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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 9 January 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Marking Exit Day

1. **Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020. [900000]

11. **Kate Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020. [900011]

17. **Mark Logan** (Bolton North East) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020. [900017]

18. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What plans the Government have to mark the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020. [900018]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Steve Barclay**): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend on his election to the seat of Warrington South. I look forward to his advocacy on issues relating to our exit from the European Union. We stand ready to work with businesses up and down the country as we mark an important moment in our national history: leaving the European Union on 31 January.

Andy Carter: How will my right hon. Friend ensure that small businesses, which have been, and are, the engine of growth in my constituency, are able to share in the benefits of leaving the EU and in celebrating our departure on 31 January?

Steve Barclay: Before coming to the House, my hon. Friend was a champion of small businesses in Warrington, and I know he will continue to be so during his time in this place. The best way that we will support businesses in his constituency is by having control of our money, borders and laws. That is what our exit from the European Union does, and that is what he should rightly celebrate on 31 January.

Kate Griffiths: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to mark our leaving the European Union, our fantastic local breweries in Burton-on-Trent should brew a celebratory Brexit beer?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Steve Barclay: From the reaction of the House, it seems my hon. Friend has struck an extremely positive note in one of her first contributions. I again welcome her to the House. I know her constituency is famed for its beer, and I am sure that many Members would welcome those breweries celebrating this occasion in such a way, just as I would welcome the fantastic Elgood's Brewery doing so, which sits in my constituency.

Mark Logan: Will my right hon. Friend consider the idea, as a lot of my constituents have, of commemorating this day of real constitutional importance by having an anniversary on the date every year?

Steve Barclay: I very much welcome my hon. Friend to his place, not least as a fellow Lancastrian; I am sure Mr Speaker knows of our Lancastrian pride. He brings an important suggestion. Again, it is all part of marking this significant moment in our national history.

Daniel Kawczynski: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that 31 January is a significant day not only for us here in the United Kingdom but for hundreds of millions of Eurosceptics across the continent of Europe who share concerns about the direction of travel of the European Union, including many citizens in my country of birth, Poland? Does he agree that it is important for us to celebrate this day very publicly, as a nation, to give a guiding principle to others in Europe that there is life outside the European Union?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that this is an important day not just for our own citizens but for many elsewhere who recognise the importance of this event in terms of democracy and respecting the democratic decisions that people take, rather than overturning them, as has sometimes been the intention in the past. He has always been a champion of close ties between the UK and Poland, and I think that whatever celebrations there are will continue in that vein.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Do the Government's plans for the end of this month still include the abolition of the right hon. Gentleman's Department? If so, which Department and which Minister will take responsibility for the very important negotiations that are about to begin?

Steve Barclay: I pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Gentleman during his tenure as chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee. He knows from his time in Government that machinery of government changes are announced in the usual way by the Prime Minister, and No. 10 has signalled that it intends to do so. He should also be aware, because we publicly stated it, that the Department will draw to a close to mark our exit. It is the Department for Exiting the European Union, and we will have exited and done the job of the Department when we leave on 31 January.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State back to this House. We have always got on very well, and he is much cleverer than me, but I do have a couple of degrees in economics. When the President of the European Commission comes here and says that in any deal, if we do not have free movement of labour we will not get free movement of goods and services, is that not something that we should all be very sad about as we leave the European Union?

Steve Barclay: I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for how he champions his constituents and raises thoughtful points. He is quite right to pick up on what I thought was a constructive speech from the European Commission President at the London School of Economics yesterday and to draw the House's attention to it. What I took away from her speech was her language about wanting a very ambitious partnership—she referred to “old friends and new beginnings”

and drew on her own time in London and how much she enjoyed it and valued the United Kingdom. She wanted to see a close partnership, whether on climate change, security or many other issues on which we have values in common with our neighbours.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the Government confirm whether they are going to request the chiming of Big Ben to mark 11 pm on 31 January? This is not going to be a moment of celebration for many people across the UK; it will be a moment of considerable concern, not least for my constituents who are European Union nationals. Perhaps we should be asking the Government: if they do want to hear the bell chime, for whom will the bell toll?

Steve Barclay: I welcome this late conversion on the part of the Scottish National party to celebrating our exit and having Big Ben chime. As the hon. Gentleman will know, a decision as to whether Big Ben should bong or not is one for the House authorities and I would not dare to step in to such terrain. The wider point, as I think the mood of the House has demonstrated, is that this is an historic moment and many Members of the House wish to celebrate it.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I urge the Government to be careful about the tone that is adopted at the end of January. They will appreciate that there are many who do not see this as a moment for celebration. In particular, may I ask the Secretary of State what measures are being put in place for the large numbers of non-UK EU nationals, of whom there are many in Cambridgeshire, who will feel particularly vulnerable at that point?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Member is absolutely right, and I hope that colleagues across the House will see that I always try to take a tone that reflects that. I have often talked about the fact that in my own family, notwithstanding my personal role, my eldest brother is an official working for a European institution. I know that many families were split on this issue.

To answer the hon. Member's question directly, one thing that we have done is establish a £9 million fund to support outreach groups and charities. We have worked with embassies in particular. Within that £9 million,

£1 million is specifically for the settlement scheme, as I am sure the Minister for Security detailed in Committee on Tuesday, and there have been 2.6 million or 2.8 million or so applications, so the scheme is working very effectively free of charge. But the hon. Member is right that some people will have concerns, and one thing that the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill does is guarantee the rights of citizens and address many of the concerns that some of his constituents have shared.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): In celebration of this important occasion in our nation's history, will the Secretary of State arrange for Union flags to be flown from all public buildings across our kingdom? That would be a fitting tribute to the decision the British people made to leave the European Union. We will remain unafraid of our patriotism, unabashed about our departure and unwavering in our determination to make our future even greater.

Steve Barclay: I know that, like me, my parliamentary neighbour always takes pride in seeing our Union Jack flown, and any opportunity to do so is one that he and I would always celebrate. Given my right hon. Friend's penchant for poetry, I cannot be alone in thinking that such an occasion might inspire him in due course to write something fitting.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Even the most ardent supporter of Brexit will, I am sure, share a concern that the UK's departure from the European Union might be depicted as representing insularity and nationalism. It is therefore important that we dispel that sense, and one way in which we could do so is to sign up long term to the vulnerable refugees resettlement scheme and, indeed, to accept in full the Dubs amendment and do our best by the most vulnerable people on this planet, child refugees.

Steve Barclay: I absolutely agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. A big part of why I and many colleagues supported Brexit is that we want to be more outward-looking, global and international; we want to go after trade deals around the world and have autonomy.

On unaccompanied children and the Dubs amendment, we should not talk down the United Kingdom, which is currently in the top three EU countries in terms of the number of unaccompanied children it takes. It takes 15% of the entire total of unaccompanied children. We have a proud record, we have made commitments, and the Home Secretary wrote to the Commission in October on this issue. It is not necessary for it to be in the withdrawal agreement Bill itself. We have a proud record, and we should not talk it down.

Employment Rights

2. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What plans the Government have to negotiate for dynamic alignment with the EU on employment rights after the UK has left the EU. [900001]

6. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What plans the Government have to negotiate for dynamic alignment with the EU on employment rights after the UK has left the EU. [900005]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): The Government have been clear that the future relationship will protect the UK's sovereign right to regulate, and have no plans to align dynamically with EU employment legislation.

Mohammad Yasin: Since October, the withdrawal agreement Bill has undergone major changes, including the stripping out of previous commitments to workers' rights. Will the Secretary of State publish a revised impact assessment so that he can be honest with the public about what his Government have in store for them with their hard Brexit plan?

Steve Barclay: The reality is that we actually go beyond Europe in many areas of workers' rights, including maternity and paternity leave, and we should be proud of that. The hon. Gentleman asks specifically about the change to the withdrawal agreement Bill, but it does not affect the rights of workers. It should be for this Parliament to set the standards. In our manifesto, we committed to having high standards. The real question that should be asked is why a number of member states do not meet the standards set here in the United Kingdom.

Liz Twist: So far, the Prime Minister has taken workplace rights out of the withdrawal agreement in October and the withdrawal agreement Bill in December. What confidence can we have that workplace rights will be protected under this Government?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady says that as if she supported the Bill in October, but she did not. She did not support it when those things were in the clause, and now she is lamenting that they are out of the clause that she did not support. The reality is that the purpose of the withdrawal agreement Bill is to implement the international agreement that the Prime Minister has reached with the European Commission. Of course it is for the House, in the course of its business, to determine what standards it wants on workers' rights, the environment and other areas. The Prime Minister was clear in the manifesto that we are committed to high standards in those areas. I think that is something that the hon. Lady and I can agree on.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) said, we need dynamic alignment like a hole in the head? The purpose of Brexit is to enable us to make our own laws and rules, set our own taxes and chart our own course.

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend has championed Parliament's taking control of these issues for many years, and he is absolutely right: it is for this House to determine the standards, and we should have confidence in its ability to do so.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his answer on dynamic alignment. As his Department winds up, I thank him personally for leading it with such professionalism, and I thank his team at DExEU.

On dynamic alignment, I ask my right hon. Friend to reflect on the fact that the Brexit vote was about this House being sovereign. For me, as a Welsh Member, that is the Union of the United Kingdom, and this House being sovereign over our alignment.

Steve Barclay: I extend a particularly warm welcome to my hon. Friend on his return to the House, and I thank him for his contribution to the Department during his tenure. He is right both in having confidence in this House setting high standards on workers' rights and the environment, and in emphasising the importance of that from a Union perspective. Of course, Wales supported leaving, just as England did.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give an absolute guarantee that post Brexit, under a Conservative Government, there will never be a point at which workers in the EU27 enjoy stronger employment rights than they do here?

Steve Barclay: I am absolutely clear that we will deliver on our manifesto—[*Interruption.*] Members seem surprised that the Government want to deliver on our manifesto. The manifesto says that we are committed to having high standards. As I said earlier, the real issue is that, in a number of areas, EU standards are lower. The UK has three times the maternity entitlement: it has 52 weeks of maternity leave, 39 of which are paid, whereas the EU requires only 14 weeks of paid leave. That is the area that I urge the hon. Gentleman to focus on.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: A Government genuinely committed to workers' rights would have given a straight yes to that question, but the Secretary of State did not. If he committed to dynamic alignment on workers' rights, there would be nothing stopping the Government going beyond it in the years ahead. Should we be surprised by their lack of commitment? The Prime Minister said that the weight of employment law was "back-breaking". Is not the truth that the Government will not end up with stronger rights for UK workers at the end of this Parliament?

Steve Barclay: I really do not think Opposition Members should be talking about a lack of commitment when it comes to the withdrawal agreement, given that their party leader was neutral on the issue during the general election. The reality is that the hon. Gentleman, like so many Members on the Opposition Benches, having said that he would respect the result of the referendum, went back on the manifesto commitment and did not do it. It is now time to listen to the electorate and deliver that. We are absolutely clear that in doing so, as we set out in our manifesto, we will maintain high standards on workers' rights.

Environmental Standards

3. **Robert Lorgan (High Peak) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on maintaining environmental standards after the UK leaves the EU. [900002]

13. **Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on maintaining environmental standards after the UK leaves the EU. [900013]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): I continue to have regular conversations with ministerial colleagues across Government on all aspects of exiting the European Union. The Government have been clear that we will not weaken our current environmental protections as we leave the European Union, and that we will maintain, and even enhance, our already high environmental standards.

Robert Largan: It is vital that we not only maintain but enhance our environmental protections, and that we enhance our natural environment. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that leaving the EU will not negatively impact on the Nature4Climate fund and the essential restoration of our peat moorlands, including in my constituency of High Peak?

Steve Barclay: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He is quite right to highlight the importance of those protections from a constituency perspective. I draw his attention to the £10 million that the Government have allocated for peatland restoration until March 2021, which I hope will give him comfort, alongside the environmental commitments set out in the Queen's Speech, such as the independent monitoring of the targets that have been set, and the allocation of funding for that specific issue, which I know he has a close constituency interest in.

Chris Loder: The United Kingdom has some of the highest food standards, so will my right hon. Friend confirm that Her Majesty's Government will not allow substandard agricultural or food imports after the UK leaves the EU, which it would otherwise be illegal to produce here in the UK?

Steve Barclay: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place—it is nice to have so many hon. Friends to welcome today. I am sure that, like me, he listened to “Farming Today” this morning and heard, in relation to the Oxford conference, a debate on how important it is to maintain high animal welfare standards on imports in any future trade deals. One of the odd points about this debate is that the Government are constantly asked whether we will maintain high animal welfare standards, notwithstanding our manifesto commitments to do so, but there is very little scrutiny of those areas in Europe that have lower standards. I am sure that we will explore the issue during the negotiations.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that the EU's groundbreaking European green deal includes many policies with which UK alignment will be straightforward. Others will be more challenging. For example, the circular economy action plan will seek to change business models and set minimum standards for producers to prevent environmentally harmful products being placed on the market. He has talked about wanting to lead on environmental issues, so will the Government commit to adopting and keeping pace with the proposed minimum standards on sustainable production?

