men are speaking up about this issue today—the husband of my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) has also raised it in the Scottish Parliament a number of times—goes to show that there are men out there who care. We must ensure that every employer does, and we can make a significant dent in that by getting the UK Government to commit to ensuring that HMRC, and all other Departments, are sensitive and prepared for something that is clearly an issue in their own house.

This has been a hugely consensual debate. I do not want to be overly critical, but we cannot have consensus just in Westminster Hall today and nowhere else. We can do something about this issue if we work together. We heard what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) has had to endure, and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) spoke powerfully about her experiences and the work she has done. There is huge expertise in this room, but I also wish to give a voice to some of the women who have got in touch with me. One said:

“I was lucky to have a good employer and eventually they sent me home with the promise that I go to the doctor, as the pain was so bad one day.”

She said that her doctor had no clue what the problem was, and she had to go to hospital many times after suffering for 10 years. Another woman, Ailsa, said that the condition

“completely impacted my work and social life due to the pain, anxiety and isolation”.

Rebecca said that endometriosis had a life-changing impact on her mental health. She has been trying to reduce her working hours, but that has not yet been implemented, and she has been off sick since August.

A number of women got in touch to say that their employers have been sensitive to this issue, but so many are not. Raising awareness of endometriosis is our duty, but doing something about it is even more of a duty. One woman said that she was constantly being called to see HR, and then being called a liar and threatened with dismissal. Another woman said that her employer had refused to provide a sanitary bin because it was “too expensive”, and he did not want to add it to the costs of the business. It is incredible that although 1.5 million women are affected by this condition across the UK, we still have employers who think such behaviour is acceptable. Let us be clear: they are breaking the law.

Legislation alone will not solve the problem. Earlier I spoke about Endo Warriors West Lothian, which was founded in 2017 by Candice McKenzie and Claire Beattie, and I pay tribute to them. They recently walked, as did I, on the Kiltwalk in Edinburgh to raise money for the EXPPECT centre, which is a specialist clinic for endometriosis. We must also recognise the challenges in rural areas in Scotland and across the UK. Women in

rural areas have to travel further to reach services, and good practice is particularly important.

Another constituent, Rachel, said that she lobbied her employer, and they now have an understanding. She has been able to get better support, whereas previously she lost pay or had to take holidays to attend operations or hospital appointments. She was unable to get sick pay, which added to her stress and financial worry, and those poor experiences resulted in her taking more time off. One woman told me that she is fighting her employer to get reduced working hours, just so she can work at a desk. We are all employers, and it is our duty to support our staff.

Emma got in touch with me to say:

“25 years blessed with a curse...finally diagnosed 15 years ago after 10 years of being palmed off.”

She was told that she suffered from hypochondria—that old chestnut—and that periods were “meant to be painful”; that was said by a man. Someone said, “I’m sure your pain is very real to you,” as she crawled to A&E, crying her eyes out and vomiting in pain. She was told that periods cannot cause leg pain—she uses crutches some of the time—and she often passes out from pain when going to the toilet. She was told, however, that she looked “fine”. She wrote:

“Through the years I’ve passed out so much that my bathroom floor has had more hits than Take That”.

That goes to the heart of the issue.

Shirley said that she

“worked full time and had NO support from bosses and management...even after my specialist wrote to them I still got no support...in fact they stressed me out that much I had a heart attack”.

Such experiences are outrageous, and wherever we find them, we must call them out. Not every woman can get in touch with her employer, or ask a specialist to write a letter. We must do everything we can as Members of Parliament and legislators to change the narrative, change the law if necessary, and work holistically across Departments and the UK to ensure that women who suffer from endometriosis get a proper diagnosis at the proper time and the right support. When women are at work, they should not be persecuted for something over which they have no control.

3.36 pm

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on securing this important debate.

We have heard excellent and powerful contributions from 15 hon. Members about the profound impact that this complex and debilitating condition can have on our constituents—and on Members of the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). It is extraordinary to think that nearly as many women in the UK have endometriosis as have diabetes, yet the suffering associated with it is often private and unseen. Part of the issue is a still-ingrained culture of silence and even shame when it comes to women’s reproductive health, and the pervasive attitude that serious menstrual pain is normal and natural. It is not.

When such attitudes collide with working life, the effects on women can be profound. For the 30% of



women with the disease who have severe endometriosis, the condition can stop them working in the way they want. As we heard from hon. Members across the House, some women report finding conventional, full-time jobs impossible to hold down because of the impact of the condition on the hours they can work—zero-hours contracts have been mentioned—and the tasks they can perform. In some cases, women are literally managed out of work. Recent research shows that such actions can lead to those women who are most severely affected losing on average more than £5,000 in earnings a year, and one in six women gives up work entirely. We cannot afford to ignore this condition any longer.

Workplace attitudes often do not help. Today, we have listened to the experiences of women, and we heard the same stories over and over: when it comes to endometriosis, women are often not believed or supported by doctors, employers or even loved ones. Almost all women who responded to a recent BBC survey on endometriosis felt that their career had been hampered. The knock-on effects of endometriosis on mental health are shocking; almost half of the women surveyed reported that they had experienced suicidal thoughts.

Endometriosis UK provides information and guidance for employers and employees, but workplace guidance from the Government is still lacking. Endometriosis is not mentioned in several mainstream Government resources on occupational health and disability. Government acknowledgement is a vital part of awareness and recognition of endometriosis; in the absence of that acknowledgment, the condition is often framed as a performance issue, rather than a health concern. Will the Minister commit to changing this discriminatory practice? As the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) highlighted, some of that has to do with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Another problem raised by Endometriosis UK is statutory sick pay. The current guidance limits statutory sick pay to three years—much less than half of the average time it takes a woman suffering from endometriosis to be diagnosed, let alone their total time living with the condition. Endometriosis is a chronic, complex and fluctuating condition. Will the Minister do everything he can to ensure that statutory sick pay reflects reality?

Concerns have also been raised by the Work Foundation about how guidance for benefits such as the personal independence payment covers endometriosis. It has been suggested that its potential severity is not accurately reflected in guidance provided to assessors. Concerns have also been raised that references to “lifelong” conditions in disability policy have the potential to exclude women with this condition. Considering the number of women affected by endometriosis, and its impact on working lives, what will the Minister do to investigate that and ensure that women receive the support they need?

In 2017, the main recommendation in the first ever guidance on endometriosis produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence was that medical professionals should “listen to women”. I advise the Government to do the same. Listen to what has been said in the Chamber. Listen to research and testimony. Listen to the outcome of the APPG inquiry. Listen to what women, and the organisations that represent them, are telling Ministers about the help that they need, and commit to addressing the unacceptable shortcomings in support for those who suffer with endometriosis.

**Mark Pritchard (in the Chair):** As the debate is due to finish at 4 pm the Minister has, helpfully, a little more time than usual. If he is so minded, he can allow Mr Shelbrooke two minutes at the end.

3.42 pm

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** Thank you, Mr Pritchard. It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again for this important debate. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) on securing this debate, which provides an opportunity to discuss this hugely important and overlooked condition.

It is clear that there is overwhelming cross-party agreement, with little to disagree with in the sentiment expressed. I am incredibly impressed with the references to digital engagement and with how most hon. Members who spoke have been personally contacted or have personal experience of the impacts. It was clear to see genuine emotion from people watching the debate, and that is because this genuinely matters.

It has been highlighted that this issue cuts across many Departments. I represent the Department for Work and Pensions, but there is clearly a big role for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in how employers are acting, for the Department of Health and Social Care on awareness and how long it takes to get the correct diagnosis, and for the Department for Education in raising awareness at a younger age, although it does seem that there are positive steps. To ensure that nothing falls between the cracks, my Department recently moved the Office for Disability Issues to the Cabinet Office. We are still responsible, but it is based in the Cabinet Office so that on cross-cutting issues such as this it can be the eyes and ears, making sure that there is a joined-up approach.

I absolutely give a full commitment, on behalf of the DWP, that we will engage fully with the APPG review, to identify areas where we can improve awareness with our frontline staff, and improve how we handle benefits, support and everything that we can possibly do. We will also do everything we can to encourage the other three Departments, which I have no doubt will be just as willing to be proactive in this area. With the APPG’s helpful, constructive, proactive review, using the wealth of experience that is out there, hopefully together we can make a big difference.

**Jim Shannon:** We clearly welcome what the Minister just said, but as the shadow Minister said, surely there needs to be an understanding in the DWP of what endometriosis is and what its symptoms are, so that that is reflected when considering someone’s benefits. As elected representatives, we sometimes find that that is not the case. How will the Minister ensure that the Department and officials can make that change?

**Justin Tomlinson:** That is what I am articulating. We want to know that all our frontline staff and systems are taking that on. People are raising concerns that may not necessarily be directly linked to the DWP, although they may be. That is why I want to commit as much as I can to support the review, because if there are areas in which we can improve, we should and will improve in them. There is a genuine commitment.

**Louise Haigh:** The point about taboos has been raised by many people, and the fact that this condition is so under-researched and given so little airtime because it relates specifically and only to women. I bring the Minister's attention to the #periodpositive pledge, developed by my constituent Chella Quint, which campaigns against menstrual taboos and asks particularly for all official documentation to explicitly use the terms "menstrual issues" or "menstrual health issues" rather than euphemisms such as feminine and sanitary hygiene.

**Justin Tomlinson:** That is a really helpful suggestion, which we will make sure is fed in.

**Patricia Gibson:** I welcome what the Minister said about the DWP looking at how it can raise awareness of the condition for frontline staff. Does he agree that it is important to look at how sick pay works? Given the recurrent nature of the condition, it often has a financial cost to women in days lost to sickness. Will he commit to looking at whether endometriosis can be accommodated?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I will come to that in my speech, so I ask hon. Members to be a little patient. I will cover most of the points raised.

When, of the four Departments, my Department and I were selected to respond to the debate—one of four Ministers could have been selected to respond—my initial reaction was: do I know much about this? I was contacted by a former employee, Kamyá Gopal—she is happy for me to name her—who had this condition. When I employed her, we had had a conversation and made some relatively easy changes that involved being sympathetic: she had to go for short-notice GP appointments; we took into account a need for urgent toilet breaks when doing visits, making sure we were not too far away; and we took things on a day-to-day basis. For a reasonable length of time, no changes were needed. Sometimes they were, and we just accepted that, and it worked. The key thing is that it was easy for me to make those changes, and I as an employer benefited, for four years, from a really valuable member of my team. It was a win-win from having the confidence to have that conversation. She made it clear to me—this has come across clearly in hon. Members' speeches—that it affects everyone differently. For her, it is a family trait, but they all have different symptoms and challenges to overcome. It all comes down to having that conversation.

Linked to that, another impact is the need to use disabled toilets. Kamyá has a RADAR key—it is a hidden disability—and recently someone challenged her for using the disabled toilet. She had to explain, which was embarrassing for her and for the lady who challenged her. That is why I pay tribute to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield), who has been championing Grace's sign, which is fully supported by my Department, to raise awareness of hidden disabilities and hidden health conditions and avoid those confrontational, embarrassing situations.