Steve Barclay: We are very happy to commit to world-leading environmental standards. One of the areas where we are doing so is through our hosting of COP 26 in Glasgow, which will be key, and through standards—*[Interruption.]* I will come on to climate change, but

that is integrated in our aspiration—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is chuntering away, but I will move on to that. On the specific point about the green deal, he is right that the Commission President specifically referred to the green deal in her speech at the London School of Economics yesterday, and it is something that the Prime Minister and I discussed with her in our meeting. Again, it is an area where the UK has world-leading expertise. Look at our green finance, our green investment bank and the areas where the UK is in the lead. We look forward to working with the European Union on that as we move forward.

European Court of Justice

4. **Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con):** Whether the UK will be required to comply with (a) EU law and (b) rulings of the European Court of Justice after the UK leaves the EU. [900003]

5. **Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** Whether the UK will be required to comply with (a) EU law and (b) rulings of the European Court of Justice after the UK leaves the EU. [900004]

10. **Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con):** Whether the UK will be required to comply with (a) EU law and (b) rulings of the European Court of Justice after the UK leaves the EU. [900010]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) on her election as the first Conservative MP for Great Grimsby since 1945—fantastic!

The withdrawal agreement ensures that the current role of the European Union institutions, including the European Court of Justice, and the obligation to comply with European Union law as it is now end with the implementation period on 31 December 2020. There are limited exceptions, such as citizens' rights, to give businesses and individuals certainty. The agreement enables a relationship between sovereign equals.

Lia Nici: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he agree that coastal areas such as my Great Grimsby constituency voted particularly to ensure that we take back control of our fishing laws, and that it is essential, following Brexit, that laws governing fishing are decided here in the UK?

James Duddridge: I agree with my hon. Friend. I recognise the importance of this issue as I, too, represent a coastal constituency. As we leave the EU, we will be an independent coastal state and we will introduce our own independent fisheries policy. We will be able to control access to and management of our waters. That presents opportunities for the UK fishing industry, and the Government are determined to make the most of such opportunities for the people of Grimsby and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Huw Merriman: On 30 January, I shall be holding a public meeting to explain the terms of the withdrawal agreement. When I held my last meeting relating to the previous withdrawal agreement, concern was raised about the European Court's ability to determine issues that arise.

Will my hon. Friend confirm that, under articles 167 to 181 of the new withdrawal agreement, while the Court can have matters referred to it, it cannot actually determine, because we will now have an arbitration panel, over which the UK will have a large degree of control?

James Duddridge: I can confirm that the withdrawal agreement establishes an arbitration panel as part of the standard mechanism for settling disputes between the UK and the EU. After 31 December, the Court of Justice of the European Union will no longer be the final arbiter of disputes under the disputes resolution mechanism. I look forward to an invite to my hon. Friend's event.

Chris Clarkson: I thank the Minister for his assurances on the ECJ. People in Heywood and Middleton voted to leave the European Union by a quite significant margin. Does he agree that the critical reason for that was a wish to take back control of our laws to this place and not to be dictated to by Brussels?

James Duddridge: It is wonderful to see my hon. Friend in the Chamber—he is not the first Conservative MP for his constituency since 1945, but the first ever Conservative MP for Heywood and Middleton. This Government have prioritised negotiating a deal that disentangles us from the European Union's legal order and does indeed take back control of our laws.

NHS

7. **Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the effect on the NHS of the UK leaving the EU. [900006]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election. His experience as an A&E doctor will, I am sure, pay dividends here. I promised my office that I would make no jokes about his scrubbing up well as a new Member of Parliament.

Ministers from the Department for Exiting the European Union continue to hold regular discussions with Health and Social Care Ministers. The NHS is, of course, of the utmost importance to the Government. As was outlined in the Queen's Speech, the national health service's multi-year funding settlement, which was agreed earlier this year, will be enshrined in law for the first time ever.

Dr Mullan: I thank the Minister for that response. I know that my constituents in Crewe and Nantwich are delighted to see the deadlock broken and the good progress that we are making toward delivering Brexit responsibly by the end of the month. Does he agree that significant measures have rightly been taken to ensure the continued flow of medicines after Brexit, and that the NHS will continue to be a fantastic place for EU citizens to work in years to come?

James Duddridge: The Government are moving forward on the implementation of the withdrawal agreement, and we are confident that the deal will be ratified on 31 January. Under the terms of the agreement, we will enter the implementation period following 31 January,

during which medical supplies will continue to flow as they do today. My hon. Friend makes a good point about EU nationals working in the health service. Since the referendum, almost 7,300 more European nationals have been working in NHS trusts and clinical commissioning groups, which should be welcomed.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): During the election, the Prime Minister promised 50,000 extra nurses. Given a one-third increase in EU nurses leaving the UK, does the Minister accept that the Prime Minister must ditch his anti-immigrant rhetoric, and that there must be improvements to the settlement scheme so that EU citizens feel both welcome and secure in the UK?

James Duddridge: There have been improvements in tier 2 visas and 700 more EU doctors have come on board. The hon. Lady talks about the manifesto and 50,000 more nurses. We will do more on the nurse bursary scheme, as was promised during the general election.

Dr Whitford: My German GP husband, who has been looking after patients for over 30 years, was quite offended by the Prime Minister criticising EU citizens treating this "as their own country".

There has been a lot of concern about the possible increase in drug prices for the NHS under a US trade deal, but what estimate has been made of the increased bureaucratic customs costs for the 37 million packets of drugs that come from the EU every month?

James Duddridge: The hon. Lady talks about bureaucracy, but one of the reasons why we want to take back control is to reduce that bureaucracy. We will be in control of our own destiny to manage the very issues that she highlights.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the NHS will receive far more than £350 million a week in additional funding as the UK leaves the EU, including in my home constituency of Bassetlaw?

James Duddridge: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and can certainly confirm that.

EU Citizens

8. **Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the level of fees payable by EU citizens who are the spouse of a UK national and continue to reside in the UK after the UK leaves the EU. [900008]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): The Secretary of State regularly discusses the rights of EU citizens with the Home Secretary and other Cabinet colleagues. To protect the right to reside, EU citizens who are resident at the end of the implementation period must apply for settled status by June 2021. This is a free-of-charge process, and we have already received well over 2.6 million applications to the scheme.

Philip Dunne: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, and obviously I am delighted by the progress that the settlement scheme is making in encouraging EU citizens who are here to remain. In common with many colleagues in the House, I spent a number of days in the last few weeks knocking on doors and talking to my constituents. One of the people I came across was an EU citizen—an Italian who was married to a British lady and had lived here for over 50 years, working all the time and paying his taxes. He wanted to become a British citizen, but is faced with an application fee of £1,700. Does my hon. Friend think that that is fair? Is there something that we can do to encourage people who have lived here for a long time to become British citizens?

James Duddridge: I am more than happy to meet my right hon. Friend to talk about the specifics of that case and the EU settlement scheme. Yesterday the Minister for immigration talked about why that issue would not be covered by the withdrawal agreement Bill, but I am more than happy to chat to my right hon. Friend about that individual case.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Does the Minister have even the tiniest twinge of conscience at the sheer immorality of demanding that somebody pay an extortionate sum simply to be allowed to continue to live in their own home?

James Duddridge: The settlement scheme is free.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): To what extent is the Government's EU settlement scheme in this country being replicated by the EU27, including with reference to fees and charges?

James Duddridge: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Prime Minister made a big, bold offer for EU citizens, and we urge member states to do the same.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister further outline whether he intends to level the fees between European partners and Commonwealth partners such as Canada to ensure that there is a level playing field for immigration? Is he aware that that would reduce the fees paid by Commonwealth spouses?

James Duddridge: Such issues are for the Home Office, but an advantage of taking back control is that we can look at our relationships with other parts of the world, particularly the Commonwealth, which makes up a third of the world by population.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Can my hon. Friend assure EU citizens in Beaconsfield that there is no charge for applying for settled status?

James Duddridge: I thank the right hon.—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, my hon. Friend—the title does not go with the constituency. I do not know her well, but she is already a great improvement, and I agree fully.

9. **Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on protecting the rights of EU citizens living in the UK after the UK leaves the EU. [900009]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on citizens' rights. The withdrawal agreement will protect the rights of EU citizens who arrive in the UK by the end of the implementation period. As of the end of November, we were already moving towards receiving 3 million applications to the EU settlement scheme.

Wera Hobhouse: Will EU nationals who fail to get settled status by the end of this year become our next Windrush generation, losing their driving licences and jobs, and ultimately facing deportation?

Steve Barclay: I am glad that the hon. Lady asks that question, because it lets me say: first, we have a grace period until June 2021 to address that issue; and, secondly, the declaratory scheme that she advocates would increase the risk of exactly the issue to which she refers.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the fact that 3.5 million EU citizens see the best future for themselves and their families as to remain living and working in post-Brexit Britain is a huge endorsement of our post-Brexit prospects? I wish that that confidence was shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Steve Barclay: I urge Members on both sides of the House to support Third Reading of the withdrawal agreement Bill because it safeguards the rights of the 3 million EU citizens here, as it does those of the 1 million or so UK citizens in Europe. The Bill guarantees the rights of those EU citizens because we value the contribution they make to our homes, communities and businesses.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Refusing to provide paper proof of status, rejecting Labour's proposal to grant automatic status, granting only uncertainty inducing pre-settled status to people who have been here legally for years and the high cost of applying for citizenship—what part of all that does the Secretary of State believe makes our EU friends and neighbours living in the UK feel truly valued and welcome?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady appears to have missed the debate about these issues in Committee.

Thangam Debbonaire: No, I was here.

Steve Barclay: In which case the hon. Lady should well know that the specific issue of documentation versus digital was raised with the Minister for Security, who was clear that although there will be a letter to provide a document, it would have reference to the digital number. That issue was explored at length. She will also know that citizens do not lose any rights when they get pre-settled status, and that they then move on to settled status. Those issues were debated—that is what a Committee stage is for—and addressed by a Home Office Minister at that time.

Agricultural Sector

12. **Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con):** What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on potential opportunities for (a) farmers and (b) the agricultural sector after the UK leaves the EU. [900012]

23. **Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on potential opportunities for (a) farmers and (b) the agricultural sector after the UK leaves the EU. [900023]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): I continue to have regular conversations with ministerial colleagues on all aspects of exiting the European Union, including agricultural policy.

Kevin Hollinrake: Our farmers and food producers are required by domestic legislation to observe high standards for the environment, the workplace and animal welfare. Will the Secretary of State confirm that under future free trade agreements, tariff-free imports will be allowed only from producers that also observe those standards?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue, about which there has been a live discussion at the Oxford farming conference, as he will know. The UK has always been a leading advocate of open and fair competition. I assure him that we are absolutely committed to maintaining high standards through a robust domestic enforcement regime.

Mel Stride: As this is my right hon. Friend's last question session as Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, may I congratulate him on having served with such distinction?

I very much welcome the Government's commitment to maintaining common agricultural policy levels of funding for our farmers, but during his remaining days in office, may I urge my right hon. Friend to liaise closely with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make sure that we come up with an excellent deal for our hill farmers, many of whom operate at a level of subsistence yet look after some of the most beautiful uplands in our land?

Steve Barclay: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's kind remarks. He is absolutely right to focus on hill farmers. As he will know, one of the aspects of the agriculture Bill is the ability to target measures—for example, on the environment—at specific areas of agriculture. Key among those are hill farmers, whom I know he has always championed.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Farmers made it clear in Oxford this week that they simply do not trust the Government's assurances. Will the right hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs give assurances that they will accept the equivalent of my former new clause 1 to the agriculture Bill, when it comes back? That would ensure no lowering of standards. Will they also agree to the National Farmers Union's request for a trading standards commission to scrutinise any future trade deals and make sure that farmers are protected?

Steve Barclay: If farmers did not trust the assurances, I am not sure whether another assurance would suddenly become trustworthy.

On the substance of the hon. Lady's question, I refer her, for example, to the commitment to set up the office for environmental protection, which will be the single

enforcement body. Above all, however, I refer her to this House: part of taking back control will be the House's ability to scrutinise issues, such as the legitimate one that she raises, and to ensure that the Government meet the assurances that they have given.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Secretary of State will be aware of the importance of the agri-food sector in Northern Ireland. Will he assure the House, and the agri-food sector and associated businesses in Northern Ireland, that his departmental and Cabinet colleagues are very well aware of that importance and can minimise any threats and maximise opportunities as we leave the EU?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the importance of that issue. The former Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee referred to the Department's disbanding, but what is not disbanding is the expertise within it, which will be shared across Whitehall, including with the Northern Ireland Office. As the hon. Gentleman will know, when it comes to the implementation of the Northern Ireland protocol, that sector and how it plays into discussions within the Joint Committee will be extremely important. I am sure that he will contribute fully to that debate.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): As in Northern Ireland, the agricultural sector is vital to the economy of Scotland, where food and drink account for 18% of international exports. What work is my right hon. Friend's Department and the Department for International Trade doing to ensure that, in our future relationship with the European Union, the trade in agri-goods is as free and frictionless as possible?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the food and drink sector—not least, for example, when we consider the Scottish whisky industry, which is key. From memory, the UK has 88 geographical indications, whereas Europe has over 3,000: from a negotiating point of view, the European Union obviously has more interest in that issue. From a Scottish point of view, however, the importance of the intellectual protection of Scottish whisky and salmon is huge. We are very alive to those issues.

22. [900022] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Scottish farmers and Scotland's food and drink industry are completely reliant on existing EU arrangements. A no-deal crash-out would be disastrous for both sectors, so our relationship with the EU is critical. Also, trade deals with the US could undermine environmental standards: if there is a no-deal crash-out under World Trade Organisation rules, we will not be able to avoid cheap food involving poorer environmental standards coming from the States. That future relationship is important, as are the trade deals that the UK negotiates. Surely the Scottish Government need a statutory role in both those areas.

Steve Barclay: One of the most welcome things about the debate since the general election has been its more positive tone, and one aspect of that has been moving on from the language of no-deal crash-outs. The withdrawal agreement safeguards things such as citizens' rights. It includes the Northern Ireland protocol and settles

settlement. We therefore move into a different phase, in which the risks of no deal that the hon. Gentleman and many others spoke about no longer apply. That is the benefit of the Prime Minister's deal and it is why the hon. Gentleman should support the withdrawal agreement Bill on Third Reading.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm whether the Government will introduce any changes to the seasonal agricultural workers scheme after the UK leaves the EU? Farmers in my constituency need certainty that they can hire the workers they require.

Steve Barclay: I know from representing a farming area myself the importance of seasonal workers. Obviously, that debate interplays with the expansion of investment in agritech, which brings benefits not only for productivity but in reducing demand. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Home Office has increased the numbers under the seasonal agricultural workers scheme to 10,000, but as part of designing our own approach to immigration and having control of our borders, we will be able both to address the concerns of the public at large and to mitigate any specific sectoral issues that apply, for example, to agriculture.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Fifty per cent of Welsh lamb is consumed elsewhere in the UK and 45% of it goes to the European Union, so Welsh hill farmers will probably be the most exposed of all if there is a no-deal Brexit at the end of this year. Will the Secretary of State do everything in his power to ensure that the Government do not sign off on a deal unless it ensures tariff-free access for lamb into the European Union?

Steve Barclay: The whole point of the deal—I hope the hon. Gentleman supports it on Third Reading—is that it ensures that we will leave in a smooth and orderly way. The specific issues of hill farmers are matters for both the negotiation and the agriculture Bill. I am sure he, among others, will contribute to that debate.

Mr Speaker: Question 14. Karl McCartney.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is good to be back—and I do like your socks.

Fishing and Marine Policy

14. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on (a) fishing and (b) marine policy after the UK leaves the EU.

[900014]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Steve Barclay**): I welcome my hon. Friend back to his place as a great champion of the constituency of Lincoln. We continue to have regular conversations with ministerial colleagues on all aspects of exiting the European Union, including fisheries and marine policy.

Mr Speaker: Topical questions. Nigel Mills. [Interruption.] Sorry—supplementary question, Karl McCartney.

Karl McCartney: And there was me saying I liked your socks.

The good city of Lincoln is not that close to the sea, but further to the Minister's answer to Question 4, in percentage terms and considering everything we now know, how confident is my right hon. Friend not only that will we leave the common fisheries policy completely, but that we will then be in full control of our fishing areas and quotas, and therefore able to influence international total allowable catches?

Steve Barclay: I am 100% confident on those issues, because page 46 of the Conservative manifesto, which I know my hon. Friend knows in detail, makes it clear that we will leave the common fisheries policy and become an independent coastal state. For the first time in more than 40 years, we will have access to UK waters on our own terms, under our own control, and we will be responsible for setting fishing opportunities in our own waters.

Topical Questions

T2. [900027] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Steve Barclay**): Since our last departmental questions, we have contested the general election, where Brexit was the defining issue, and been given a renewed mandate by the British people to leave the European Union. As a result, we have been able to bring the withdrawal agreement back before the House. As was shown during its Committee stage this week, it is the will of this House that we now implement that decision.

That has been reflected, as referred to by the Chair of the Brexit Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), in the decision to disband the Department for Exiting the European Union, as its purpose will have been achieved. I would like to take this opportunity to place on the record my thanks to all the officials in the Department and across Whitehall who have worked so tirelessly over the last three years to achieve this result, and to thank all my colleagues who have served in ministerial roles in the Department.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister and I met the new European Commission President and the European Union chief negotiator to discuss our shared desire for what the President described as a unique partnership reflecting our shared values as friends and neighbours.

During the three years that the Department has been in place, it has had three Secretaries of State and three permanent secretaries but, since the first departmental questions, just one shadow Brexit Secretary. Throughout my interactions with the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), he has always been both professional and courteous while probing and challenging. Without wishing in any way to jinx his next steps, may I place on the record his contribution to the scrutiny of the Government, which I am sure will continue in whatever role he plays in the House moving forward?

Nigel Mills: Does the Secretary of State agree that close working between UK authorities and their equivalents on the continent is key to making our future relationship

work? Now that we have nearly agreed an orderly exit, will he confirm that discussions between tax authorities in the UK and France on ensuring that customs processes are streamlined can start, and will not continue to be blocked by the European Commission?

Steve Barclay: It is not so much a question of whether those discussions need to start; they have started. In our contingency planning for an exit without a withdrawal agreement, there was a lot of discussion on how we would manage frictions at our borders, and much of that can be taken forward, such as the Treasury's commitment to driving productivity and improving connectivity and flow through our ports. There is work on this already; my hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to it, and we intend to build on it.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his kind words. I appreciate the relationship that we have had, and, in particular, his kindness when my father died at the tail end of 2018, which touched me personally. I welcome the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) and all Members, but I strongly dissociate myself from the words of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State about the former right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, who gave distinguished service in this House, including as Attorney General for the Government. I hope that there might be an opportunity to correct the record on that.

Yesterday, the Government voted down the Opposition's amendment on unaccompanied child refugees. Our amendment would have preserved the victory that Lord Alf Dubs had campaigned for. I have always had a good personal relationship with the Secretary of State, but whatever he says about the wider issues, he must know that the Government have got this wrong. This could be his last Brexit oral questions; is he prepared to reconsider? I urge him to do so.

Steve Barclay: To understand the context, it is important to look at the commitment the Government gave to commencing negotiations on this issue, as reflected in the letter of 22 October from the Home Secretary to the European Commission. As was touched on in earlier questions, the Government have a strong record on this. They take 15% of unaccompanied child refugees; we are one of the top three EU countries in that regard. That commitment on granting asylum and supporting refugees remains; it is actually embedded in our manifesto, on page 23. In the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, we return to the traditional approach, in which the Government undertake the negotiation and Parliament scrutinises that, rather than Parliament setting the terms, as happened in the last Parliament.

Keir Starmer: I am disappointed by the Secretary of State's reply. Labour will continue to fight to protect the most vulnerable. We may not win many votes in Parliament just now, but we can win the moral argument. I urge everyone who cares about the issue to put pressure on the Government, and urge Ministers to rethink this disgraceful decision. A legal obligation on the Government has been converted into reliance on the Prime Minister's word. Surely the Secretary of State can see why that gives rise to anxiety among Labour Members.

Steve Barclay: The shadow Brexit Secretary is right: there clearly has been anxiety among Labour Members, but I hope that he takes assurance from the explanation I gave that the commitment is unchanged. That is reflected in the letter of 22 October to the Commission from the Home Secretary, and in the manifesto. The policy is unchanged. It is right that the Bill should, as is traditional, implement the international agreement; that is what it will do.

T3. [900028] **Sally-Ann Hart** (Hastings and Rye) (Con): In beautiful Hastings and Rye, we have two ancient fishing communities, one of which is the under-10 metre beach-launch fleet, which is, by its very nature, environmentally and ecologically responsive and sustainable. It is vital that this ancient fishing tradition be given room and opportunity to flourish. Can the Secretary of State confirm that specific attention will be given to our under-10 metre boats, so that they are given more autonomy and flexibility in a post-Brexit Britain?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): May I take the opportunity to say that I have the utmost respect for the previous Member for Beaconsfield? I was simply trying to say that as a Government Minister, I found the particular line of questioning raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) much more helpful to respond to. I hope that the House will take that as an apology to the previous Member for Beaconsfield.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) on her question, and on her election to the House. I can confirm that we will pay special attention to the 10-metre fleet; it is an issue that I am aware of, as a coastal MP; in Southend, we have some under-10 metre boats. I also confirm that as we leave the EU and become an independent coastal state, the Government will develop a domestic fisheries policy that promotes that fleet, which is profitable and diverse, and uses traditional practices to protect stocks and our precious marine environment.

T7. [900032] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): For many decades, our creative industries and particularly our performing arts have been a major export of the UK. Will the Minister explain what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about the impacts of Brexit—a hard no-deal Brexit, in particular—on the movement of our performing arts between here and Europe?

Steve Barclay: I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has drawn the House's attention to a sector that is extremely important to the potential of the UK. I have discussed the issue with my ministerial colleagues. As for his characterisation, part of the reason for the withdrawal agreement Bill, which I hope he will support on Third Reading, is to secure the rights of the 3 million EU citizens, many of whom contribute to the creative arts. Future policy, however, is for the immigration Bill, where we will design something that is targeted at talents, including the talents of those in the creative industries.

T4. [900029] **Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): May I say how warming it is to be greeted by a fellow Lancastrian? Does my right hon. Friend agree that his Department should be commended for ensuring that this Government will deliver on the verdict and the will of the British people, in that we will leave the European Union on 31 January? With the closure of DExEU at the end of this month, perhaps he is a victim of his own success.

Steve Barclay: It must be a happy day, and one to celebrate, when there are so many Lancastrians in the House. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the achievements of officials within the Department who have worked so hard to support the Government in getting this deal. It is an important moment, and in part, the closure of the Department will enable us to take the expertise built up by officials over the past three years into those Departments that will be front and centre in the trade negotiations.

T8. [900033] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether EU citizens who work and pay taxes in the UK post Brexit will be liable for the immigration health surcharge? Does he envisage similar charges being introduced for UK citizens living and working in the EU?

Steve Barclay: I am happy to guarantee to all those EU citizens living in the UK ahead of our exit that the withdrawal agreement Bill guarantees their rights, among which are their rights to healthcare. That is why I urge the hon. Gentleman to support the Bill on Third Reading.

T5. [900030] **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the UK will remain an open, dynamic and welcoming place for EU citizens to study in our world-class universities, and that Britain continues to lead the way with the internationally recognised quality of our higher education?

James Duddridge: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The Government are clear that they wish to continue to attract students from the EU and the rest of the world to study here in the UK. The UK's higher education institutions have long-established traditions of attracting the brightest minds at all stages of their education and research careers, as we saw yesterday

with the alumna of the London School of Economics. This being our last oral questions, I thank civil servants for their support. I particularly thank my private office and Cara Phillips. They have been wonderful.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows that Airbus contributes billions of pounds in taxation, employs tens of thousands of people and wants business continuity after a short transition period. Will he give an undertaking today that the European Union Aviation Safety Agency will continue as is—rather than us inventing new, bespoke regulatory systems for the sake of divergence—so that Airbus can plan ahead, invest and continue to make its contribution to our economy?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman correctly draws the House's attention to an important issue, and one for the future negotiations. As he knows, however, in the political declaration there is scope for such participation. What was constructive and positive about the remarks of the President of the European Commission yesterday, which were reflected in the meeting with the Prime Minister, was the desire to build on that close partnership. The sort of areas where there will be detailed discussion will be on aircraft and other such sectors.

T9. [900034] **Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): Through the EU single market, our supermarkets lever enormous power on food supply chain prices. Leaving the single market is a huge opportunity for small farmers in this country. What steps will Her Majesty's Government be taking to redress that imbalance and to ensure a fair price for our farmers, not only in West Dorset but across the United Kingdom? [R]

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to seize the opportunities that Brexit offers, and that is particularly the case in agriculture. He well knows that the bureaucracy of the common agricultural policy was an area of deep frustration, with things such as the three-crop rule dictating to farmers who farm more than 30 hectares what they can and cannot grow. We should be setting farmers free and giving them those opportunities. Through the agriculture Bill, we will have the chance to seize those opportunities, and I know that my hon. Friend will be at the forefront of that for his constituents in West Dorset.

Football Association and Bet365

10.30 am

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the deal between the Football Association and Bet365.

The Minister for Sport, Media and Creative Industries (Nigel Adams): I will respond on behalf of the Secretary of State to this urgent question.