It is important that people with health conditions get the support that enables them to stay in work, and productive in work. Such support is wide-ranging and relies on employers being open to discussing health matters with their employees in a respectful and constructive way.

I am on my fifth Secretary of State as a Minister in the DWP, and I have many roundtables with different stakeholders. We were talking about disability employment yesterday, and it was interesting how there has been a shift in focus to ensuring that people do not drop out of work due to disability or a health condition. Collectively we must do much more in that area. I am encouraged that there is increasing awareness and recognition of hidden disabilities, and hidden health conditions in particular. There is still a huge way to go, but there is a willingness in society to do better.

Endometriosis is a serious condition; we have heard about the ways that it can be debilitating. For the estimated one in 10 women in the UK who suffer, the condition can have a huge effect on their daily lives, including their ability to work to their full ability. As the examples quoted by various Members today show, diagnosis is not always straightforward. Problems arise because symptoms can vary significantly, and because diagnosis tends to require invasive procedures. I do not profess to be a health expert, but it is clear that because endometriosis is seen as a taboo, that will impact on the ability to diagnose and provide support. Members have spoken powerfully about how we have to do much more in that area.

The challenging nature of the condition is recognised within the health system, which now has specialist training. NHS England has developed a service specification for severe endometriosis under the specialised commissioning area of complex gynaecology. That is a good step. It is the beginning of the journey and we will have to see what difference it makes, but I am encouraged that it is starting to happen.

Through these measures diagnosis and treatment should improve, but we must also consider the effect on the ability to work. A survey by investment firm Standard Life found that one in six women with endometriosis report having to give up work because of the severity of their symptoms, with almost all—some 87%—reporting that the condition affected their financial position in some way.

Individual women feel the harmful effects, but employers and the economy as a whole lose out. The leading charity, Endometriosis UK, has estimated that the total cost to the economy of the condition is £8.2 billion; the cost from loss of work is a key contributor to that figure. As outlined in the Work Foundation report, such an impact means that the days of dismissing topics such as these as "women's issues" are long gone. We know that both the health and work landscapes must be more aware of the condition and its symptoms, for the sake of the women who suffer from it and in order to build a healthier and more productive society for all.

One way that people in work are protected is through the Equality Act 2010, which is the principal means through which disabled people are protected from discrimination in Great Britain. Other than for a very few exceptions, the Act recognises a disability by the impact on the person's life rather than by the condition itself. Importantly, that means that women with endometriosis are protected by the Act if their condition has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. I recognise the points that have been highlighted about how we need to improve the awareness and the enforcement of the Act, and about wider support. I will come on to some of the work in that area.

Individuals are also protected in law against unfair dismissal. While those legal protections exist, sufferers continue to face barriers to work and barriers in the workplace, as we have heard. More must be done to raise awareness of hidden conditions. Workplace cultures must adapt to spread understanding of the importance of supporting individuals with health conditions and the value of open discussions about health in the workplace.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** Can my hon. Friend pick up on the specific point that was raised about HMRC by myself and the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell)? I absolutely agree with what he is saying, but it seems like an easy starting point to address that point with a Government Department.

**Justin Tomlinson:** Yes, absolutely. HMRC has been named and shamed in this debate; we will make sure it is made aware of that. I hope and expect that it will act to improve on that.

**Hannah Bardell:** Will the Minister guarantee that no employee of HMRC, or any other Government Department, who has spoken out or contacted their MP will be persecuted or disadvantaged in any way in their place of employment? Because of the treatment she had experienced at HMRC, the constituent who contacted me was concerned that she would be putting herself at further risk if she were to be named. That is why I have not named her. Can he give me that guarantee?

**Justin Tomlinson:** That is absolutely understood. It is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, which protects workers in the workplace.

Unfortunately, as highlighted, there remains stigma and taboo attached to discussing health issues that affect women. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) said that she was pleased to see so many men contributing or responding in this debate. I recognise that that is important. I also welcome the recent media focus on endometriosis, which has begun to break down some stigma and taboo. There is still a long way to go. This debate alone highlights the need to do more. Women, particularly young women, must know that they do not need to suffer in silence. This is one of the few issues that unites us across parties; those who have campaigned on this issue should take credit for helping to secure that cross-party support.

I find cause for optimism in parallels with work supporting other hidden disabilities, such as mental health issues, where we have been able to raise awareness. There has been a desire in all parts of society to improve what we can do. We need to replicate that with this condition in light of the concerns that have been raised.

The Government's main role is to create conditions in which employers can do the right thing. In mid-July we published a consultation on proposals to reduce ill-health-related job loss, called "Health is everyone's business". The consultation closed on 7 October, but I will try to make sure that everything that has been raised today is fed into that. There were some helpful insights.

The proposals covered a range of areas, such as changes to the legal framework to encourage employers to intervene early during sickness absences and provide workplace modifications; the reform to statutory sick pay, which many Members have highlighted as an area

of particular interest; and better provision of information and advice to employers on health issues in the workplace, which is important to me.

We often think about big businesses that have HR and personnel departments. As long as the key decision makers at the top can be convinced about what their organisation should be doing, there are professionals who are comfortable making sure that that is embedded in the culture of the organisation. As an example, I pay tribute to John Lewis & Partners; I spoke at an event in Parliament last week about its provision of good in-work health support for its staff.

However, over 50% of private sector jobs are in small or medium-sized businesses. With the best will in the world, they do not have HR or personnel departments, so we must do far more to ensure that they have information and to signpost them to organisations and groups that can provide the next level of support. I want to see that delivered through the Health and Safety Commission. We are brilliant at supporting safety in the workplace; we have to have the same approach on health and on improvements to the quality and accessibility of occupational health services. These proposals do not name and target specific conditions, but they will reduce ill-health-related job loss across the board, which will benefit those suffering with endometriosis.

I again thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell for highlighting the powerful words of many of the people who contacted him. I know that, with over 2,000 responses, he had a lot to choose from. One response that articulated the value of flexibility particularly well said:

"You don't know how your pain is going to be that day. You could be absolutely fine, or you could be crippled."

Being able to adjust workload on a given day, or to choose to work from home, will enable women who experience fluctuating symptoms like that to stay in work.

The Government are committed to showing employers the business case for this flexibility, and to showing that a more productive and engaged workforce, with better retention, will be the end result. I say that with genuine passion. I have employed many people with health conditions and disabilities, and I have benefited from that.

I have been grateful for the opportunity to address the issues raised. Endometriosis is a condition that we all need to take seriously, and those with the condition need all the support they can get. I trust I have been able to offer reassurances to hon. Members about the support and protection available, and about the measures that this Government are taking to support and encourage employers to support their employees with health conditions and create workplaces where everyone can thrive. We have much more to do. The all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis allows Members who have a real interest, passion and knowledge of this area to contribute. All Departments must take that seriously.

Finally, I pay tribute to all the volunteers who are providing support groups across the country, among our local communities. They are making a real difference, ensuring that people realise they are not suffering alone.

3.58 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I thank every single right hon. and hon. Member who has contributed today. Given the



[*Alec Shelbrooke*]

times we are going through, it goes to show the strength of parliamentarians from across parties that we have come together to deliver a clear message about where we want to get to as we move forward.

My main aim today was to raise the issue further into the public perspective. I welcome the Minister's words; I know the APPG will be feeding into that. I am excited by the fact that the issue is now with the Cabinet Office, so that it can look at it across Departments. We have made it clear—all coming at the subject from different angles—that we need different Departments to get a handle on the issue if we are to sort it out.

I pay personal tribute to the hon. Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff). Many of us in this Chamber suffer from health issues, but not many of us are brave enough to stand up and say what they are. People who inspire other people make change possible. Being able to look at someone who is in the position of being a Member of Parliament and say, "That person has the same thing I am suffering from," hopefully lets the word spread. Fundamentally, we have to break down the taboos. We have to educate better in the workplace and use the education system we have, but we have to break down the taboos. We have made a good start today.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Bus Services: Cumbria

[*DAME CHERYL GILLAN in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered bus services in Cumbria.

It is a huge privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, and I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this massively important issue.

To represent a part of Britain as breathtakingly beautiful as ours in south Cumbria—to stand here and speak up for communities in the Yorkshire Dales, the Lake District and the rest of the south Lakes—is the greatest privilege. It is an awesome place, and it is a huge place—the travel distances are immense. My constituency could contain every single one of the 73 constituencies that make up London, and we would be delighted to have the public transport options of just one of them. In such a vast and sparsely populated area as the south Lakes, public transport links are fundamental, yet so often they fall woefully short of meeting the needs of communities, and the provision that currently exists is coming under continuous and increasing threat.

Cumbria suffers from rural transport poverty. The picture for the whole north-west region is pretty bleak; in the 10 years from 2008 to 2018 the north-west lost 888 separate, distinct services. That figure does not include the services that we have lost in the past year. We in Cumbria have been particularly badly hit, although we had a little good news last week when we won a temporary reprieve for two bus services in the south Lakes. Stagecoach agreed to continue running the 552 between Arnsdale and Kendal and the 530 between Cartmel, Levens and Kendal, but only for a further three weeks, while we look to put a longer-term solution in place.

In a large rural area with a dispersed population, it is very hard for bus services to be run on a commercial basis. Unlike many urban areas, we cannot rely on the private sector to fill the gaps when funding disappears.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. I represent a constituency with many similar challenges to those he is talking about in Cumbria; it is a collection of small towns and villages around a bigger town, near a city. Exactly that point applies—we cannot rely on a commercial service. If we compare the number of cuts, the funding and the services that we have in south Yorkshire and Cumbria with areas such as London, the same model simply does not work. Does he agree that we need more funding, but that local people also need to get the services they deserve?

**Tim Farron**: The hon. Lady's intervention is very appropriate. I am certain that her communities will have had similar experiences to mine. In the end, investment in public transport is just that. People use the word subsidy, but we are talking about an investment, because the impact on local communities, their economy and the wellbeing of the people who live in them of having these services is worth the money we put into them. It makes more money in terms of the multiplier, so her point is well made and I am grateful to her for making it.

Over the next three weeks we will work together to try to provide a long-term solution to the proposed loss of the 552 and the 530 services. We are grateful to have managed to persuade Stagecoach to give us that stay of execution. As I said, in a large rural area with a dispersed population, it is hard for bus services to be run on a commercial basis and, unlike many urban areas, we cannot rely on the private sector to fill the gaps when funding disappears. In fact, none of the recent services that have been cut has since been taken up by a commercial provider. Once they are gone, they are usually gone for good.

That is why I am so determined that we should find solutions now to protect or to replace the 530 and the 552 before they disappear. With no alternative bus service, those communities can easily become cut off. The average age in my patch is 10 years above the national average, and with a significantly larger older population the need for reliable, regular bus services is all the greater. Many people I know have found themselves alone and disconnected in their later years, the loss of bus services leaving them stranded in places that are utterly beautiful but utterly isolated.

The steady erosion of our bus services comes at the worst time, when other key services are also being reduced. The closure of bank branches in places such as Milnthorpe, Grange, Sedbergh, Ambleside and Coniston in recent times, alongside the closure of shops and post offices, means that people rely even more on public transport to get to the bigger towns and villages, just as those public transport options are disappearing.