Recent reports on the streaming of FA cup matches by online bookmakers have rightly caused concern across the House. They relate to a media rights deal agreed by the FA with IMG in early 2017, within which IMG could sell on live footage or clips of certain FA cup matches to commercial partners. Bet365 and six other betting operators acquired those rights from IMG to use from the start of 2018-19 season.

It is right that sporting organisations have the freedom to benefit commercially from their products and negotiate their own broadcasting deals, but football authorities also have an important responsibility to ensure that fans are protected from the risks of problem gambling. Since the deal was agreed, the FA has rightly reviewed its position on commercial relationships with gambling firms. It has ended a commercial partnership with Ladbrokes and announced that it will be reviewing its processes for tendering rights from the 2024-25 season onwards, and it is absolutely correct that it does so.

The Secretary of State and I made our views quite clear yesterday and have done so previously on the wider responsibilities of sport and gambling sectors to their fans, their customers and our wider communities. We therefore welcome the fact that the industry has responded to public concern by introducing a whistle-to-whistle ban on TV advertising during daytime sport, and that the FA introduced a rule last year that prevents players, managers and members of staff in any capacity from deliberately taking part in audio or audio-visual advertising to actively encourage betting.

While many people enjoy gambling as a leisure pursuit, we cannot forget that it carries a high risk of harm and can have a serious impact individuals, families and communities. All of us—Governments, gambling companies and sporting authorities—need to keep the momentum going so that we can protect vulnerable people from the risk of gambling-related harm.

Carolyn Harris: Problem gambling in the UK is now so endemic that it should be treated as a public health crisis. It causes untold misery to those affected and their families. Too many times, I have sat with men and women who are cursed with an addiction and who are battling mental health issues. Too many times, I have listened to the heart-wrenching grief of a partner, sibling or parent whose loved one has taken their life because the demon became too big to fight. Again and again, I have stood in this Chamber and vocalised my shock, my anger and my utter disgust at the greed and immoral behaviour of the gambling companies. It saddens me that I am having to do it yet again, yet here we are—the first urgent question of the new year.

Three years ago, it appeared that the FA had turned a corner when it ended a £4 million-a-year sponsorship deal with Ladbrokes, distancing itself from the gambling industry—or so we assumed. However, what has come to light in recent days paints a very different picture.

In 2017, the Football Association agreed a streaming deal through sporting rights agency IMG, which will run until 2024. That deal, thought to be worth in the region of £750 million, allows IMG to sell on live footage from cup matches to bookmakers and betting firms around the globe. Gambling companies can then stream matches on their websites and mobile apps, forcing fans to “bet to view” if they want to watch their team.

We already know of some of the UK-based gambling companies who took part in the deal, but there are likely to be many more, both at home and across the world. I dread to think how many people will take the bait and place their first bet as a result of this deal, and how many could spiral into a dark addiction off the back of it. Just last weekend, Bet365 broadcast 32 FA cup matches online, in comparison with only two on terrestrial free-to-air television. To watch the matches on Bet365’s site, fans had to either place a bet before kick-off or open an account with a £5 deposit. Bet365 heavily promoted the matches on social media beforehand, offering tips to lure potential gamblers. Betting odds then accompanied the live footage, tempting viewers to gamble more.

Everything about the deal is shameful, everything about it needs to be dealt with and everything about the Gambling Act 2005 needs reform. The Gambling Commission certainly needs reform. I thank the Prime Minister for his comments, but I urge the Government to do more to protect vulnerable people.

Nigel Adams: I congratulate the hon. Member, who I know is passionate about this issue and has campaigned very effectively in the House. The Government are also very angry about this arrangement, especially after a weekend when the FA worthily highlighted its Heads Together mental health campaign.

I have spoken at some length to the FA since this broke. The arrangement has been in place for some time; the 2017 contract was a rollover of a deal. The Government have asked the Football Association to look at all avenues to review this element of its broadcasting agreement. This element of the broadcast arrangement is for matches that are not chosen for the FA cup online broadcast or do not kick off at 3 pm on a Saturday, and it does open up the opportunity for plenty of other games to be watched, but we have asked the FA in no uncertain terms to look at the deal and to see what opportunities there are to rescind this particular element. I will be meeting face to face with the FA next week.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this urgent question. I welcome the Minister’s comments following the Prime Minister’s earlier call for this unacceptable deal to be scrapped. It is unacceptable because it goes in completely the wrong direction; it is the gamblification of sport. It seriously damages the reputation of both the Football Association and IMG. Does the Minister agree that the FA should return, as soon as possible, to working to reduce the links between

[Richard Graham]

football and gambling, and that it should do away with this deal and avoid the proven risks of relentless online marketing, particularly on young men?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is right. I have spoken with him about his constituency concerns about this issue. It is absolutely right that the Football Association and all sporting bodies who, rightly, have links with sponsors across all sectors need to be very mindful of the impacts that such deals have on vulnerable people. We have made that very clear to the FA. As I said earlier to the hon. Member for Swansea East, the FA is looking into how it can alter the arrangements under that deal in the shortest order.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for granting this important urgent question, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for asking it. Many people are outraged that gambling firm Bet365 has won the rights to broadcast FA cup matches exclusively through its website and applications, because we are all too aware of the devastating impact that gambling can have on lives. At the heart of this issue is the cynical way Bet365 hook people into placing bets and gambling during matches, almost grooming people into becoming gamblers.

We know the link between gambling, mental health and suicide is real. My constituent Kay Wadsworth's only daughter Kimberly took her own life when she was in the grip of gambling addiction. Her death destroyed her family and brought unimaginable heartache. Think of the hundreds like Kimberly out there who might enjoy football, but find their lives ruined by addiction.

Yesterday the Secretary of State made strong statements, and even Gary Lineker and the Prime Minister agreed that the FA should reconsider. Has the Prime Minister spoken to the FA in the last 24 hours? Will the FA listen to the wishes of the Prime Minister?

Bet365 has stated that those who wished to watch matches did not need to gamble, but they did need to deposit money into an account, which meant that viewers were bombarded with live odds throughout the match. What protections have been put in place for gambling addicts? Is the Minister aware of any assessment that the FA made on the potential impact the deal could have on vulnerable people and the health of viewers? When was the Department first made aware of the deal by the FA, and what was the Department's response? Was it deemed acceptable or not? Will the Minister commit to write to all our sporting governing bodies and those who sell the rights to sport so that we do not end up in this situation with another sport?

It feels as though most of the House is united on this issue. The Queen's Speech made a commitment to review the Gambling Act 2005. Will the Minister update us on when that review will begin?

Nigel Adams: I welcome the shadow Secretary of State to her place. The arrangement through IMG is not solely with Bet365, as six other gambling companies have rights to the broadcasts. I have spoken to the Football Association and the Prime Minister has made his views clear. The hon. Lady will be pleased to hear

that I have received several commitments from the Football Association: it will not renew the deal when it comes up and it is also looking at all options to see if the current deal can be restricted.

I urge all other sporting bodies to look at their broadcast agreements. My understanding is that similar agreements are in place across all sports, not just football in this country. It is a global arrangement. The Olympics, FIFA and the Premier League do not have such broadcasting arrangements, but just about every other sporting body does. I urge all those bodies to ensure that they review their broadcast deals urgently.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing the urgent question, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) tabled a similar urgent question, showing the cross-party concern on the issue.

The deal with Bet365 is distasteful, naive and a long way short of what good governance of sport, especially football, should look like. But it also contradicts previous FA decisions dissociating itself, as the sport's regulator, from betting companies. Those decisions recognised public concern about gambling in football and dovetailed nicely with the FA's mental health work. I encourage the Minister not to listen too closely to the FA's defence on the issue and claims that any renegotiation of the deal will have an impact on grassroots sport. That is something that the FA has regularly claimed in the past, but it is important that it reviews the deal now, to protect people involved in football. Does the Minister agree that that needs to be done urgently if the FA is to regain respect for its previous moral position on the issue of gambling?

Nigel Adams: As the House knows, my hon. Friend has done an incredible amount over the years and she is passionate about this subject. It is fair to say that the arrangements for cutting the stakes on fixed odds betting terminals and tightening the requirements on age and identity verification to protect customers have a lot to do with her work in the House.

It is absolutely right that the FA act urgently on the matter. From our conversation this morning, it is fair to say that the FA is more than embarrassed by the situation. We will make it very clear when we have a face-to-face meeting early next week what steps we expect it to take next.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The deal between the English FA and IMG/Bet365—and, indeed, six other bookmakers—is, as the Minister has outlined, to be regretted. It shows the danger of selling media rights to third parties without correct oversight of the process. Gambling addiction is on the rise in the UK, so every gateway to gambling and the problems it creates needs to be scrutinised intensely. Online gambling in particular has experienced a huge increase in activity, with more than one third of the EU's online betting taking place in the UK. There has been progress through measures to address fixed odds betting terminals in the past year—with the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who asked the previous question, at the heart of that move. Do the Government intend to pursue similar proactive measures before the FA's next media rights review?

A tiny percentage of live football is now available on terrestrial TV. Does the Minister agree that ensuring that more football, and more sport generally, is broadcast on free-to-access television would remove potentially dangerous gambling gateways such as this one?

Nigel Adams: Yes, I do. The hon. Gentleman is correct: we would like to see far more live sport on terrestrial television. However, it is worth pointing out that the games we are discussing are one of three tranches of games. They are not FA cup games that kick off at 3 o'clock on a Saturday. They are not games that are chosen by the broadcasters for live broadcast. As the competition goes on, there will be fewer games. However, that is largely irrelevant. Let me deal with the issue at hand. It is worth pointing out that, as I have mentioned previously, it is an issue across all sports. We want to do all we can to ensure that there is more sport on terrestrial TV, but we have to be mindful of the fact that the rights holders can conduct their commercial deals themselves. However, they have to be responsible. The hon. Gentleman will know that our manifesto said that we would review the Gambling Act 2005. I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who is responsible for gambling, is in her place and I am sure that we will come to the House in future to clarify when that review will take place.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on obtaining the urgent question. In a sense, it does not really matter what the FA says to explain. The evidence is clear. The all-party parliamentary group on gambling-related harm conducted a series of inquiries with the chief executives of several gambling companies. The biggest area of risk is their drive to get more and more people into VIP rooms, where they give them incentives, such as tickets for football matches. What we are discussing is all part of that. The biggest abuse takes place in that process, whereby companies drive people who gamble a lot into higher levels of gambling because that is where their profits lie. It is not good enough for the FA to say, "Well, we didn't really mean this and we'll review it." The Government give the FA financial assistance. I urge my hon. Friend, as Minister for Sport, to tell the FA that unless it moves on the matter pretty damn quickly, we will review its financial support.

Nigel Adams: My right hon. Friend has a long history of campaigning on this issue, and he is absolutely correct. On his first point, the Gambling Commission is looking into the matter. As for the financial assistance the Government give the Football Association, I understand the Football Foundation receives about £18 million, and my right hon. Friend will be aware of our manifesto commitment to £500 million for grassroots football. I assure him that that will be on my agenda when I meet the FA next week.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The betting companies know there is a problem already, because they have undertaken not to advertise during live football matches, but of course that has not yet been implemented. Does the Minister share my concern

that if this development is not nipped in the bud we might reach a position where people can watch sport only if they have placed a bet?

Nigel Adams: I am confident that that will not happen. The hon. Gentleman is correct about the commitment to the ban on in-game advertising, and it is important that we look at the data on that. It has only just kicked in, but we should welcome the fact that the industry has stepped up and introduced that measure. I assure him that we will monitor it extremely carefully.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should work with banks as well as betting companies to ensure that the sort of behaviour that suggests that someone is developing a gambling addiction is spotted? I raise that because Bet365 is a major, well respected and responsible employer in my constituency, employing several thousand people. We need to get the balance right in how we tackle this issue and who we talk to, and recognise that there are other issues at stake.

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend and new colleague is correct. Bet365 is a significant employer in her area and it is right that it takes its responsibilities very seriously. I urge her to seek a meeting with the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), who is responsible for gambling and who I know will be interested in furthering that discussion.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): This is not about sport any more—we have gone way beyond that. This is entirely about gambling. It is not about the love of the game; it is about the unrestricted greed of Bet365. Right now, it is streaming 21 live events, covering eight different sports. Its design is to get people who have self-excluded from gambling to race to a gambling company and lay themselves open to lobbying once again. People who have identified themselves as suffering from gambling-related harm are being asked to put themselves back in a vulnerable position simply to watch their chosen sports. The Government should stop asking the gambling industry to act; they have to tell the industry what to do. We have to legislate; we cannot kowtow to the industry and let it have authority in this. This place makes the law. The gambling industry has to be brought into line with a completely new gambling Act, and during that process we should consult people who have suffered from gambling-related harm.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is spot-on. That is another reason why we are going to review the Gambling Act—and the sooner we do so the better as far as I am concerned.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I believe the deal cheapens the FA cup, and I do not believe we should wait four years for a review. If the FA will not change its mind and act soon, will the Minister consider amending the Gambling Act to ban the type of sponsorship deal that requires sports fans to set up gambling accounts simply to watch sports?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is right. Nothing is off the table in the review. I can tell the House that this morning the FA confirmed that from next year, 2021, it

[Nigel Adams]

will show those particular games on its website, so that they are not available exclusively via gambling sites. That is progress, but we have asked the FA to consider all the options for restricting the deal sooner.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Minister has several times mentioned the review he is going to undertake, which was in the Queen's Speech. Will he tell us when that is going to happen, as he did not answer the question from my Front-Bench colleague?

Nigel Adams: Work has started on the review, but I am not in a position to give the hon. Lady a date. This will be done in due course and Ministers will make the announcement when that is ready.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I sense the frustration of the Minister and the whole House that he has had to come to the Dispatch Box again to explain the actions of these clowns at the Football Association. Does he agree that this is more than goes on in other sports, because the national game permeates right through our society and we must therefore take it absolutely seriously? Will he widen his discussions to look at areas of poor governance in the national game, such as bullying, safeguarding and the poor deal for football fans? There is a canker at the heart of our national game and we need to sort it out.

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is correct; we are regularly in conversation with the FA on these issues. I know he is an active member of the Select Committee—at least he was, and he may very well continue to be—and we will ensure that he is updated on the conversations that we have.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that this is just another example, but a serious one, of the FA's dumbing down of the wonderful competition that is the FA cup? I do not know whether the Minister is old enough to remember, but I am sure you are, Mr Speaker, when most games kicked off at 3 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in the third round of the FA cup—to suit fans, not to suit the media companies and the betting companies. When he has that conversation with the FA, will he raise that general issue and say that this competition must be about the fans? It is their competition, and the interests of the media and betting companies should not be taken as the first priority.

Nigel Adams: I agree 100% with the hon. Gentleman. I do have fond memories of racing home from playing football to watch the FA cup final and various other matches. There could be an argument for saying that the competition has been watered down in some regards, as we see when we look at what players the teams put out on the pitch. He is absolutely right with his remarks.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I have met far too many families who have been bereaved by suicide as a result of a gambling addiction. I am extremely disappointed that the FA has made lots of nods about looking after mental health and mental wellbeing but embarked on such a partnership. We should give a clear message from both sides of the House that we find this abhorrent.

We have done a lot to make the physical gambling environment safer for users, but the online environment remains like the wild west. I encourage him to use not only his relationships with sporting organisations but digital regulation and those powers to take action to make it safer.

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is correct to raise this issue. The history of the broadcasting of these games goes back to the 1980s, when they were shown in betting shops; they were games that people would not see broadcast, so they would go in to get updated on the score, and the pictures would be fairly low resolution. That market has now changed and the pictures—the streams—are now online. That is exactly why we are going to have the review we have announced.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): This has undoubtedly damaged the FA's reputation. Is the Minister going to meet Bet365. I do not believe that a renegotiation is enough; we need redress. The new accounts set up in the past week were not just about people making bets this week; the company will have harvested the data of those vulnerable users so that it can keep advertising to them for the future. Will it shut down those accounts and give that data back, too?

Nigel Adams: It is worth pointing out again that seven gambling companies are involved in this arrangement with IMG. I know that the FA is in constant contact with IMG, and they have been put in no doubt about our views on the current arrangement.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this urgent question, and I thank the Minister for what he has said. He is right to highlight the progress that the FA has made on football and betting, but does he agree that bad decisions such as this one are in danger of making that perception of progress disappear in a puff of smoke? Given that there will be an increase in gambling as a result of this deal—after all, that is why Bet365 has engaged in it—there will also be an increase in problem gambling. That needs to be properly monitored, that monitoring will have a cost and that cost should be paid by Bet365 and the FA. If it can be demonstrated that there has been an increase in problem gambling, that should bring forward the review of the deal.

Nigel Adams: The former Secretary of State makes an incredibly good point. As I said to the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), nothing is off the table in respect of the conversations that we will have with the FA.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Child gambling addiction has doubled since 2017 and, shockingly, around 70,000 children are said to be at risk. Is the Minister concerned that this deal will make the situation worse?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Member is correct to raise that point. Gambling sponsorship and advertising must be responsible and must not be targeted at children, so we expect all sports bodies to consider the effect on their fans when they engage in any commercial relationship.

I thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who was present a second ago but is no longer in his place, because yesterday the NHS and GambleAware opened a clinic in Sunderland to assist those who have gambling issues. I understand that another dozen or so gambling clinics are to be opened throughout the country, which is good progress and will give people the right advice.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): The football community has done some excellent work on mental health, including the Take A Minute campaign. Everyone in this place cares passionately about the mental health of all those we seek to serve in our constituencies. Does my hon. Friend agree that this deal puts that work at risk, and will he join me in calling on the FA to reconsider?

While he is on his feet, will he remember the fans in Scunthorpe and wish Scunthorpe United the best of luck on Saturday?

Nigel Adams: May I welcome my hon. Friend to her place? I certainly will wish Scunthorpe United the best of luck—

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Who are they playing?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Member asks who they are playing; I can tell him that as a youngster I used to be dragged along to Scunthorpe to watch Scunthorpe United. That was some years ago. I was a very lucky child.

The irony of this story having blown up this weekend is that the FA was launching its Heads Together mental health campaign. It could not have been any more badly timed. As I have said, we have given clear instructions to the FA to look into every avenue possible to have this deal changed.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Let us be honest: betting companies disproportionately target low-income demographics and working-class communities. I see that in my own constituency, with three betting shops lined up next to each other in Baillieston Main Street. The Minister continually says that all sports are involved; can he really put his hand on his heart and say that cricket, for example, would have the same disproportionate targeting and investment as we see with football?

Nigel Adams: I understand that similar arrangements have been made in cricket. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman, hand on heart, whether those arrangements have the same extent and the same number of matches. It may be that more FA cup matches than cricket games are covered under these broadcasting deals.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): What is important are measures that actually tackle problem gambling, rather than virtue signalling in this House. People do not have to place a bet to watch these matches. Is it not typical of the metropolitan, privileged outlook of people in this House that there is no urgent question on people having to pay £100 a month for a Sky subscription to watch football matches? There is no urgent question on people paying £35 a month to BT to watch football matches, but there is one on something that allows working-class

people to watch these matches free of charge, because some people in this House do not like gambling. Will the Minister look at all this in the round?

Nigel Adams: I think everybody in this House can agree that problem gambling causes mental health problems. Indeed, this House has heard about—and I have spoken to colleagues about—situations when some of these cases have led to suicide. There is a clear link; mental health problems can lead to problem gambling, and can also be triggered by or made worse by it. The Government and the Gambling Commission have tightened protections, and we have committed to a further review of the Gambling Act, as I said in my response to the urgent question.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This issue is perhaps the most egregious example of how money is ruining football. It is clear that, with one or two exceptions, there is very little support in this place for this arrangement.

I want to follow up on the wider issue of football broadcasting. Last month, three different subscription channels were showing premier league football. How many times do we expect people to pay to watch football? Are we in danger of pricing people out of the game?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. We do want to see more live football on television, which makes it more accessible, but it is worth pointing out that the broader FA cup rights are worth around \$169 million to the Football Association, much of which—if not most—is ploughed back into grassroots football.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that all our legislation needs to be fit for purpose for the digital age, especially when it relates to online activities and their impact on health and mental health? Does he also agree that the review of the Gambling Act is not only needed, but urgently needed?

Nigel Adams: I could not agree more.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Can I pull the Minister up on the point that he just made, when he said that a large proportion of the money from broadcasting rights is going into grassroots football? If only! It is a tiny amount of money. In other countries in Europe, much more significant amounts of money go into paying for local coaches, local facilities and ensuring that there is homegrown talent. Should not we be ensuring—notwithstanding today's urgent question—that far more of this money goes directly to the small local clubs that are sustained by families, with mums, dads, grandpas and grandmas turning up every weekend?

Nigel Adams: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman's latter point, but I was referring to the broadcasting rights and the amount of money secured under the FA cup broadcasting deal, not the premier league broadcasting deal, which is an enormous amount of money.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): There is an obvious link between gambling and health, so what are the Minister's Department and the Department of Health doing to improve medical treatment for those affected by gambling?

Nigel Adams: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He makes a very good point. As I said previously, I am encouraged that the national health service and the Health Secretary have begun to open clinics to provide advice and assistance to those who are affected, in particular targeting younger people who might be having issues with loot boxes or other types of behaviour that could prove addictive.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): This issue raises fundamental public policy questions about ethics, fair rules and controls, and the responsibility of the Government to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation. It also fundamentally calls into question the judgment of the FA. The chief executive officer of Bet365, Denise Coates, was paid £277 million in basic salary in the last financial year. Does that not suggest that something is fundamentally wrong with our gambling system and industry, and again highlight the need for fundamental root-and-branch reform?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady will not have missed the point that I have made on several occasions: we are going to be reviewing the Act. Bet365 does an awful lot of good work in the region that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) mentioned. It is a private company. The salaries of its executives are a matter for that business. My understanding is that the chief executive is resident in the UK and so pays her full share of tax on those moneys. But it is absolutely right that we hold the sporting bodies' feet to the fire with regard to these broadcasting rights and make sure that they are dealt with responsibly. In this case, that has not happened.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): There is a mental health crisis for young men in our country, and it is clear that gambling addiction is a major factor in that. Time and again we hear that the gambling companies are investing more funds in tackling problem gambling, but will the Minister update the House on whether this investment has actually had any impact in tackling this issue?

Nigel Adams: I do not have the figures that my hon. Friend refers to, but this is an absolutely crucial issue in the sector of society that he mentions, which appears to be the target for this type of advertising. There is indeed a huge crisis in gambling addiction within that age group, and it can lead to some pretty horrific stories that we have heard in this House.

Business of the House

11.11 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): May I begin by wishing everybody a very happy new year and welcoming them all back after the Christmas break?

The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 13 JANUARY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on Britain in the world.

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on education and local government.

WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on a green industrial revolution.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on health and social care.

FRIDAY 17 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 20 JANUARY—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen's Speech on the economy and jobs.

I am pleased to announce that subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the constituency recess at the conclusion of business on Thursday 13 February and return on Monday 24 February. For Easter, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Tuesday 31 March and return on Tuesday 21 April. For the early May bank holiday, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Wednesday 6 May and return on Monday 11 May. The House will rise for the Whitsun recess at the conclusion of business on Thursday 21 May and return on Tuesday 2 June. For the summer recess, the House will rise at the conclusion of business on Tuesday 21 July and return on Tuesday 8 September. Finally, the conference recess will commence at the close of business on Thursday 17 September with the House returning on Tuesday 13 October—which hon. and right hon. Members will know is the anniversary of the birth of the late Baroness Thatcher.

Valerie Vaz: I start by wishing everyone a happy new year—and you, Mr Speaker. I am very pleased that you now have your full cohort of deputies in place. I thank the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) for his sterling work in the House at business questions and welcome the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who has taken over his post.

I thank the Leader of the House for next week's business; in fact, we have a week and a day. Will the Prime Minister be making a statement following his discussions with the EU President, as the previous Prime Minister always did? She always updated the House.

The Leader of the House has very helpfully set out the recess dates and sitting days right up until 13 October. It feels a bit mean to ask him for the Christmas dates as well, but it would be very helpful if he could say how long the Session will be and also give the dates of the sitting Fridays.

There are rumours about proposed machinery of government changes. They are just rumours at the minute, but I know that the business managers have been working hard to try to allocate Chairs of Committees. Will the Leader of the House make a commitment that if any changes affect the Opposition allocation, he will honour the commitment to renegotiate that? Please do not be the Leader of the House who does not commit to fairness and the convention.

One Committee that has not been set up yet is the Backbench Business Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) did a grand job as Chair, and I hope he will continue in that post. He and others are keen to get the Committee set up. In the meantime, he has helpfully given the Clerks some subjects for debate that can be rolled over. Could the Leader of the House have a discussion with him? I am sure that my hon. Friend will raise that later.

It is interesting that the Leader of the House has not announced the date of the Budget to the House, but it has been announced outside this place. That is quite concerning. He could have made a statement. He made lots of statements before the House rose, coming to the House practically twice or three times a day.

Another thing that the Government have announced outside the House but not to it is a review, to be concluded by mid-February, of the roll-out of the IR35 tax plan for the self-employed, which is due to take effect in April. May we have a statement on the exact terms of that review and the measures that will be put in place to support the self-employed? The Opposition called for a review during the general election. This is more chaos, and it is disgraceful—and so is the announcement on 23 December by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy about the takeover of Cobham.

“This is a deeply disappointing announcement and one cynically timed to avoid scrutiny on the weekend before Christmas. In one of its first major economic decisions, the Government is not taking back control so much as handing it away.”