That is why we were right to fight to expose Barclays for its dreadful plan to withdraw from the scheme that underpins our post offices, and I am relieved that Barclays has done a U-turn under pressure from many of us. However, it is a reminder that we need to ensure that the banks pay a fair price to the post offices that now fill the spaces that they left behind when they closed their branches and abandoned our communities.

Many in our towns and villages rely on the buses for the basic tasks of daily life—shopping, doctor's appointments, seeing friends and family or getting to work. The 530 is the only bus route that serves the village of Levens. It is well used by residents to travel into Kendal to shop and to access other vital services. The same applies to the 552; without that service, there is no regular bus connection linking Arnside with the other major communities.

We must also consider the impact of loneliness on physical and mental health. Let us imagine someone who lives in a small village and is unable to drive. If their one transport link is removed, they will find themselves increasingly cut off, unable to travel at the same time as they witness the closure of accessible services in the place they live, with more and more of the homes in their community becoming second homes that are empty for 90% of the year. With few neighbours and fewer local services, the loss of buses constitutes the loss of a vital lifeline and risks leaving many even more isolated and vulnerable.

It is not only the elderly in our communities who are suffering from the reduced bus services. Young people's access to public transport is also under threat. Free school transport is provided for children up to sixth-form age, but after that the support is not available. It simply makes no sense for the Government to demand that

young people carry on in education until they are 18 and then deny them the ability to afford to do so. In places such as Sedbergh and Coniston, it is often impossible to gain access to sixth-form provision at schools or colleges by public transport. There needs to be a statutory responsibility for local education authorities to guarantee home-to-school transport for 16 to 18-year-old students, in the same way that there is for the under-16s. However, there must also be the buses available to deliver that transport in the first place.

Community bus services have filled the gap in some cases, as over the past 30 years Governments of all colours have allowed funding for bus provision to evaporate. To their absolute credit, communities have not just stood by. When the X12 from Coniston to Ulverston was cut, the community stepped up to run the service through fundraising and sheer determination, but it has not been easy. It is a service run in the face of obstacles thrown up by the Department for Transport's own rules.

Similar stories could be told of the 106 between Kendal and Penrith, and of the 597 Windermere town bus. In Sedbergh the buses are now run by the community-run Western Dales Bus, set up after the cancellation of the 564 left Sedbergh entirely without a connection to the main town of Kendal. I am massively grateful to the volunteers who make those services possible. Indeed, it was a pleasure to be a volunteer driver myself on the Sedbergh bus just a few months ago. It was a great pleasure for the passengers too—at least, they were pleased when the experience was over.

I am proud of our communities and proud of the bus services that so many groups run locally, working tirelessly to provide the best services they can, but it is a battle that comes at a personal cost. Our communities do a phenomenal job, but they should not have to. Urban areas would never settle for that absence of provision, so why should we?

The Cumbria chamber of commerce last year consulted businesses throughout our county for their response to Transport for the North's strategic review. Inadequate bus services were cited repeatedly for the toll that they were taking on the ability of businesses to recruit staff. Put simply, staff have no means of getting to work. That is a particular issue for the tourism and hospitality industry, in which staff often have to start shifts early or finish late. Lack of buses also prevents businesses in the Lake district from recruiting staff from Barrow, where the employment pool is bigger and unemployment is higher.

Bus services are essential to life for locals. They are also key to Cumbria's vibrant tourism industry. Cumbria's Lake district is Britain's second biggest visitor destination after London—16 million people visited us last year. A high proportion of visitors use their free bus passes while on holiday. That is subsidised by Cumbria County Council through funds provided by the Government, but calculated according to the number of people permanently living in our community. That calculation does not count the reality of the colossal number of tourists using the service. The funding does not even begin to reflect the number of passes used in our area, and local taxpayers end up picking up the shortfall. That is one reason why there is no money to subsidise public bus

[Tim Farron]

services in Cumbria; we are basically subsidising public transport for people from richer authorities who do not return the favour.

It strikes me as bizarre, standing in London as I am, that bus services here receive a £722 million annual subsidy, while in Cumbria we receive absolutely nothing. The lack of subsidy has a catastrophic impact on fares, and the extortionate prices make commuting by bus a real challenge, especially for lower-paid workers. How is it right that the 5-mile bus journey from Ambleside to Grasmere—neighbouring communities—costs £4.90, while a journey of equivalent length in London costs £1.50? The Government subsidise buses in a big city where the market is not broken, but they refuse to help in rural areas where the market absolutely is broken.

We are proud that so many people want to visit our area—we love to welcome you to Cumbria. Our tourism industry is invaluable to the economy, but investment in public services is essential to ensuring that tourism does not damage our local communities but helps them to thrive. We want to encourage our visitors to travel sustainably, but 85% of them use the motor car to get to our community and to travel around once they are there. However, we know that with the right interventions and conditions, our visitors will travel sustainably.

Tourism sector deal zone proposals include a focus on sustainability, and public bus transport is a key component of that—so we welcome it—alongside rail, boats, bikes and, of course, walking. Improved bus services could alleviate pressure on the roads that become clogged with the cars of those visiting.

The reality is that we are too late to prevent climate change, but we have perhaps a dozen years left to avoid a major climate catastrophe, with real and appalling human consequences. [Interruption.]

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Order. [Interruption.] Order. Could you sit down in the Public Gallery and be quiet, please. Thank you. Mr Farron—[Interruption.] Please, this is a debating chamber; it is not for members of the public to take part in the debate. I am awfully sorry, but thank you for leaving. I am sorry, Mr Farron. Would you like to continue?

**Tim Farron:** Thank you, Dame Cheryl.

The reality, whether we like it or not, is that climate change is happening. The question is whether we can prevent a climate catastrophe that will have huge impacts on human beings in this country and across the globe. Tackling this global disaster will take change in every community and lots of steps that add up to a bigger picture. Public transport is an element of that. In order for there to be success globally, we in the Lakes are determined to act locally. Our community bus services prove that determination.

Two new platforms are being funded and opened at Manchester Piccadilly railway station. That important public investment in infrastructure and the economy through the northern powerhouse is good news, but where is the equivalent for the rural north? The transport spend in the north-west per head of population is still barely half that in London, despite promises made when the northern powerhouse was formed. I will continue

to fight the cuts to individual bus services. I will continue to stand with and work with the community to find alternative solutions, just as we are currently doing for Arnside, Levens, Cartmel, Hincaster and Kendal. But let us be honest: that is not good enough. The concept of the northern powerhouse is great, but from Cumbria's perspective it is not much of a powerhouse and it is not very northern.

If new platforms at Manchester Piccadilly are an investment that will boost the Manchester city region's economy, a comprehensive bus service in rural Cumbria is the investment to boost the Cumbrian economy, so that is my proposal today: that the Minister should ensure the direct commissioning of a comprehensive, affordable and reliable rural bus network in Cumbria. Will the Minister do that as a key plank of the northern powerhouse?

The bus service running through the south Lakes along the A6 and the A591 is the 555. Running from Lancaster to Keswick, it serves Milnthorpe, Kendal, Staveley, Windermere, Ambleside and Grasmere. It is a reliable service, but extremely expensive. The Kendal to Ambleside journey was recently revealed as the second most expensive route in the country. But if we look at the 555 as the trunk service, what we have seen over the last 30 years has been the slow but steady hacking off of the twigs and the branches. If people do not live in one of the communities along the main south Lakes route, they are more than likely without a bus service. Therefore, what I am asking for is a new commissioned service that will bring back buses to every community and breathe new life into the public transport of the Lakes.

If the Government keep ignoring the plight of rural communities, we will keep fighting for ourselves, rolling up our sleeves, making our own luck and finding solutions against the odds, but we would love it if they would stop ignoring us and instead commission a comprehensive rural bus service to exceed anything that we have seen before, even 35 years ago before deregulation. It will be an investment that revives rural communities, boosts our economy, tackles isolation and connects our towns and villages. I plead with the Minister to be ambitious and to back that proposal.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Before I ask the Minister to respond to the debate, may I thank you, Mr Farron, for bearing with the interruption, and may I place on the record our thanks to the Doorkeeper for dealing on our behalf with that interruption?

4.17 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman):** Thank you for that, Dame Cheryl. I echo those sentiments and thanks.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) on securing the debate and thank him for raising this issue. He now has a meeting in the diary with my noble Friend Baroness Vere, who leads on buses in the Department. It is an absolute pleasure for me to respond to the debate, partly because, as a rural MP for Mid Norfolk, I share many of the hon. Gentleman's frustrations at the neglect of rural buses over decades, but also because, as the newly appointed Minister for the future of transport, with responsibility in the Department for a new portfolio and leading on tackling disconnection, decarbonisation,



digitalisation and innovation in the private and public transport sectors, I welcome the chance to speak to the issues that he has raised and to highlight some of the things that we are doing to turbocharge the improvement of rural connectivity.

The hon. Gentleman and I, and indeed the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), recognise, as I think all rural MPs do, that public transport and particularly buses in rural areas are essential to connectivity to the workplace, but also for access to public services, particularly healthcare and education. Often in these debates, however, those of us who bemoan the lack of investment and support for rural buses over the years forget that there is still a very substantial service. There are 4 billion bus journeys a year.

Buses remain the most popular form of public transport. Overall, passenger satisfaction remains consistently high, at 85%. I happen to think that the figures are probably higher in urban areas than in some of the rural areas, such as Mid Norfolk and Westmorland and Lonsdale. None the less, I place it on the record that buses are popular and are vital for the connectivity of rural communities and, of course, vital for productivity and general economic wellbeing. For the many people visiting areas such as the Lake district, buses are key.

For the first time in my memory, we have a Prime Minister who has been a Mayor—it is certainly the first time we have had a Prime Minister who makes model buses—and who actually has a passion for public transport, and for places, buses and connectivity, which is all to the good. It is for that reason that I am here today to signal the levelling up of our ambition for rural connectivity. Indeed, the first request that the Prime Minister made to me when he asked me to take on this role was to drive better innovation and faster connectivity, to reach out to those people and places left behind, which is a subject the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and I have both spoken about and written on widely.

That is why I am delighted that in the last few weeks the Government have announced a new £220 million bus deal and committed to a long-term bus strategy. We may say that is long overdue, but it is happening none the less, and I am delighted. Crucially, it will focus on the passengers who rely on the services, rather than the providers, and we will also look at how national and local government, and the private and public sectors, can work together to improve value for money and to get a better deal from not only the additional money, but the money that we have already put in.

Each year the Department for Transport provides £250 million in direct revenue support for bus services in England via the bus service operators grant. Without that, fares would increase and marginal services would disappear in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine. Around £43 million of that grant is paid directly to local authorities, rather than to bus operators, to support socially necessary bus services in their areas that are not commercially viable. The Government recognise the importance of these services, which are essential for rural connectivity and for supplementing the often patchy private provision of, for example, evening or Sunday services, which may not be available.