They are not my words but those of Lady Nadine Cobham, the daughter-in-law of the founder of that brilliant British company. She said it would never have been done by the US, French or Japanese Governments. All Advent has to do is promise to call the Ministry of Defence if it plans to sell up. The takeover does not include a right to veto the disposal of these sensitive defence assets. This is Government asset-stripping Britain instead of protecting British interests. We need an urgent statement from the Business Secretary.

I want to mention our colleague Andrew Miller, who has sadly died. Being a new Member is quite disconcerting. Andrew was here when I was a new Member, and he was an assiduous Chair of the Science and Technology Committee. We must also mention the three British nationals who died in the Ukrainian plane crash. I am pleased that the Government have scheduled a statement on the Australian bushfires. Many people here have friends and family living there who are affected.

On a happier note, I want to congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) on the birth of their babies during the election. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Wales is now a grandmother, and we welcome Jesse Thomas Francis Kearney. We wish them well for the future.

The Leader of the House will know, because he tweets, that Gabriella Zaghari-Ratcliffe is now at school here—#pleasebringmymummyback. I hope the Leader of the House will do everything he can to do that.

Finally, I want to thank the staff of the House for staffing the super-hub. It was very effective for new Members and for old Members like me. I used it yesterday, and Members have one day left.

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I add to the right hon. Lady's words about the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who will be very much missed from these sessions? It always amazed me how a man of such gentleness, courtesy and kindness in private always managed to be so fiendishly angry in the Chamber. I look forward to seeing whether the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who I know is also a model of kindness, will be similarly angry when he gets up to speak in a moment, but I look forward to our exchanges.

The right hon. Lady asked 11 individual questions, and I will do my best to answer them all. The House will always be updated by the Government on really important issues. The Prime Minister, in the last Session of Parliament, averaged 36 minutes a day at the Dispatch Box during the time he was Prime Minister, so I think he has been ahead of almost any other previous Prime Minister in his assiduousness.

As regards the Christmas recess—absolutely. We want to ensure that there is reasonable notice for all recesses, which I think is of general help not just to Members but to the staff of the House for planning their lives. This is important for all of us, so we will try to give the longest notice we can, though I cannot yet give the length of the Session—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Why?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Rhondda always wants to chip in. We might have thought that, after a little peace and quiet over Christmas, Rhondda would have calmed down, but no such luck. Because there is so much business to be brought forward, and that will depend on the progress of business. That is a completely normal approach.

As for sitting Fridays, we have only just had the ballot, but of course we will bring those forward, and the motion, as soon as is practicable. On the machinery of Government changes, I got a little bit worried by a memo that said, “MOG changes”. I am not necessarily so keen on such changes; I am rather used to being the Mogg that I am. However, I can absolutely assure the right hon. Lady that any changes that are made will lead to consultation with the Opposition about any changes to Committees. It is hoped that the motion in relation to the sharing out of the Committees will be put on the Order Paper by the end of business today. That is not an absolute promise, but I understand that good progress has been made on coming to an agreement.

I am indeed grateful to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) for passing on a list of overhanging proposals from the Backbench Business Committee for debates. Whether there will be a lot of time for non-legislative business in the next few weeks, I am not absolutely certain, but it is useful to have that and to be aware of it.

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

The Budget date—giving people plenty of notice—is perfectly reasonable. I make announcements about the business for a week or possibly for two weeks; I do not intend to announce the business for March, so I think it would be unusual for me to be announcing that. I do hope that in this Session of Parliament my appearances at the Dispatch Box will be once a week to set out the business, rather than once or twice a day, which I think was beginning to pall on everybody in the House.

The IR35 review is extraordinarily important. It is a matter of concern to many of our constituents, and something that came up in the election on a number of occasions. It is important that it is done in such a way that people know what their tax affairs will be in April.

On the takeover of Cobham, the Government have to act within the legal parameters and the approach that we generally take to takeovers, and announcements must be made punctually. Sometimes when the House is in recess announcements still have to be made. Saying it was done just before Christmas is not a reasonable criticism, because business goes on.

May I share in the right hon. Lady's condolences to Andrew Miller's family? It is always sad when we lose a distinguished former Member of this House who has invariably been influential and important in the careers of existing Members.

There is indeed a statement coming on the Australian bushfires. I think all of us feel the deepest sympathy for the people of Australia, who for so many of us are kith and kin, and there is therefore always a particular concern with what is happening in Australia.

The Ukrainian plane crash is something that needs to be investigated thoroughly so that we find out what the cause was. Our concern is for the British citizens, but also for all the lives that were lost.

As always, I am so glad that once again the right hon. Lady reminds us about Ms Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and of course all the other dual nationals who are held improperly, unlawfully by the Iranian regime. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Iranian Government on 6 January. The Government are doing everything that we can to secure her release and that of others, but the Government's power, regrettably, is not unlimited in this area.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Leader of the House will be aware of the support in all parts of the House and in the country—with campaigners such as Battersea Dogs and Cats pressing hard—for the reintroduction of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, which was in the Queen's Speech and was of course lost because of the general election. Can he pledge to introduce the Bill in the next two weeks, and if not, can he tell us what the timetable is for it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can reassure my right hon. and learned Friend that the animal welfare Bill is a priority of this Government. It has not ceased to be a priority of this Government; there is a busy programme of legislation, but this Bill will remain within it.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): There is always a degree of excitement in starting any new job, and I feel I will have to have an ongoing challenge of

curbing my enthusiasm for this one, but let me begin by paying tribute and a word of thanks to my friend and colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who preceded me in this role and who for a long shift—four and a half years—stood here every Thursday to represent my party in his own inimitable style. I intend to pick up where he left off, and while the style may be different I assure Members that the message will be the same.

Let me also say that I very much look forward to a weekly verbal joust with the Leader of the House, and I only hope that we do not have a spoilsport Prime Minister who will dash my expectations by an imminent reshuffle and changing that position.

Turning to the business statement itself, I have to observe that, given the times we are in, it does seem a little self-indulgent to be spending six days debating what is essentially a mission statement by the Government rather than any specific legislative proposals. I understand that the Queen's Speech debate is important, but is it not time to get on to matters of substance? Even for a Government bathing in the afterglow of an election victory that does seem a little excessive.

There are many things we ought to be discussing that are not in this business statement, and let me offer three this morning. The first is the Government's proposed departmental reorganisation. If this House is to have the role of scrutiny of the Executive, it is clearly important that we understand what the shape and structure of the Executive actually is. This House ought to be kept up to date on the proposals being made for changes in Government Departments so that we can consider what changes we might need to make to our agenda and procedures in order to adequately hold them to account. Will the Leader of the House therefore please update us on what the obstacles to the current reorganisation are, when they might be resolved and when we can expect an announcement?

Secondly, given the events of the last seven days, we can see that there is a very precarious military and political situation in the middle east. Not only that, but we can see how compromised this country is in trying to influence those events. Should not the Government be bringing forward an urgent debate on these matters so that this House can consider how better we can influence these events?

Thirdly, and finally, when are the Government going to hold a debate recognising the consequences of the 12 December general election, which for the first time has created a situation within this island where the two principal countries have a different political mandate? Are the Government going to bring forward proposals in order to acknowledge Scottish public opinion and to accommodate Scottish political representation? If they do not, and if they do not recognise that their mandate ends at the Scottish border then—

Mr Speaker: Order.

Tommy Sheppard: Then—

Mr Speaker: Order. Sorry, but one of us is going to have to give way. I am being very generous as it is the hon. Gentleman's first outing, but please come to a conclusion; you are meant to take two minutes, but you are on three.

Tommy Sheppard: Apologies, Mr Speaker; this is my first time, but I was a sentence away from my conclusion, which is simply to say that I caution the Government: if they do not do this and do not recognise that different mandate, they are going to become a recruiting sergeant for those on these Benches who wish Scotland to have an independent, alternative future.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his first outing in holding this Government to account and bringing on the fast bowling to start with.

The Brexit Bill started us off, so even before the Queen's Speech we passed a major piece of legislation, but that does not keep the hon. Gentleman happy; what more can we do?

As I have said, we hope to announce the reorganisation of government today: the share-out of Select Committees begins the process, the Chairmen will then be elected and Committees will be established, and they will be adjusted if there are any changes. This is all perfectly normal. There will be regular statements and oral questions continue. That is all in place; it is there, and it is for the hon. Gentleman to use it.

On the hon. Gentleman's first go, I do not want to be unkind and point out that, as I said in my statement, we will be debating foreign affairs on Monday. That will be an opportunity to discuss all matters relating to Iran, so I am granting his wish almost immediately after standing up. We also had a statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence earlier in the week.

On the consequences of the election, the hon. Gentleman says that we may become a recruiting sergeant for the SNP, which makes me wonder what he is complaining about. If that is what he thinks we are doing, I would have thought he would be quite pleased. What I would say is that he and other SNP Members must not forget that there was a rather important election in 2014, and it was won by people who wanted to remain in the United Kingdom. There is not the division that he talks of. The United Kingdom is united, and that was what the people of Scotland voted for in their wisdom and good sense.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): People opening their new year calendars, and now those who heard the Leader of the House announce the recess dates, will have noticed that the early May bank holiday has moved from Monday 4 May to Friday 8th so that we can, quite rightly, mark the 75th anniversary of VE-day. However, events such as weddings, sporting fixtures and civic events will have been scheduled for Monday 4th and perhaps Sunday 3rd, and they will be adversely affected by the change. What are the Government's plans to make sure that there is full awareness of the situation? Perhaps the Leader of the House will consider whether it would be in the spirit of a new, forward-looking global Britain that we might have another bank holiday in May and reinstate the Monday, as well as having the Friday.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just advise Members that business questions will finish at 12.15 pm? If we can get through questions quickly, that would be excellent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think that bank holidays are one of the things that come under the Lord President of the Council, so this is the first question I have ever been asked while wearing my Lord President of the Council hat. However, there is a great cost to bank holidays and I think the chances of having another one, although we all like to have a day off, is relatively slim, so I would not like to build up my right hon. Friend's hopes.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May I join the tributes that have been paid to my predecessor Andrew Miller, who served the constituency of Ellesmere Port and Neston with distinction for 23 years? He was greatly admired and respected by his constituents. As I found when I entered this place, he was also greatly admired and respected across the House for his work during his time in Parliament. He will be greatly missed. He was a friend to many of us here and a real mentor, and my thoughts are with his family at this time. His work in the field of science and technology is well known, but he was also a patron for the charity RoadPeace. In that regard, will the Leader of the House update us on when the consultation that took place several years ago on increasing sentences for death by dangerous driving will actually result in legislation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point. The Government take the matter extraordinarily seriously. There were plans in the previous Parliament for dealing with it, and I would be very surprised if they were not revisited soon.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): The Leader of the House, like other hon. Members, will be aware of the daily work pressures on members of our ambulance services, not least in the east of England, where there were three staff suicides over 11 days in December. May we find time for a debate to highlight the extent of the problem of pressure on ambulance workers and perhaps to try to find some solutions?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by welcoming back my hon. Friend? It is a huge pleasure to see a friend back in the House and I congratulate him on his victory.

My hon. Friend raises a point of great seriousness. It would be possible to consider it during the Queen's Speech debate next Thursday, which covers matters of health, but this is something the Government must be aware of more broadly. Issues relating to suicide have such a devastating effect on families. They tie in with the Government's efforts on mental health and increased spending on mental health to try to help people in, or heading towards, that situation.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): We have just heard that Liberty Steel is restructuring, which will inevitably lead to job losses in Rotherham and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). While we will, of course, hold Liberty Steel to account for the long-term future, we also need the Leader of the House to find time in which we can hold the Government to account, because the underlying structural issues, for which they are responsible, have not been dealt with. Please will he find time for an hour and a half debate on this very important topic?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Obviously there are time slots available for Westminster Hall debates and Adjournment debates—they are in Mr Speaker's hands—and I recommend that the hon. Lady applies for one of those. I also remind her that Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions are on Tuesday 21 January. This is such an important issue and it is well worth raising. If there is anything I can do to help to facilitate a debate—not, I am afraid, in Government time, but before the Backbench Business Committee is set up—I will look very sympathetically on it.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome the announcement of the recess dates, which is very helpful for families and everybody else. Can we find time for a debate or a statement on why we are still allowing children aged 16 to get married in this country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think that it is not easy for children aged 16 to get married. As I understand it, they need the permission of either their parents or a magistrate, and the numbers are not enormous. However, it would be perfectly reasonable to ask for an Adjournment debate on the subject. I do not see an obvious opportunity to raise the matter in the Queen's Speech debate, but the issue—the age of majority in this country—needs to be considered, as many things flow from that.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Leader of the House was kind enough to recognise that, as the former Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, I wrote to him, but he will also have noted that a number of the main sponsors of the awaited debates are no longer with us. The debates with sponsors who are still Members of the House are on: the impact of diagnosis and treatment of parental mental illness on outcomes for children; the collapse of Thomas Cook and the future of the travel industry; and the value of the arts and creative industries, which are very close to my heart, given that the Sage Gateshead and BALTIC are in my constituency. I look forward to the re-establishment of House business Committees, including the Backbench Business Committee.