To improve current bus services or to restore lost services, the Government will pay an extra £30 million of new funding to local authorities to help tackle that problem, in addition to the £1 billion a year currently

spent by local authorities on concessionary bus passes. We also committed to protecting the national bus travel concession, which benefits around 10 million people, allowing free, off-peak local travel anywhere in England. That concession provides older and disabled people with greater freedom, independence and a lifeline to their community, and enables access to facilities in their local area and helps them to keep in touch with family and friends.

In policy making, it is sometimes easy to overlook the essential nature of rural public transport for basic, functioning communities and connectivity. Living in a great city such as London during the week, one sees transport at our fingertips, on demand when we want it. In rural areas such as the hon. Gentleman's and mine, it is not like that. No one expects it to be identical—we want diversity—but we have to recognise that connectivity is fundamental to a functioning society and economy. That is why we are going further and why we need to be more innovative.

Digitalisation and basic telephony now make a whole range of new services possible. Demand-responsive transport services have been used for some time to replace infrequent traditional services that do not meet a local community's specific needs, or to get services closer to where people live at a time that is convenient for them—and we are about to go further and faster. We will start to look at places, counties and districts and ask where the people who most need to be moved around actually are, and at what time of day, and whether one bus running infrequently down one road is the right way to do that. Could we use technology to provide a more mixed package of lift-share, car-share, community bus and traditional and modern bus services?

To trial on-demand services in rural and suburban areas, the Government have established a new £20 million fund as part of that bus deal. I am delighted to tell the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that, as part of that, I will be championing innovation in rural areas. As part of the future mobility zones that I am putting in place, we will look specifically at rural mobility, not just at inner-city and urban mobility, where so much of the innovation has tended to be.

The hon. Gentleman rightly paid tribute to the many people up and down rural Britain who contribute to community transport and support their communities. I echo that. Approximately 8 million passenger trips take place in rural areas every year, which has a huge impact on encouraging growth and reducing isolation. Community transport operators can access the bus service operators grant to help keep fares down and to run a wider network of services than they could otherwise afford to run. Community transport spend from this grant was substantially above £3 million in 2018-19.

Data, technology and innovation are making possible a whole range of new services, which is why access to digitalisation for rural bus services is a crucial part of what we are doing next. Passengers rightly expect easy access to comprehensive and high-quality information about local bus services. People want to know where they can catch a bus, when it will come, what the fare will be and how they can pay. With more and more people having smartphones in their pockets, it is surely possible for us to run a more digital and demand-responsive service.

[George Freeman]

The bus data powers in the Bus Services Act 2017 will go further than the partnership provisions, requiring all bus operators of local services in England to open up real-time information on routes, timetables, fares and tickets to passengers from next year. These improvements aim to remove uncertainty in bus journeys, improve journey planning and help passengers secure best-value tickets.

However, we will go further. Notwithstanding potential electoral disruptions, I shortly expect to announce future mobility zones, our flagship project for supporting innovation in future transport. Crucially, I will be looking at rural as well as urban areas. We will look at pilots on demand-responsive services such as those in Lincolnshire and in the Tees Valley, which was announced this week by the Mayor of Teesside, Ben Houchen.

I will close by congratulating the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and genuinely thanking him for securing the debate, which has given us the chance to raise these issues. His points on the northern powerhouse were well made, and I will pass those on to the Minister responsible. The truth is that there is no single solution, and we should not seek some magic bullet. He is right to highlight that rural areas demand a different solution from urban areas. Equally, he is right to highlight that while cities such as Manchester—the heartbeat of the northern powerhouse—are growing and investing, we need to look at nearby rural areas, to make sure that we are not creating a two-tier transport system.

The commitment from the Government and myself is clear: to maintain and improve local public transport. We also commit to go further, using this £200 million bus package to improve and support innovation in rural public transport, so that we have a mixed economy that works for the benefit of communities and businesses in rural areas. The Government are 100% committed to that. The Prime Minister is committed to that. I hope that we get a chance after the next election to put that into practice.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Northern Ireland Economy and Innovation: Government Support

4.27 pm

**Emma Little Pengelly** (Belfast South) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for the economy and innovation in Northern Ireland.

First, may I say what a pleasure and privilege it is to serve under your chairpersonship, Dame Cheryl? I am particularly pleased to finally secure the debate. The Minister will be aware that I had secured the debate twice previously, and that it unfortunately fell twice because of the proroguing. I am glad to be here, particularly at this moment in time, to talk about the business and innovation community in Northern Ireland, which is such an important issue.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will my hon. Friend join me in being extremely grateful that she did not succeed in securing the debate for next week?

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Absolutely. Even when I saw that the debate was scheduled, I thought that I had jinxed the entire thing, and that it certainly would not be third time lucky. However, it is, and I am really pleased to be here, because I am passionate about supporting the economy and businesses in Northern Ireland.

The issue is particularly important at this pivotal time for Northern Ireland and our United Kingdom, of which our businesses are very much part. I will touch on a number of issues relating to business, innovation and the economy in Northern Ireland, and I will raise questions and issues on particular elements. I am grateful to the Minister for being here to respond.

First, I want to paint the broader picture in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has an incredibly proud industrial and manufacturing history. We have been world leaders. Many companies that were created and thrived in Northern Ireland, and have been world leaders, will be well known to many across the United Kingdom and the world. Northern Ireland has contributed in a valuable way, including to the economy of pre-partition Ireland and of this United Kingdom. We have been world leaders in manufacturing and industry.

Many generations in Northern Ireland have worked, created, innovated and led the way. They have been critical to our economy and the tens of thousands of jobs they created, changing lives. The mighty companies of the past put Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland on the map. However, as we are all aware, times have changed, and some of those huge, mighty industries of the past have faded away or are disappearing. This is common not only in Belfast and Northern Ireland, but across the United Kingdom and in many other countries.

However, we must build on our incredibly strong foundation to move forward. Having spoken to businesses, universities, and people in my constituency and across Northern Ireland, I believe there is a huge appetite to do that. It is often said that we stand on the shoulders of giants, and that is true when it comes to the economy and business in Northern Ireland. We have a bright and optimistic future if there is application, support and the right environment to help our businesses, economy and companies grow.

**Paul Girvan** (South Antrim) (DUP): I want to highlight the benefits we receive from the likes of Ulster University. Its Harry Ferguson building, a centre for innovation, brings forward many world-leading manufacturing products, which will revolutionise the future. But sometimes we fail to embrace the great innovation that we have in Northern Ireland. In my constituency, Conemaster developed a safety product for laying out cones on motorways. Unfortunately, it was set aside by the UK Government and those who want to run things here. It is important that we buy from, and support, local industry, and do not promote others.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair)**: I remind hon. Members that interventions must be brief.

**Emma Little Pengelly**: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which was so good that I almost intervened on him. I absolutely agree. We have incredible companies. Politicians from all parties, but particularly the Democratic Unionist party, have always been proud to showcase and promote those companies, in London, the UK and across the globe. I have had the privilege and pleasure of accompanying many of those businesses on trade missions across the globe. I can see the huge interest in the innovation and creativity of those companies.

The Democratic Unionist party has often been referred to as the party of business in Northern Ireland. Some may disagree with that, and we do not always agree with business on everything, but one thing is clear: the Democratic Unionist party is a proud pro-business party. We recognise that supporting business is critical to supporting our economy, and growth in our economy is critical to getting new opportunities for young people and building a better future for them. We know that shared prosperity in Northern Ireland will bring shared stability. That is essential for Northern Ireland as it emerges from decades of trouble and division, and their legacy, which we still deal with; we know that growing the economy is key.

That is why, in 2007, when the Northern Ireland Assembly was restored, the Democratic Unionist party made growing the economy in Northern Ireland the No. 1 priority. We do so by building a coalition with all the other parties that agree that growing the economy is the best way to get a bright and better future for all in Northern Ireland, across all communities: Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and nationalist, and new and other communities that do not define in that way. We want everybody in Northern Ireland to succeed, and to have the best opportunities, and we recognise that one critical way of doing that is to have a robust, growing and strong economy in Northern Ireland.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech. She mentioned large companies, but the backbone of Northern Ireland is small, family businesses. We have helped those in manufacturing with rates relief and other measures. Regarding innovation, we have the Young Enterprise programmes, which are coming through into small businesses to give them some initiative. I am sure she will also welcome that.

**Emma Little Pengelly**: I absolutely agree. Later in my speech, I will come to the various aspects of our economy in Northern Ireland, and the particular issues, challenges and opportunities they face.

Northern Ireland is the smallest region of the United Kingdom, making up just 3% of the UK, but we still make a mighty contribution, and have a mighty story to tell. All of us here from Northern Ireland want it to play an even greater part in what is often referred to here as global Britain, but we would like to see a truly global United Kingdom agenda, in which every part of this United Kingdom is fully integrated and promoted and each region pulls its weight.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the downsides of the current withdrawal agreement is that although we are a major exporting region of the UK, we might find ourselves prevented from taking part in trade deals that the Government might strike with other parts of the world because of the way in which we are tied into the EU?

**Emma Little Pengelly**: As a member of the International Trade Committee, I am very aware of the opportunities, challenges and barriers that full participation in international trade entails. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to learn that I will mention the ‘B’ word—Brexit—later in my speech, and specifically the dreadful proposal for the Northern Ireland economy. My right hon. Friend’s points are valid; that constitutes a real and present risk to our economy.

Northern Ireland, just 3% of the United Kingdom, relies hugely on trade with the rest of the United Kingdom. Great Britain is the biggest market by far for Northern Ireland—bigger than the Republic of Ireland, the European Union and the rest of the world combined. Over the past 10 to 20 years, and certainly since the restoration of the Assembly in 2007, huge effort has been put into increasing our exports, and the market for our exports in other countries in the European Union and across the world, but Great Britain remains our biggest market, which we rely on hugely. Any barriers to trade with it would have significant impacts. I will touch on that later.

A factor that is discussed less often in this debate is consumer choice. Consumers in Northern Ireland rely hugely on the Great British market for goods, from the supermarket goods that we see in common high-street shops, to bespoke and craft products in smaller, family-owned shops. Many of those goods come from Great Britain, and there are real concerns about how people will access them. Many people today access goods through online marketplaces, such as Amazon, eBay and Etsy; that, too, gives rise to concerns about consumer choice and access. Many of the companies in those marketplaces are based in Great Britain, and many are very small producers; barriers might prevent them from posting their products to shops and consumers in Northern Ireland.

As a small region of the United Kingdom, we rely heavily on its economy, but Northern Ireland has a really strong case to make. As we have gone round the world trying to attract new businesses and, particularly, foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland, we have been able to showcase the fact that we have the highest skills in the United Kingdom. We have three excellent universities: Ulster University, Queen’s University in the heart of my Belfast South constituency, and the Open University, which does a huge amount of work. We also have high skills and a good education system. That is not to say that we do not have challenges—I have



[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

spoken about the challenges of trying to support every child to succeed in getting skills—but we are one of the highest-skilled regions in the United Kingdom.