Will the Leader of the House also organise a Government statement on the failing—if not failed—Northern Rail franchise? The matter is of great importance to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of our constituents across the north of England, who are being badly let down by this failed franchise?

Mr Rees-Mogg: In response to the first half of the hon. Gentleman's question, I was careful to say that while I was grateful for the list being sent, I was not committing to it, because the Backbench Business Committee of one Parliament ought not to bind a future Parliament for exactly the reason that he mentions: some Members who wanted a debate are no longer Members of the House. It would be wrong to have debates reflecting former Members' interests, but when Members are still here, that is a relevant factor if any time is available.

I thought that the Prime Minister gave a very clear statement of the Government's position on Northern Rail at Prime Minister's questions yesterday: rail franchise companies will have to improve and deliver good services, otherwise the Government will take action.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): The Government's ambition is to improve rail services all over the country, and there is a great need for improvement on the Cotswold line in West Oxfordshire, where we require further redoubling. May we have a debate in Government time to ensure that we can make the case all over the country for where we need investment so that we can all get the services that our constituents deserve and require?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Rail is a real issue for many Members of Parliament, given the effect on people of extremely difficult journeys to work. The Government are spending £500 million on a Beeching reversal to restore some rail lines. We are willing to act to ensure that the rail services provided are those that people can have a reasonable expectation of receiving, so what my hon. Friend says is very much in line with the action that the Government plan to take.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Will the Leader of the House say when we might expect to see the return of the domestic abuse Bill, on which such great progress was made during the last Parliament, so that we can put that in our diaries?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot give the hon. Lady a date for her diary, but the Government are prioritising that Bill. It is on the stocks and ready to be brought back soon—it will certainly be introduced before Easter.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Can we have a debate on rail connectivity with the north of England? My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and I have been campaigning for years for a through train from Grimsby via Market Rasen to London. This is a catchment area of up to a quarter of a million people with no through train. The Government want to introduce projects to help the north of England and they own London North Eastern Railway. Can we get the train done?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First, may I add to my answer to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns)? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has just issued a written ministerial statement on Northern Rail, which I hope will be helpful to the House.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) for his appeal for a through train and for his noting that the Government are trying to improve infrastructure in the north of England. His appeal will be heard, and I shall make sure it is passed on to the Secretary of State. What he is calling for fits in with the thrust of what the Government are trying to do, but that is not a promise.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The statement on Northern Rail should be being made to the House right now—it is that important to that many Members.

Lydiat Primary School in my constituency is in desperate need of a new building. The governors are doing all that they can to make do and mend, but it is simply not economically viable to continue. Despite what the Prime Minister said yesterday, education spending in this country has fallen since 2010, not increased, so may we have a statement on the importance of investment in new school buildings across the country, and can the

Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Education to arrange a meeting with me about the urgent need for a new building at Lydiate Primary School?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Education questions are a week on Monday, but an extra £14 billion is to be spent on schools over the next three years, which is an extra £150 million a week. Extra money for the physical infrastructure of our schools will be available as part of that. Money is becoming available and expenditure is increasing, which was a commitment prior to the general election and reconfirmed at the general election. I would suggest in the first instance that the hon. Gentleman raises the matter at Education questions and writes to a Minister to ask for a meeting. If he has no success with that, he can come back at business questions and I will see if I can help.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Last summer, dozens of homes and businesses in my constituency were flooded, but they could not meet the criteria for receiving Flood Re insurance or any of the funding available for flood resilience measures, despite some of them having been flooded for the second or third time. In addition, as a further blow, Stockport Council, despite some initial relief, is now charging people council tax on not only their temporary accommodation, but their main accommodation, which is still uninhabitable. May we have a debate in Government time on how we can offer more support, both nationally and locally, to flood victims?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is a really important issue. One would hope that local authorities would have the good sense and wisdom to treat people whose homes have become uninhabitable through flooding with generosity, rather than insisting on full payment of council tax. There will be an opportunity in Tuesday's Queen's Speech debate to discuss local government issues, and I hope my hon. Friend will raise this matter then.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Yesterday, the two lorry drivers who sadly died in a road traffic collision near Luton on Saturday morning were named as Surjit Singh and Gheorge Mihai. This followed two other accidents on Christmas eve along the same stretch of smart motorway on the M1. May we please have a debate on and a review of the roll-out of smart motorways across this country, especially in the light of these recent and tragic deaths?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I know that the way in which smart motorways have been operating is a matter of considerable concern to the House. I understand that the Secretary of State has ordered a review of them, which was meant to be taking place relatively rapidly, and that he will report back to the House. To consider and debate that in due course, after the report has happened, would be only suitable.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): May we also have a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport, as well as an urgent debate, on London Northwestern Railway, whose recent performance has been abysmal, as it is severely affecting the mental wellbeing of many of those who travel on it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is a great commonality of feeling across the House about rail services. Rail companies need to deliver, and to ensure that people have the service that they need and that trains run broadly on time.

The franchising system is being changed and the railway will be improved with an investment of £48 billion, the largest since the Victorian era, which I know many Members think is relatively recent but which was actually well over 100 years ago. There is also a £4.2 billion local public transport fund to enable city regions to upgrade their buses, trains and trams so that they are as good as those in London. This will help every part of the country, and it involves a very, very large amount of money, but I absolutely recognise the problems that are currently affecting constituents across the country.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): We know that the most vulnerable people rely on prepayment energy meters, but I do not know whether the Leader of the House is aware that on 1 January British Gas changed its top-up outlets from PayPoint to Payzone, which has 15,000 fewer outlets in the United Kingdom. I have an elderly constituent who, instead of having to walk around the corner to top up her meter, is now faced with a 2-mile walk. May we have a statement outlining what discussions the Government had with Ofgem and British Gas, and what impact assessments were made?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I was aware of that issue, and I know that Members throughout the House are concerned about the effect that it will have on their most vulnerable and least well-off constituents. I think that it is up to all of us to lobby British Gas to reconsider its decision. I will happily take up the matter with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments, because I know that it has attracted cross-party concern and is a matter of considerable seriousness. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we need to look after the least well-off the most.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): My constituency has one of the worst broadband networks in the country in terms of both coverage and speed—particularly the likes of Audlem, Tattenham and Bunbury, which are in the bottom 10%. May we have a debate on broadband infrastructure so that I can question a Minister on how Eddisbury residents will secure their fair share of the £5 billion manifesto commitment to roll out full fibre across the country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I welcome back my hon. Friend, who made such a contribution to the former Government. It was a great pleasure for me to campaign for him when he stood in a by-election some years ago, and he was a great hero for winning it.

Broadband roll-out will involve a major effort by the Government and the £5 billion investment that my hon. Friend mentioned. I fear that I am slightly teaching my grandmother to suck eggs, because he knows all this perfectly well, but questions to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will take place

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

next Thursday, and I think that they will present him with a good initial opportunity to put in his plea for Eddisbury.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Every hour someone in England has a partial foot amputation, and every two hours someone loses an entire leg. Please may we have a debate in Government time on the growing crisis of vascular disease and the urgent steps that the Government need to take to address it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I must confess that I was unaware of those figures, which are absolutely shocking. There will be an opportunity for the hon. Lady to raise the issue during the Queen's Speech debate on health matters, and I hope that she will do so.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Leader of the House aware that 150,000 people worldwide, mainly children, died of measles last year, and that many children in this country are not protected by the MMR vaccine when they start school? May we have an urgent debate on the measles epidemic that is spreading across Europe, and also New York state, and a discussion about whether it should be mandatory for children attending pre-school and early school to have that MMR protection?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government are doing what they can to increase the take-up of measles vaccines to ensure that as many children as possible are covered. That is tremendously important, and parents have a great responsibility to ensure that their children are vaccinated. Let me add, without going into too much detail, that I, as a parent, have certainly taken steps to ensure that I have fulfilled my responsibility. The Government will be pushing for this, and there is next week's Queen's Speech debate in which to raise it, but public health depends on people's use of the vaccines that are available to them, and that should be encouraged.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): May we have a debate on championing apprenticeships and skills? Although we have over 900,000 apprentices, the highest number in our nation's history, we need to look at how we can get more young people doing apprenticeships and more people doing degree apprenticeships. Will the Leader of the House also look to work with the Speaker on introducing an apprentice scheme in Parliament to help parliamentarians to employ apprentices?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I understand it, apprentices have a chance at the age of 28 of earning significantly more than graduates do. I think it is 25% more. It is a really remarkable success for apprenticeships. They ought to be encouraged, and my right hon. Friend is absolutely brilliant at doing this. He was one of the most successful Ministers in advancing the cause of apprenticeships. His idea about apprenticeships within the Palace of Westminster is very well timed and, Mr Speaker, if you think it is agreeable, perhaps that is something we could discuss at the Commission on Monday.

Mr Speaker: Of course.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Would the Leader of the House consider making time available to highlight the plight of residents and small businesses in Arundel and South Downs who were impacted by the recent floods just before Christmas and, in particular, to discuss what steps the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) will take to ensure that the risk of flooding is reflected when future development is contemplated?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. It is a great pleasure to see him in his place after all that he has done for the Conservative party in his distinguished career. The Government naturally sympathise with those people who have been affected by the recent flooding and the terrible impact that has on their lives. As we were hearing earlier, we have put in place a wide range of recovery schemes for affected homes, businesses, farmers and communities, and £2.6 billion is being spent in over 1,000 flood schemes across the country, which will protect a further 300,000 homes by 2021. I think that in this case prevention is better than cure. There will be relevant questions to the Local Government Secretary on Monday.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): May we have a debate about standards in public life and the consequences when Members of either this place or the other place abuse staff or each other? Following the incident that I raised on the Floor of the House this week, I have had a number of members of staff raise concerns with me about the way they are treated. Further to that, I am sorry to say that the Member from the other place who I have complained about has now launched a homophobic attack on me in the press. This will be reported to the police, and I know that I and others consider this to be a hate crime.

I know that the Leader of the House and the Speaker take this matter very seriously. I have a position of great privilege and I am able to raise this, but we must set the best possible standards from this place for other LGBT people and, indeed, our staff, to ensure that we send a message to say that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable here or anywhere else.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I hope that I will not breach the normal order of this House if I say that the attack on the hon. Lady was utterly disgraceful and that she is clearly owed an apology by the noble Lord for what he said about her. I think that everybody who heard about that was shocked by the comments that he is reported to have made and has not denied. I think they are really appalling. I know that we are not allowed to criticise Members of the other place except on a specific motion, but I think that under these circumstances we are allowed to stretch the rules.

As regards the initial complaint, everybody should treat our members of staff politely and with normal good manners. The staff have a duty to look after us and protect us, and we must respond to them in kind. The purpose of this place is to facilitate legislation. We are here as legislators, and it is incumbent upon us to lead by example. That is why the behavioural code has been set up as it has. Everyone should be respected and valued. We should recognise that, by virtue of our office

and by virtue of the 70,000 people who have sent us here, we have a status that we must not abuse through ill manners. Indeed, the greater one's status—you are a model of this, Mr Speaker—the more important it is to show good manners to those who are working on one's behalf. There is a helpline that people can call, and for any members of staff listening to this—I hope hon. Members will pass this on to their staff—it is 0800 028 2439. I hope that the security staff who were abused will ring the helpline so that the House of Lords authorities can look into the matter.

While I am paying tribute to the staff, I want to add one thing on a happier note. Two members of our security staff—this shows us how lucky we are—Ron Dowson and Habibi Syaaf rescued a man who had fallen into the Thames earlier this week. That is a reminder of how well we are served and, therefore, of our even greater duty of good manners.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Government have many important priorities, but nothing can be more pressing than the safety of our children. There is clear data that children as young as eight are regularly viewing pornography online—often extreme pornography—with no legal consequences for website operators. When will the Government turn their extremely good “Online Harms” White Paper into a Bill to address the issue that can be debated in this House?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my right hon. Friend for her campaigning on this matter. Any parent with children getting to the age when they start going online worries about what content may appear and how effective or ineffective filters may be to protect their children or, indeed, how clever one's children may be at getting through the filters that one tries to put on.

The Government are committed to ensuring that children are protected from accessing harmful content online. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport outlined in her written statement to Parliament on 16 October that we want to achieve the most comprehensive and coherent approach to protecting children online. We have decided to deliver these protections through our wider online harms regulatory proposals. The Secretary of State's statement outlined that the age verification provisions in the Digital Economy Act 2017 will not be commenced and, as a result, the British Board of Film Classification has been de-designated as the age verification regulator for online pornography, but there will be a wider strategy to protect children.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Fire service men and women take risks to save lives on a daily basis, yet there is increasing concern about their own wellbeing and the links to cancer that arise from exposure to chemicals through their uniforms. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time to discuss the matter?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is an important point and should be a matter of concern to us all. The people who risk their lives for us ought to have equipment that protects them, rather than increases the risk to them. Housing, Communities and Local Government questions are on Monday, which would be good initial opportunity to

raise the matter. It would also be sensible to ask Mr Speaker for an Adjournment debate, which is often a good way of starting the discussion on such important matters.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The great services available at the Hospital of St Cross in Rugby are rightly cherished by local residents, but Rugby is growing fast. We are delivering houses at three times the national rate, and many people are concerned that additional services will be needed to support that growing population. Can we have a debate on how the Government health infrastructure plan will support smaller hospitals in growing towns such as Rugby?