We have relatively low staff turnover, which is very attractive to businesses moving to Northern Ireland, because they know that if they take those staff on, train them and invest in them, they will show loyalty. Indeed, I think we have the lowest staff turnover in the United Kingdom, which is comparatively unique. A company looking to come to the United Kingdom will also find relatively low set-up costs in Northern Ireland, as well as people who can support it through the process, and comparatively low recurring running costs.

We have a strong case to make, but of course there have been challenges. Over the past 15 years, the Republic of Ireland has cut its corporation tax time and again to make it even more competitive, knowing that our corporation tax rate is tied to that of the rest of the United Kingdom, and is therefore significantly higher. The Republic of Ireland has created tax incentive packages that I would describe as innovative, particularly to attract big US companies such as Facebook and Apple. We want to be able to attract those companies, too. Since 2007, working closely with Invest NI, Northern Ireland has had a very strong record; in fact, for some years, it attracted more FDI than any region of the United Kingdom outside London and south-east England. For a small region with the challenges that we had, that is a really strong story to tell. It is a story that we should be proud of—but we want more. We want to do better, and we need to do better, because we still have challenges and we still do not have the types of jobs that we want for our young people: high-value, stable jobs that young people with the right skills can move into, creating happy, healthy lives for themselves and their families with the prosperity that we want to bring.

**Sammy Wilson:** My hon. Friend is right that it is not just jobs that we want, but good-quality jobs. Does she agree that when the Assembly was working properly, one of its successes was in attracting such jobs? Indeed, about 50% of the jobs attracted through FDI paid wages above the average wage in Northern Ireland.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I absolutely agree. Statistics released in recent days indicate that although we have had growth in the average wage, it has now slowed down, and there has been a slowdown at the high-value end of jobs. In Northern Ireland we have comparatively low unemployment, but those statistics do not necessarily show the whole story. My constituency of Belfast South has one of the lowest unemployment rates not just in Northern Ireland, but across the United Kingdom—but too many of those jobs are at the lower end. We need high-value jobs that pay people better, because there is significant in-work poverty. The best way to get out of poverty is with a well-paid job. People need jobs with stability to help them to support themselves and their family.

We also have persistently high levels of economic inactivity. Although people point to that inactivity, the reality is that right now we cannot just match it with jobs growth. We need good programmes to support people, regardless of why they are economically inactive. In Northern Ireland, we have a higher than average

percentage of students, who are currently defined as economically inactive, but those are not necessarily the people we are worried about; we are worried about those who have been economically inactive for some considerable time. Even more worrying are people in families who suffer from transgenerational unemployment. They need the right support and skills programmes, at the right level.

This is not just about getting people entry-level jobs; we want them to skill up and make progress. I have heard House of Commons statistics about how many people go into an entry-level job and stay at that level for their entire career. Social mobility and support for people throughout their career, so that they can increase their wages and their family income, are essential to the shared prosperity to which we are committed.

Let me touch on a few particular aspects. I have already mentioned foreign direct investment. Northern Ireland's economy is still very much one of small to medium-sized, largely family-owned businesses, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) said. The Democratic Unionist party absolutely wants to support those businesses, but many of them are understandably reluctant to take risks in order to grow—people are content with the strong business that they have built not just for themselves, but for their children and family. We want to encourage those businesses because we need them to grow, but they should be able to take those risks in an environment in which they feel confident and positive. I will say a little more about family and small businesses in a moment.

I know that the Minister will have had meetings with Invest NI and received briefings. I pay tribute to the incredible work of Alastair Hamilton, who I worked with many years ago. He has done a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances, particularly in the past few years, to keep increasing foreign direct investment and high-value jobs. Since the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly more than 1,000 days ago, one of the small glimmers of light has been the fact that Invest NI has been able to continue to make jobs announcements, including in my constituency, and to create the opportunities that we really need. Under the framework set by the Northern Ireland Assembly, Alastair Hamilton and his Invest NI colleagues were able to continue going into the global marketplace, winning contracts and attracting companies to Northern Ireland. We want to build on his incredible work; as he moves on from the job, we are all thankful for the amazingly competent work that he has put in.

We are keen to continue to play a full role in attracting foreign direct investment. We can do so much through our regional organisations, such as Invest NI, but as the Democratic Unionist party has pointed out to the Government on a number of occasions, our sell in Northern Ireland must be fully integrated into what the United Kingdom does on a global scale. We want to be fully included in what is being offered, including trade fairs, engagement with countries, and trade missions. Some progress has been made, but we want more. I am sure that Members of Parliament from Scotland, Wales, the north of England and other regions also feel that, historically, their region has not been fully included and integrated in the sell of the UK Government. I have raised that issue on many occasions with the Secretary of State for International Trade, and with the Department

for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Progress has been made, but we want to build on it, and we want more of our companies to take part.

We know that innovation is the way forward. Northern Ireland will never be a low-cost manufacturer, but we have been, can be and will be high-quality, innovative and creative in our manufacture, industry and services, and in the skills that we bring to them. Investment in innovation is therefore very welcome. Some investment in research and development has been affected by constraints around state aid and other aspects of the European Union. As we move forward from that, we want a continuation of the investment in innovation, research and skills that we have had before.

The Government have spoken on this issue on a number of occasions, and I certainly welcome the very warm words that they have used. However, we would like concrete proposals on how Northern Ireland will get its fair share from any central programme to support innovation, research and development, and on how Northern Ireland can be more successful in bidding for central funds, to try to get the help and support that our businesses need to grow.

I have mentioned a number of universities, but as the Member of Parliament for Belfast South, I will of course mention once again Queen's University, which does fantastic work in innovation; in fact, it is leading the way in a number of areas.

I am very conscious that we need to identify the potential growth areas. In what areas can Northern Ireland show unique creativity and innovation? In terms of the UK as a whole, what can we do to be particularly attractive to foreign direct investment and growing businesses? We have done huge amounts in areas such as cyber-security and finance.

**David Simpson:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again. An issue raised with me time and again is research and development assistance from Invest NI, because small companies are very much hands-on, so they do not have the manpower or staff to handle research and development. Maybe we could look at another way to deliver R&D.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Absolutely. The Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly were in a really good place to listen to businesses about their needs, and the challenges that they found when trying to apply for those types of funds—the red tape and other difficulties. In future, particularly post-Brexit, we will need a Government who are responsive to the question of how we can support businesses to grow in a way that works for them and their owners, because those owners have enough to do running those businesses, and focusing on what they are good at. The Government need to support firms in a flexible way, and give them the right tools and encouragement to grow.

I will briefly refer to our small and family businesses, particularly retail businesses on our high streets. I mentioned this issue last night in a debate in the main Chamber. As is the case across the United Kingdom, our high streets are under a huge amount of pressure, but unfortunately, we have not been able to access the same amount of support as other areas. I welcomed the Government announcement of additional support for high streets through the future high streets fund, but of course

Northern Ireland was not able to use that money, because it went into the Northern Ireland block grant as an unhypothecated Barnett consequential, which meant that it was not ring-fenced for that purpose. As there is no Northern Ireland Assembly at the moment, there is no accountability; there is no way that elected Members and the people of Northern Ireland can push civil servants to spend that money on high streets.

We all know that our retail sector in our towns, villages, and small urban areas in cities is crying out for help; that is common right across this United Kingdom. Those areas are suffering from high business rates; they feel crippled by the bills that they receive. The shopping habits of consumers are changing, so small businesses are struggling. Very often, they are family-owned, and the owner actually works in the business. They need this help, but I met the head of the civil service to urge him to put that money towards retail, and there is no indication that that has happened.

That brings me to something that I have spoken about many times since I was elected as a Member of Parliament in 2017, namely that there is no Northern Ireland Assembly to listen to what the economy needs, and to do what it needs to do. That genuinely grieves me. The people of Northern Ireland, including our business people, are deeply frustrated. They want politicians to get back to work, to get back into the Northern Ireland Assembly and to start investing to grow our economy.

That is my challenge here today to Sinn Féin. There is no impediment to all the parties going back into that building tomorrow and sorting out our problems around the table, like adults, in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I speak for very many people across the community when I say, "Just get back to work and do what you need to do, because our economy needs to grow."

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): My hon. Friend is making a very important point. We are talking about the economy, but peace and prosperity go hand in hand. Does she agree that the current EU withdrawal agreement, which she touched on, has the potential to damage local businesses further? Those businesses bring many of the goods that they sell on the high street from Great Britain, and anything that adds to the cost of bringing in those goods risks the ongoing presence of those businesses on our high streets.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** Absolutely, and I—

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady resumes, I point out that I have one eye on the clock, three Members have indicated that they would like to make a contribution, and I want to start the wind-up speeches by the two Front-Bench spokesmen at 5.10 pm. It is, of course, up to the hon. Lady to decide what she does, but I thought it might be helpful to point that out.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I will try to move on as swiftly as I can. I was coming on to the next section in my speech, which is on Brexit. Your comment is probably a good indication that I should not speak for very long on Brexit, Dame Cheryl; despite the fact that I could do so, I will not do so.

I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). However, before I move on to speak very briefly about Brexit, I will mention business rates, because our smaller

[*Emma Little Pengelly*]

retail businesses and other businesses on the high street have been crying out for reform of business rates.

I was chair of the Finance Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly just before the collapse of the Assembly, so I know that business rates were an issue that we were looking at, because Northern Ireland had led the way in rate support for small businesses. Unfortunately, however, since then, the rest of the United Kingdom caught up with us, and then moved past us, so our businesses are now suffering from business rates that are higher than those for small businesses across the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Democratic Unionist party wants fundamental reform of business rates; we recognise that there needs to be additional support for our small businesses. We are up for that challenge; we want to have that discussion; and we need a Northern Ireland Assembly back in action to do it. However, in the absence of the Assembly, I strongly urge the Minister to do what he can to listen to business, and to work within the regime that we have in Northern Ireland to give that much-needed support to small business.

I will very briefly touch on Brexit. A number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have already made contributions about it, and I will not repeat what they said, especially because I know a number of other Members still want to make a contribution about it. Nevertheless, it is absolutely right that any barriers between Northern Ireland and Great Britain—east-west or west-east—will create greater bureaucracy and disruption, and will threaten the economy that we rely on.

The fabric of that economy is complex. It encompasses everything from the large manufacturers and large businesses that have come in, to the supermarkets, right down to the business owner who runs a gift shop and brings in 10 or 20 pottery mugs, bowls or whatever it may be from a small supplier in Great Britain. When we work through all the detail, we can see where there could be significant additional costs and significantly more bureaucracy. These businesses may actually have problems in getting supplies. That is the difficulty for many, many businesses.

We have raised that issue, because the Democratic Unionist party will always stand up for what is good for Northern Ireland. What is bad for business—what puts up barriers—is bad for Northern Ireland. We know that, and we care about the people involved.

**David Simpson:** My hon. Friend touched on business rates. I understand that there will be a rate review next year in Northern Ireland; as a party, we should use our influence to try to do something for the retail sector.

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. However, I am getting a huge amount of pressure on my right from my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is very keen to speak; I know that because he never gets to speak in Westminster Hall. So I will wind up.

In conclusion, I am passionate about supporting the economy in Northern Ireland, and I hope that I have got that across very firmly today. I am passionate about making Northern Ireland work. I am passionate about

helping Northern Ireland to thrive. That must mean creating jobs, opportunities and a brighter, more prosperous future for all in Northern Ireland, across all the communities. We recognise that. I recognise that happy, contented people in this Union—in this United Kingdom—will not vote for the chaos, change and decades of transition that leaving this United Kingdom would bring. Members of our party genuinely care about the people of Northern Ireland, and we want our businesses, economy, industry and people to succeed.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Order. Regretfully, I have to impose a three-minute time limit on speeches. I am pleased to call Jim Shannon.

4.59 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Thank you, Dame Cheryl—hallelujah to get the chance to comment. Northern Ireland is on the cusp of greatness. In football and sport we are doing great things, but our economy is doing even better, with international investment in the IT sector and a booming financial industry. Newtownards, the main town in my constituency, is a commuter town; it is about half an hour from Belfast on the wonderful Glider service. Many people from the town, and indeed from across the Ards peninsula and the wider Strangford constituency, find job opportunities in the Belfast area.

The Minister for retail, the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), came to Newtownards to get an idea of how the towns and the retail end are working. Unemployment in Strangford is at its lowest level for many years. I understand that the Government have acknowledged that FinTech is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK economy, and Northern Ireland is increasingly recognised as an important destination for new development and investment in FinTech, with more than 36,000 people employed in the financial services sector. We have just had the appointment of a new FinTech envoy for Northern Ireland, Mr Jenkins, which I and my party welcome.

I also welcome the confidence and supply motion. Just this week the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announced further rural network broadband investment. Coverage will go from 78% of Northern Ireland to 91%, as the Secretary of State said in the Chamber yesterday. That is good, but it cannot be the extent of Government support for the economy and innovation in Northern Ireland. As I said in March, we have the potential to do so much more. We have state-of-the-art office spaces, UK-wide connectivity and low business rates.

We are a place to invest in, with a high-class graduate labour force and an abundance of administrative staff. As a shooting man, I would say that all the ducks are in a row. It is perfect for Northern Ireland at the moment. Queen's University, with its innovation in health, its partnerships with companies across the world and its students, adds to that. Pharmaceuticals are doing exceptionally well in my constituency—although they could do better—as is the agri-food sector. TG Eakin in pharmaceuticals, Mash Direct, McCann's and Willowbrook Foods, Rich Sauces and Lakeland Dairies are all in place.



We could do something on corporation tax to enable us to be more competitive with the Republic of Ireland. We have the rental property space, the skilled labour force, the connectivity and the ability to reach an airport within an hour for most of Northern Ireland—we have it all. We need a Government in our corner helping us to attract international investment and fighting for us as an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because we are better together—as opposed to something that seemingly works against us—in something that benefits the entire UK body.

5.2 pm

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): It is an honour to serve with you in the Chair, Dame Cheryl. The wonderful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) really put into perspective the fact that not only does Northern Ireland want to play its part in the economy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it plays its part in the world. That is very important, because we have a great history. She mentioned standing on the shoulders of giants. Currently, 10% of all global financial exchange networks flow through Belfast, and 10% of all cholesterol tests for the world flow through Randox Laboratories in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland plays a significant part in the world economy.

We are therefore anxious for Northern Ireland to do more, and for the Government to recognise and facilitate that, not cut us off from our mainstream economy. In simple terms, about £18 billion-worth of trade is done every year between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom; and about £6 billion is done with the Republic of Ireland and the EU. I know which side of the fence traders in my constituency and across Northern Ireland want to be on. It is therefore critical that we get that balance right.

We have five very simple requests for the Government. First, reduce corporation tax in Northern Ireland. Stop footling around with other things in Northern Ireland and deal with corporation tax. Reduce it to 10%. Make Northern Ireland the attractive place that it should be for businesses to invest in. Secondly, remove airport passenger duty for our region and allow us to compete properly with Dublin airport, which is stealing customers, who do not turn left when they get off the aeroplanes in the Republic of Ireland but stay in the Republic.

We need those customers to come to Belfast. Thirdly, therefore, incentivise airline carriers to land in Northern Ireland so that we can have more tourism and more businesspeople. Fourthly, remove VAT on tourism and hospitality so that we can compete fairly with our land-border neighbour. Fifthly, build a bridge. Give us that connection between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Let the constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) leave Larne and drive to Scotland, and then drive back again on the same day. Allow them to have that great opportunity, which they really need.

In the last few seconds of my speech, I want to thank the Government for their efforts to keep a brilliant manufacturing company, Wrightbus, alive in Northern Ireland. That will create tens of thousands of opportunities for people in the years ahead.

5.5 pm

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): Let us agree on one thing: Northern Ireland is the home of innovation. There has been a long history of that, from the modern tractor through to the Sunderland flying boat, Wrightbus and Shorts Missile Systems. In fact, most of the ejector seats in modern fighter planes are made in Northern Ireland. There is no argument that we have that extraordinary history; that seedbed of innovation, which is flourishing.

When we go to places such as Lagan College and speak to young people who are working in completely new businesses and industries, we realise that the base material is there. So what can we do, as Government, to facilitate the flowering of that innovation and great skill? When, 20-odd years ago, we had a problem with the aggregates industry because of the fiscal harmonisation issue cross-border, the Government were able to work with the aggregates industry in Northern Ireland to equalise the rates of exchange on tariffs, in order to facilitate that local business. However, that is just a tiny bit of it.

We have a philosophical question here: how do we actually support industry and innovation? The days of DeLorean, of parachuting in large amounts of money and of top-down intervention are long gone. We have to work in an entirely different way. Look at companies such as Thales, based in my constituency.

**Ian Paisley:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Pound:** Am I allowed to take an intervention?

**Ian Paisley:** Yes, and you get an extra minute. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has given way, because he talked about the real innovation in Northern Ireland. This week I visited a company called Creative Composites in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). They make the entire shell of the new London taxi.

**Stephen Pound:** That is an extremely interesting point, and I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman—

**Ian Paisley:** They make the 720S body for McLaren. They make the Aston Martin shell. Those things are done innovatively in Northern Ireland because they cannot be done anywhere else in the United Kingdom. That is why we should invest in Northern Ireland.

**Stephen Pound:** Do you know, I have no argument with that. Thales employs nearly 1,000 people in Northern Ireland, and it is there for a reason. It took over Shorts Missile Systems, and it is there because of the highly skilled, highly motivated, highly trained and highly capable workforce. What can we, as Government, do to help? In my days in the Navy, the number of marine engineers who came from Northern Ireland was extraordinary, yet somehow we are unable to see that great tradition of engineering innovation and expertise flourish in Northern Ireland.

I could make many suggestions; I will make just a small one. The backbone of Northern Ireland industry is small and medium-sized enterprises. They have a problem with apprenticeships—I am not talking about the Apprentice Boys, but apprenticeships. A small company

[Stephen Pound]

finds it very difficult to employ apprentices, simply because of the absence of economies of scale. In GB we used to have a thing called the MSC—the Manpower Services Commission—whereby the Government would underwrite apprenticeships or temporary employment periods. Would it not be marvellous if the Minister, a man of great decency and honesty, and who is extremely committed to the expansion of industry in Northern Ireland, could persuade some of his colleagues to loosen the purse strings and look at the Government supporting apprenticeships?

At the moment, most SMEs simply cannot afford to employ apprentices. The foreign direct investment is there. Northern Ireland has a great reputation, not just within the rest of Europe but in America. However, we need small companies to have the capability and elasticity to attract and work up those schemes. Apprentices would make a huge difference. Let us see whether we can do that, because when we see the amazing extent of innovation, intelligence, hard work and commitment in Northern Ireland, we think, “Why isn’t this place the powerhouse of Europe?” I think it could be again.

5.9 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure and an honour to serve under your chairpersonship, Dame Cheryl, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) on securing this debate. It is third time lucky for her, and also for the House, because the speech with which she opened this debate was passionate, well-informed, comprehensive, and very moving in parts. I, for one, learned a lot from it.

I am proud to represent the party that helped broker the Good Friday agreement, and the current Government’s cavalier approach to preserving that agreement in the Brexit negotiations worries me. As hon. Members have said, the Good Friday agreement is the foundation of peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland, as well as the Republic. The absence of the devolved Government in Stormont is another issue that many hon. Members have mentioned. Labour’s approach rests on increasing local, regional and national democracy, and the lack of resolution to that problem clearly undermines efforts to improve innovation and the economy of Northern Ireland.

I will begin by outlining Labour’s approach to industrial strategy and innovation. It is not a top-down approach; as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said, that is not the right approach. We aim to provide support for a devolved Administration and local councils to make decisions in support of their industry and their workers. We have talked a lot in recent months about the differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, but there are also many similarities, particularly with my home region, the north-east of England. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) likes to point out every time he intervenes in one of my Adjournment debates, there are many similarities between our regions, particularly our economies and the investment in making and building things over the centuries. The hon. Member for Belfast South spoke movingly about that in the context of Northern Ireland,

as well as the years of deindustrialisation and under-investment in infrastructure and education that have left Northern Ireland with some significant economic challenges.

The legendary Harland and Wolff shipyard was recently saved from collapse because workers staged a nine-week sit-in in protest to show that it was still viable, but those who took redundancy face an uncertain future. Wrightbus has also been mentioned—a company that had been operating since 1946, but which closed its doors in September, threatening 1,200 jobs. It was recently bought by the Bamford family after going into administration, although we still do not know what its workers’ fate will be, particularly as the Government propose a Brexit deal that would place trading barriers between that company and the rest of the UK. The right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and the hon. Member for Strangford emphasised the negative impact that would have.

**Ian Paisley:** The business that the hon. Lady has alluded to is in my constituency. It was a very significant employer, equivalent to about 60,000 jobs if it were based here in the mainland, and I am delighted that the Bamford family have invested in it. It is a new chapter for the industry, bringing hydro technology to Northern Ireland. Hopefully, as a result we will get the cleanest, greenest public transport in not only the UK but the world.

**Chi Onwurah:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I will return to that example. However, my point is that this does not reflect a sound industrial strategy, precisely because the old company collapsed because of its UK customers moving to electric buses and the new company will be making electric buses. A serious industrial strategy would have a plan for transport that could have incentivised the company to move in that direction without the chaos of administration and the sale to a Tory donor, in order to achieve the same outcome. That sort of creative destruction might excite certain Government advisers, but it puts workers under severe stress and often results in employment under worse terms and conditions, as the former employees are in a weaker bargaining position.

That process of collapse and asset stripping is related to the problem of the financialisation of our economy. The last decade has seen the UK economy centred on London and the south-east of England, with a focus on financial services rather than producing things. As the economist Mariana Mazzucato argues, the financial sector has stopped resourcing the real economy. Instead of investing in companies that produce stuff, finance is financing finance. Financialisation changes the motors behind economic activity, giving investors with short-term interests more control over firms, and its legacies are low productivity and low pay. Labour is committed to changing that and putting innovation at the centre of our economy, using our world-class universities—such as Ulster University, and Queen’s University in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast South—as drivers of growth, rather than putting off scientific talent from across the world with cruel immigration policies.

Labour’s “innovation nation” mission would raise research and development to 3% of GDP—almost twice

what it is now—using science and industry to benefit the whole country. We need to maintain our current centres of excellence, but must also ensure that every region can benefit from innovation and growth. That is why we are committed to putting technology and innovation at the heart of the lowest-paid and least productive sectors. The hon. Member for Belfast South spoke movingly of the need for social mobility in work, which requires increased productivity. We want to restart manufacturing, but we know that most jobs are in the service sector. Some 17% of people employed in Northern Ireland work in wholesale and retail, in the everyday economy. That is why we have plans to create a retail catapult to support those workers.

Much of our additional R&D spend would be drawn on by our industrial strategy missions, such as investing in carbon capture and storage as part of our commitment to decarbonise our economy, delivering hundreds of thousands of green jobs in the process. We propose a £250 billion national investment bank, made up of a network of regional development banks that would properly put regional needs first and restore regional decision making. Earlier this year, the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce said that 77% of service sector firms and 74% of manufacturers were having difficulty recruiting staff. Labour's national education service will support reskilling, delivering education free at the point of demand from cradle to grave and ensuring that we have the skills that businesses need.

Although the DUP might have secured £200 million in next year's Budget through its deal with the Government, recent weeks have shown how quickly the Government can change their mind. Labour's £250 billion national transformation fund would invest in transport and digital infrastructure across the UK without preconditions.

Finally, I will turn to the topic of Brexit. In the 2014-20 block of EU funding, Northern Ireland was allocated a total of €3.5 billion—significantly more than the Government's offer to the DUP. As we have rightly opposed the Government's shambolic Brexit deal, we have to question whether that funding will even be delivered. Will the Minister commit to publishing an assessment of the impact on the Northern Irish economy of putting extra tariffs on trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, and making sure that that impact is not negative? Will he also follow Labour's plan and commit to maintaining the EU levels of structural investment as a minimum? Finally, given the current trade tariffs on EU exports after the row over subsidies to Airbus, what commitment will he give to aerospace workers in Northern Ireland?

5.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Robin Walker):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, and I join many other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) on a superb speech and on having secured this debate—third time lucky. I was disappointed when previous debates were postponed, and am delighted that we have had the opportunity to have this debate today and hear some excellent speeches.

The hon. Lady rightly spoke about Northern Ireland's proud industrial history and its bright, optimistic future

as part of the UK. I strongly believe in upholding the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom—a family of four nations that are safer, stronger and more prosperous together. Northern Ireland benefits from being part of the world's sixth-largest economy. Being part of the UK allows the 66 million people living across the four nations to work together to create jobs and opportunities.

As we have heard from many hon. Members, the Northern Ireland economy is strong, with an economic performance that sits alongside the growth of the wider UK economy. Employment is at a near-record high and unemployment is at a near-record low. The UK Government are serious in their commitment to grow the economy and to support innovation in Northern Ireland and across the whole UK.

I will set out some details of the UK Government's investment in the Northern Ireland economy. We are delivering on our commitment for an ambitious set of city and growth deals across Northern Ireland. Since the funding announcement for the first city deal for Northern Ireland, the Belfast regions city deal, at the autumn Budget 2018, the total regional economic investment from the UK Government has exceeded £600 million. That commitment was reinforced by the Prime Minister's announcement that £163 million has been allocated to complete the deals for the causeway coast and glens and the mid, south and west regions of Northern Ireland.

The UK Government have announced funding for all 11 council areas in Northern Ireland. That investment will significantly boost economic activity and attract private sector investment. The proposals are an example of what can be achieved when politicians of all backgrounds, local businesses, community leaders, academia and local government stakeholders come together to shape the economic future for their local areas and Northern Ireland as a whole.

**Stephen Pound:** The Minister is making an extremely powerful point. There are occasions when the Government can stand by and simply encourage—when they do not have to finance initiatives. Will he give credit to Thales, which I mentioned earlier, which has set up the primary engineer and secondary engineer leaders awards for Northern Ireland? That does not cost the Government anything, but provides an incentive for people in primary and secondary education in Northern Ireland to achieve awards in engineering.

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman draws attention to what the private sector can do to support apprenticeships and programmes of that sort, which of course I welcome. I also look forward to seeing the nine digital and innovation business cases from the Belfast region city deal come to fruition next year.

We are of course aware of the challenges faced by some of Northern Ireland's iconic businesses in recent years, notably Harland and Wolff and Wrightbus. These have been very difficult times for their workforces, the families and the local communities. As the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) kindly paid tribute to, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has engaged continuously with the efforts that local hon. Members in both constituencies—the hon. Member for North Antrim and the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson)—have championed to bring in new investors to support those two iconic names. I join the hon.



[*Mr Robin Walker*]

Member for North Antrim in saying that I hope those investors will deliver tens of thousands of opportunities. I believe that hydrogen-powered buses and green infrastructure can play a crucial part in achieving the UK's aim of achieving decarbonisation, and show how Northern Ireland can continue to lead the way. So I want to see those businesses succeed.

**Ian Paisley:** The way for the Minister to succeed in that is to ensure that the Government here put money into hydro tech and allow hydro companies to produce the resource. He must see the way ahead as not just battery power but hydro power.

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman makes his bid strongly, as I would expect. I will ensure that that is passed on to the Treasury and other relevant Government Departments. Indeed, we have heard a number of bids during the debate, not all of which I can necessarily answer. Obviously, however, there are a number of opportunities coming to deal with some of those things.

People in Northern Ireland also benefit from the changes that people throughout UK enjoy that have been delivered by the Government, including an increase in the national living wage that benefits about 75,000 workers, and a fuel duty freeze for the ninth successive year that saves the average driver a cumulative £1,000 compared with under the pre-2010 escalator. Following the terrible fire in Bank Buildings, owned by Primark, in August 2018, the UK Government provided £2 million to support the recovery and regeneration of Belfast city centre in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast South. I am pleased that much of the city centre has been rebuilt and has reopened after that fire.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, the UK Government announced a £675 million future high streets fund to support local areas in England to develop and fund plans to make high streets fit for the future. As high streets funding and business rates are devolved, the Barnett formula was applied to Northern Ireland in the usual way, as she noted. It is for the Department of Finance and Northern Ireland civil service permanent secretaries to determine how that money should be spent.

I join the hon. Lady in wishing that we had a restored Executive and in encouraging all the politicians in Northern Ireland to come together to bring the Assembly back, so that decisions can be taken on those issues and they can move forward. Hon. Members may be aware that the Government introduced the Northern Ireland Budget Bill today, which is required to place the Northern Ireland budget, presented in February 2018, on a legal footing. Delivering that legislation demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to providing good governance for the people of Northern Ireland in the continued absence of the Northern Ireland Executive, but of course, we all want the Executive to be restored.

Businesses in Northern Ireland can benefit from UK Government initiatives, including the British Business Bank, which has supported more than 1,200 small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland with £80 million since November 2014. In the last year, more than 1,000 loans, valued at £7.3 million, have been granted to Northern Ireland businesses. Northern Ireland businesses also have access to UK Export Finance, which has provided nearly £33 million of support for exporters in Northern Ireland. I absolutely commend

the collaborative efforts of Invest NI and the UK Department for International Trade to support Northern Ireland exporters to trade across the globe and to

attract investment into Northern Ireland. I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the work of Alastair Hamilton and in wishing his successor every success in the years to come.

As the hon. Lady will recall, the UK Government's Board of Trade met in her Belfast constituency earlier this year, which was the first time it had met in Northern Ireland in its 400-year history. The global success of Northern Ireland firms was celebrated, with several Northern Ireland companies receiving their well-deserved Board of Trade awards.

Our prosperity and ability to build a strong economy depends on how we encourage innovation, develop high-quality jobs and skills, and support businesses throughout the UK to thrive and grow. Innovative businesses across Northern Ireland are a huge part of its success, including Armstrong Medical, which I had the pleasure of visiting at a Causeway chamber of commerce business roundtable recently.

As we have heard, Northern Ireland has globally admired universities and research institutions, such as Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, because we have nurtured our intellectual powerhouses with public investment. The industrial strategy challenge fund supports innovation UK-wide and has allocated £12 million in Northern Ireland to date, including specific investments in Queen's University Belfast.

Several hon. Members have touched on the controversies about EU exit. I do not have time to respond in detail to all those points, but I will say that we need to be absolutely clear that Northern Ireland leaves the EU

with the UK, and we need to make sure that trade between us continues unfettered. The hon. Member for Belfast South made the point very well about the enormous importance of the UK internal market, which we absolutely want to protect. Northern Ireland continues to be a top destination for inward investment, and we will work with Invest NI to ensure that that continues.

I recognise the hon. Lady's comment that shared prosperity is shared opportunity. She made the case extremely well on behalf of Northern Ireland business, and I commend her for her efforts.

5.27 pm

**Emma Little Pengelly:** I will not go into any more detail about what we have discussed. I thank all hon. Members who turned up and I apologise for the fact that they had to make short contributions. As I said, there are a significant number of issues—I did not touch on city deals or some of the other issues. I ask the Minister to continue to work closely with us to help Northern Ireland to grow, thrive and succeed in the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Government support for the economy and innovation in Northern Ireland.

5.28 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





# Written Statement

*Tuesday 29 October 2019*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Council, October 2019

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** Katrina Williams, Deputy Permanent Representative to the European Union, represented the UK at Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 14 and 15 October.

The main item on fisheries policy was fixing the 2020 fishing opportunities in the Baltic sea. Member states agreed on the total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for the 10 most commercially important fish stocks in the Baltic sea. The Council also agreed to supplement the existing partial general approach on the proposal for the next European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) post-2020. Elements relating to the monitoring and evaluation of the EMFF were added to the Council's mandate for its negotiations with the European Parliament.

Member states exchanged views on the EU position for the annual consultation with Norway on the framework of the bilateral fisheries agreement for 2020. The UK intervened in the debate, highlighting the importance of managing joint stocks with Norway in a sustainable way. The Council also exchanged views on the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), scheduled for 18 to 25 November 2019 in Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

On agriculture, member states discussed the progress report on the work relating to the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform package. During the debate, the French delegation presented a common paper on the CAP budget on behalf of a number of member states. Their proposal to maintain the CAP budget at the current EU27 level under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) received support from a number of delegations.

The Commission updated member states about the latest developments in the most important agricultural markets. Ministers welcomed the outlook in the main market segments, but expressed concerns about the difficulties in the sugar, olive and table olives, beef and rice sectors. In conjunction with the agenda item, the Italian delegation informed the Council on the damage caused by the Asian stink bug (*Halyomorpha halys*) to its fruit and vegetables sector.

Member states also discussed the potential effects of the recent announcement of the United States to impose additional duties on a list of EU agrifood products as a consequence of the airbus World Trade Organisation (WTO) judgement. The UK called for a united approach to achieve a negotiated settlement. Commissioner Hogan underscored the Commission's commitment to protect EU food production and geographical indications (GIs), including through intervention and the promotion of aid if necessary.

On forestry, member states held an exchange of views on the Commission's communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world's forests. Together with other members of the Amsterdam declaration partnership, the UK highlighted the need for action and outlined its own initiatives. The Council also held an exchange of views on the EU forest strategy post-2020 and was informed about a joint statement by various member states on sustainable forestry.

Further items were discussed under 'any other business':

The presidency briefed Ministers on the outcome of the European Bioeconomy Scene 2019, which was held in Helsinki on 8 to 10 July. The aim of the conference was to raise public awareness and work towards a sustainable bioeconomy in Europe.

The Slovenian delegation informed the Council about the outcome of the ministerial conference "Strengthening the Generation and Transfer of Knowledge for the Progress of Agriculture and the Rural Areas", which took place in Ptuj, Slovenia on 23 August 2019. The outcome was a joint declaration, which sets out a proposal for promoting the transfer of knowledge and innovation in the agricultural sector.

The Commission updated the Council on the current situation on African swine fever (ASF), asking member states to consider increasing national measures. Czechia presented a declaration on combatting ASF, calling for further multinational collaboration, additional EU co-funding and intensified research.

The French delegation presented a joint declaration on wolf management on behalf of a number of member states. The signatory member states asked the Commission to consider their concerns when revising the guidance on the protection of species under the habitats directive, providing flexibility in the sustainable management of wolf populations.

The Commission updated member states about the state of play on major issues in food safety, outlining the most important achievements of its term. This included the overhaul of the official controls legislation, improvements to animal health law and animal welfare, improved plant health legislation, and risk assessment in the food chain. In the context of the debate, the Belgian delegation gave an overview of the recent cases of *Listeria monocytogenes* in the EU, stressing the need to increase collaboration in order to detect transboundary outbreaks earlier.

[HCWS47]



# Petitions

Tuesday 29 October 2019

## OBSERVATIONS

### TRANSPORT

#### Rail link to Fleetwood

The petition of the residents of the United Kingdom.

Declares that there is a need in Fleetwood for decent transport links on the grounds of deprivation and poor economy.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to reinstate the Poulton-le-Fylde to Fleetwood rail link.

And the petitioners remain, etc. — [*Presented by Cat Smith, Official Report, 3 October 2019; Vol. 664, c. 1468.*]

[P002527]

*Observations from The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris):*

The Government are working with local authorities and other partners to identify the best new rail projects that can unlock new housing and economic growth, ease overcrowding, meet future demand and offer good value for money. It is also helping them to identify new ways of designing, financing and funding additional rail capacity.

We welcome the news that Wyre, Fleetwood and Blackpool Council are jointly putting together a remit to examine the feasibility of reopening the Fleetwood to Poulton line to enhance public transport links in the area.

As indicated in the Government's strategic vision for rail, any scheme seeking Government funding will need to demonstrate a strong business case. The Department for Transport will consider proposals on a case by case basis, based on the economic benefits put forward.

Our intention is for more enhancements to be promoted, funded and/or financed by a range of parties. We want to tap into the knowledge and expertise of promoters, investors and local partners and challenge them to identify what the right answer is for their transport needs and where schemes fit best with housing and other Government priorities.

We stand ready to consider a Strategic Outline Business Case for the re-opening of the Fleetwood to Poulton-le-Fylde rail line put forward by local authorities and other partners.

We have set up Transport for the North (TfN) to speak as a single voice for the North on the long-term strategic transport improvements the region needs. TfN recently published its Strategic Transport Plan (STP). It has a wide ranging and ambitious scope setting out connectivity priorities across the North that will help transform economic performance up to 2050. I am sure you will welcome, that enhanced public transport links to Fleetwood has been put forward by TfN as a 'future potential intervention' for delivery during the lifetime

of the STP. We welcome TFN's ongoing modelling work to review the phasing of the projects in their investment plan and look forward to taking into consideration the advice from our statutory partner TfN regarding the prioritisation of the Fleetwood to Poulton-le-Fylde scheme.

The Government remain committed to transparent policy making, and in accordance with our commitment to the Transport Select Committee, we have published a document which provide details on schemes currently in development.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-network-enhancements-pipeline-autumn-2019-update>.

This Departmental publication includes schemes which have entered the Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline, but not schemes which have received the decision to deliver (Network Rail's Final Investment Decision)—details on these schemes can be found in Network Rail's Enhancement Delivery Plan.

#### Road Safety outside Wingate Primary School

The petition of Community of Wingate Primary School,

Declares that safer roads for children are essential and that the roads outside Wingate Primary School should be made more safe.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure that the roads outside Wingate Primary School are made safer for its pupils and other people in the community.

And the petitioners remain, etc.— [*Presented by Phil Wilson, Official Report, 24 July 2019; Vol. 663, c. 1405.*]

[P002503]

*Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton):*

The Government are keenly aware of the impact of road traffic fatalities and injuries and the need to protect our most vulnerable, including children near schools, such as Wingate Primary School.

By internationally measured standards the UK has an excellent road safety record and a long history of success in encouraging safe behaviours from all those that use our roads. The number of people killed or injured on Britain's roads has dropped by 31% from 2007 to 2017. In the same period there has also been a drop of 44% in the total number of children between 0 to 17 years old killed or injured on Britain's roads. And in the area of County Durham, there has been a 37% drop in casualties of all ages and a 46% decrease in those aged 0-17 since 2007.

This Government are determined to make our roads even safer, which is why we are combining a range of focused measures to continue to improve road safety around schools.

#### Road Safety Statement

In July this year, the Department for Transport's refreshed Road Safety Statement and two year action plan was published, which addresses road safety issues throughout the lifetime of roads users, from babies to the elderly. We will focus our work particularly on the



needs of four vulnerable road user groups, including young road users, rural road users, motorcyclists, and older road users.

We want to embed a deeper understanding of road danger in school age children and have awarded funding of £200,000 to Road Safety GB to undertake a research and evaluation programme which addresses the needs of children aged 4 to 11 years old. A portion of this funding is to roll out an augmented reality (AR) road safety resource in primary schools across the UK designed to develop children's road safety knowledge and skills.

#### *THINK! Education resources for 3 to 16 year olds*

We want to build road safety knowledge and skills among our younger generations, forming good habits that last a lifetime. The THINK! campaign provides free education resources online for 3 to 16 year olds. THINK! engaged parents, teachers, youth leaders and local road safety professionals in the development of these resources, which include films, songs and games to help children understand the importance of using the road safely. These resources can be accessed at: <https://www.think.gov.uk/education-resources/>.

#### *Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) Safety Review*

The Government are committed to increasing cycling and walking and making our roads safer for vulnerable users, including children. We will only achieve our long term ambition if children feel safe when they walk and cycle to and from school. Therefore, in November last year the Government's response to the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) Safety Review Call for Evidence was published alongside an ambitious two year action plan, setting out 50 clear actions to tackle cycling, walking and horse riding safety.

#### *Bikeability*

Bikeability is the Government's national cycle training programme designed to give people the skills and confidence to cycle safely and competently on local roads. It is underpinned by the National Standard for Cycle Training. Bikeability has funding of £50million to cover cycle training from 2016 to 2020.

Local authorities have bid to the Department for Transport for the training places they wish their schools to deliver across Levels 1-3 and Bikeability Plus. More than 2.6 million places have been delivered across the country since Bikeability started in 2007.

#### *Walk to school*

The Government have invested almost £3 million into the Walk to School programme, run by the charity Living Streets, since 2015 which aims to increase the number of children walking to school. Over 2017-18, 205 primary schools were involved in the programme with 14,254 more pupils and their parents walking to school. Walking to school rates increased across all schools by 30 per cent, rising from 59.5% at baseline to 77.2% at follow up.

#### *Pavement parking*

We are aware that parking on the pavement can cause serious problems for child pedestrians; particularly for wheelchair users or those with visual impairments, as well as for parents with prams or pushchairs.

Within London there is a statutory ban on pavement parking. Outside London, local authorities have powers to prohibit pavement parking by making Traffic Regulation

Orders (TROs) under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. They may also use bollards to physically protect pavements.

Earlier in the year we completed a wide-ranging evidence gathering exercise on pavement parking to help us understand the problem, the effectiveness of current legislation and possible options for change. Before deciding on the way forward, we want to consider our findings alongside the conclusions of the Transport Select Committee's inquiry into pavement parking, published on the 9 September 2019.

#### *Parking around schools*

Under section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, local authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide appropriate traffic management schemes for the roads they manage. They are free to make their own decisions about the streets under their care, provided they take account of the relevant legislation.

Local authorities can put in place "School Keep Clear" markings which are legally enforceable when used in conjunction with an upright road sign and a Traffic Regulation Order.

Local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers can enforce these restrictions by issuing Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) to any vehicles found parked in contravention.

Although there are certain restrictions on the use of CCTV by local authorities for parking enforcement, the Department for Transport has ensured that CCTV can continue to be used to enforce parking outside schools in order to protect children.

#### *20 mph speed limits*

Local authorities are responsible for setting speed limits on local roads. They have the flexibility to set local speed limits that are appropriate for the individual road, reflecting local needs and taking account of local considerations. The Department for Transport issued guidance to local highway authorities on setting local speed limits in 2013.

Local authorities have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day. This may be suitable where, for example, a school is located on a road that is not suitable for a full-time 20 mph zone or limit. These limits are indicated with variable message signs.

Alternatively, authorities can now introduce an advisory part-time 20mph limit using traffic signs with flashing school warning lights. These were prescribed in 2016 and can be a more cost-effective solution, where appropriate, and reduce sign clutter.

#### *Training*

Changes made to the practical driving test in December 2017 are encouraging candidates to obtain a broader range of driver experience prior to their test. The independent driving section, where the candidate must drive for 20 minutes without detailed guidance by the examiner, provides more relevant 'real world' situations for the assessment of a candidate's ability to manage the vehicle, route and traffic simultaneously. This has opened up test routes so that they face more exposure to busier roundabouts and junctions to improve observation, and varying traffic situations to improve their judgement. Use of sat nav and the demonstration of controls on the move also help candidates to manage distractions.

DVSA also continues to develop the theory test, notably through use of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) in the Hazard Perception Test. Providing an opportunity to create high risk situations that the agency could not film safely, CGI has introduced a wider range of clips into the test featuring vulnerable road users or adverse weather conditions.

#### *Crossings*

Importantly, a new crossing, the parallel crossing, has been introduced to enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross where a signal-controlled crossing is not justified. Pedestrian countdown units can now be used to provide extra information on how long children have left to cross the road. To help local authorities use these measures, we are producing updated guidance. Chapter 6 of the

Traffic Signs Manual will bring together and update existing out-of-date advice on designing traffic signals and crossings, as well as providing guidance on new measures. It will be published later this year.

#### *Summary*

In summary, this Government are taking an active role in tackling road safety around schools and will continue to support and engage fully in making all of our roads safer for everyone. All road users are required to comply with road traffic law in the interests of their own safety and that of other road users. For those who do not adopt a responsible attitude, or if their use of the roads creates an unsafe environment or causes nuisance, there are laws in place that can make them liable for prosecution.





# ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 29 October 2019

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Tuesday 5 November 2019**

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