Mr Rees-Mogg: On 29 September, the Government announced our new health infrastructure plan to ensure that our health infrastructure works for decades to come. At the centre of the plan is a new hospital building programme, and the Government announced six new hospital schemes that are receiving funding to go ahead now and to be delivered by 2025 and a further 21 schemes across 34 hospitals that will start the next stage of developing their plans between 2025 and 2030. There is a clear NHS capital funding plan to ensure that the health infrastructure is there, and I commend my hon. Friend for standing up for his hospital in Rugby. Local hospitals are cherished by residents up and down the country.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): As I am the fifth Member to ask about rail, the Leader of the House can be in no doubt about the strength of feeling on both sides about transport infrastructure. Can we have a Transport Minister before us so that we can question them on details of the recent announcements on the reopening of lines closed under Beeching? I am particularly keen to raise the reopening of the line to Fleetwood.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Congratulations, Dame Rosie, on your unanimous re-election yesterday as Deputy Speaker, having been elected by acclaim.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) raises an important point, as have other hon. and right hon. Members. There is a £500 million pot to reopen lines that were closed under Beeching, and there will potentially be an opportunity to discuss it on Monday 20 January in the debate on the economy and jobs. Rail is an important part of the economy, and that debate will be the first occasion to raise it.

I reassure the House that I am not the deaf adder. I have heard very clearly the widespread concern about rail, and it will have been heard by the Government and the responsible Ministers, too.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I add my congratulations on your welcome return to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Leader of the House will be aware that Monday is the statutory deadline for getting the Stormont Executive back up and running. The talks are under way, and we all hope they are successful over the coming days. They will reach a conclusion, one way or the other, this weekend, so can he confirm that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be making a statement to this

[Mr Mark Harper]

House on Monday, either to announce that the Executive is back in operation so that Northern Ireland is properly governed or else to set out what steps the Government will take to ensure that the very serious issues for the operation of Northern Ireland's public services can be properly dealt with?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working extremely hard, and worked hard over the Christmas break, with all the parties in Northern Ireland to try to ensure that the Assembly is up and running on 13 January. Progress has been made, but it is not possible for me to say where that will conclude or what statements there will be on Monday. It is important that this work proceeds and that the Assembly is reassembled. [Interruption.] I see nods from Northern Ireland Members, and I think there is a widespread feeling that the lack of an Assembly has gone on for much too long.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) mentioned, today Liberty Steel announced job losses in Newport, Rotherham and elsewhere. Our thoughts are with those who are affected. The Orb steelworks in Newport was mothballed before Christmas, and there were worrying signs from Tata in the press over the weekend. I reiterate the call for an urgent debate in Government time on steel so that we can ensure the Government are proactive at this time.

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is obviously a very important issue, and very important for the people whose jobs are involved, for whom it must be a very troubling time. I reiterate that there are Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions on Tuesday 21 January, and an application for an Adjournment debate may see something discussed even sooner.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): The recent treatment of the 19-year-old British national in Ayia Napa and the failures of the judicial process follow on from the failure of the judicial system in Cyprus to bring to justice the killers of my constituent George Low, who was murdered in the same town in 2016. Can we please have a debate on the safety of British subjects visiting Cyprus on holiday and whether any further precautions or advice are needed?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Both cases are matters of considerable concern, and they have been of concern to the Government. I note that the lady returning from Cyprus is being helped by the police and viewed as a victim of a sexual assault. That tells us something important about how the British authorities view the case. We have to bear it in mind that standards of justice across the world are not necessarily as high as they are in the United Kingdom. It is one of the primary duties of any Government to ensure the wellbeing of their citizens when they are abroad, or that justice can be done if anything goes wrong when they are abroad. The Government take

that duty extraordinarily seriously. Hon. Members of all parties may rest assured that, if they have constituents who need assistance, the Foreign Office is there to help them.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is very nice to see you back in your place today, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Leader of the House has been asked a number of questions about rail today. I am sure that he knows that TransPennine Express has had to offer a rebate of 3% on its fares because of its latest timetabling fiasco. That goes alongside its failure to run Hull station properly: we have a leaky roof and appalling toilets. May we have a debate about whether we should introduce management productivity clauses into the franchise so that, for example, TransPennine's managing director, Leo Goodwin, could refund perhaps more than 3% of the £331,000 salary he receives after a recent 44% pay increase?

Mr Rees-Mogg: On my own behalf and that of the Government, I congratulate the hon. Lady on becoming a Dame and on all she has contributed to Parliament, for which it is a due and proper reward. She comes up with a novel solution—it may be rather a good one—that people should have performance-related pay and that if the performance is bad, perhaps the pay should go down. That is not something, as a capitalist, I am averse to.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I am sure that there is cross-party consensus in the House that the most beautiful constituency in the United Kingdom is West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. That beauty was enhanced last year by the flowering of rare aspen trees on the Muir of Dinnet nature reserve. Would my right hon. Friend consider a debate in Government time on the importance of nature reserves, as a way of thanking all those who volunteer and work to protect our great flora and fauna across the United Kingdom?

Mr Rees-Mogg: If my hon. Friend wants to get a debate out of me, he will have to say that Somerset is the most beautiful county; he will not get it by saying that his own constituency is. However, he raises an important point. The work that people do to ensure that the natural beauty of our country is enhanced is important. I am not sure that I can promise him a debate, but his point is extremely well made and I thank him for all his work to ensure that our country remains the most beautiful in the world—something I think we can all agree on.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The UK Government already had a woeful record on shamefully backsliding on commitments to child refugees, but to vote to prevent unaccompanied child refugees from being reunited with their families is a new low. Will the Leader of the House make an urgent statement on exactly what assessment the Government made of the impact of their shameful decision on those most vulnerable children?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is under a misapprehension. There is no change to Government policy. The decision to take the provision

out of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill was made because it is not right to put negotiating mandates in an Act of Parliament in that way. The Government remain committed to supporting and aiding child refugees.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that our manifesto says that we will review the Gambling Act 2005, and he will have heard, from standing at the Bar of the House during the urgent question earlier, that it is an analogue Act in a digital age. Given that the work will require a laborious Whitehall process, we in Parliament can help it along. With that in mind, will the Leader of the House give the House the opportunity to start the discussion by granting a debate in Government time on what we would like to see in the review of the legislation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for her brilliant work in bringing problem gambling to the attention of the House and the country at large. Without her work, the problem would have been less noticed and more swept under the carpet. As the urgent question showed, it worries hon. Members across the Chamber, and many of us have seen in our constituencies the problems that arise from addictive gambling. The Government did indeed say in our manifesto that we will have a review, and that will be delivered.

I do not think I can promise a debate because there was such a full discussion of the subject shortly before I got to my feet that I think it has in some sense been covered, but the knowledge that the House and the Government are concerned, and the strength of the position taken by my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport in his answers, will, I think, be noticed by the gambling world. I hope the industry will put its own house in order; otherwise, it might find that its house is put in order for it.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Last month, the Prime Minister said,

“We should bring electrification of Midland Mainline back and do the whole line through to Sheffield”,

but given that the two previous Tory Prime Ministers made precisely the same promise, only to backtrack just a few weeks after the election, may we have an urgent debate so that those very busy Transport Ministers can be challenged on precisely when and how they will deliver that vital investment?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have a certain sympathy because the great western line was also meant to be electrified, but then it was found to be too difficult to do around Bath, which is the station I use—

Chris Bryant: Because you use it.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am always getting heckled from Rhondda! Everyone else is so well behaved in this new Parliament. We have this new image and row upon row of people who sit there politely listening, other than the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) raises an important point. There will be oral questions to Department for Transport Ministers in due course, and I think that is the right time to raise

the subject initially as it may not constitute a full debate on its own, but it will also be possible to raise the matter at various points in the debate on the Queen’s Speech.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I add my congratulations on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Government have announced that there are to be further town deals. My constituency already benefits from the Greater Grimsby town deal. May we have in Government time a debate in which the Government set out more details of their proposals and I am able to outline the benefits that have come to Cleethorpes?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am glad to say that Midsomer Norton and Keynsham in North East Somerset are also benefiting from a deal. Previous town deals are benefiting many of us, up and down the country. I can answer my hon. Friend’s wish because I can give slightly more detail, which may save the House the time that would be taken by a full debate.

On 27 July, the Prime Minister announced that a £3.6 billion towns fund would support an initial 100 town deals. The Government have announced 100 places that will be invited to develop proposals for deals, including some that have been the birthplaces of industry, centres of commerce for centuries, or bastions of the maritime economy along our coastline. The Government will work with local people from the 100 communities to agree proposals to spend up to £25 million in each place. The Government are committed to decentralising funding and decisions away from Whitehall. We have invested in the growth of local economies, developing powers through green, ambitious city growth deals, devolving more than £9 billion of funding to local enterprise partnerships, and introducing eight metro Mayors in England. This is all part of a general programme, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) is pleased with the success of the Greater Grimsby deal.

Chris Bryant: For a start, the name of my constituency is pronounced Rhon-tha, not Rhon-da. I hope the Leader of the House will practise in front of a mirror later today.

I am not an unreasonable man, so I am not asking when the next Prorogation of Parliament will be, but I am asking how long the Government intend to run the Session in the broadest sense. It would be perfectly legitimate to run it to next November and return to the old system of having State Opening in that month. May is a daft time to have a State Opening, because the Government are caught in purdah thanks to local elections, making it much more difficult to do it properly. Will the Leader of the House give us a clearer idea of the Government’s broad intention, not least because we would like to make sure that we get 20 Opposition days a year, and not just 20 a Session?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Member for—

Chris Bryant: Rhon-tha.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Patience! The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), when I was newly elected, very generously took me to the

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

Smoking Room and gave me a couple of glasses of Scotland's finest produce to help me to learn how to pronounce his constituency, whereas the hon. Member for Rhondda merely bellows at me across the Chamber. For that reason, I may try harder with Na h-Eileanan an Iar than I do with Rhondda.

Regarding the length of the Session, if the hon. Gentleman were to divide the number of Bills listed following the Queen's Speech by the average number of Bills passed during the course of a year, he might get a rough idea of how long the Session is likely to last, other things being equal, but that is not a promise.

Australian Bushfires

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mrs Heather Wheeler): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to see you returned as first Deputy Chair of Ways and Means. With your permission, I will update the House on the bushfires in Australia.

In the past four months, bushfires in Australia have killed at least 25 people and displaced thousands more, with over 1,900 homes destroyed. Millions more people have been affected by poor air quality as a result of fire smoke, with 10 million acres of land burnt. Meteorologists predict that the fires will get worse before they get better, as peak summer temperatures are yet to come. This crisis has been devastating and our hearts go out to the Australian people.

The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Commonwealth, the UN and South Asia, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, have been in contact with their Australian counterparts to offer our condolences and stress our readiness to help in whatever way they need. Furthermore, our high commission and consulates general are in close contact with Australian authorities at federal and state level, exploring how the UK can support them and what assistance they would find most useful.

The Australian Government have agreed an offer by the Foreign Secretary to deploy an expert support and assessment team of specialists from defence, health and fire. We have deployed this team to meet Australian officials, and they will be on site in the coming days. The team will include a senior member of the UK fire and rescue service, a medical specialist in trauma and mental health, and a military liaison officer. The team will work with Australian colleagues to establish the types, extent and duration of support that will be of most use to Australian emergency responders, and ensure that such contributions are fully integrated with Australian efforts. The specialists will liaise with regional co-ordinators as well as with the central Australian Government. The important point is that the help we are giving is the help we have been asked for.

Such is the nature of our close relationship that co-operation between the UK and Australia is taking place all the time. Across the globe, UK forces are deployed alongside Australian counterparts. The recent radio interview with Lieutenant Grimmer, a Royal Navy pilot on exchange to the Royal Australian Navy who has been working on evacuation operations, demonstrates how we are already helping through our established relationships. The close ties between the UK and Australia are of course mirrored across families and friends in both countries, which makes this a very personal tragedy.

As ever, our greatest and most immediate concern is the security of British citizens. We are grateful to the Australian authorities for the timely and professional advice they are providing to help keep British visitors to Australia safe. We also pay tribute to the heroism and professionalism of Australia's emergency services, many of whom are volunteers, and some of whom have lost their lives as they tackle an unprecedented level of bushfire destruction. I am sure that the whole House will join me in extending our sympathies to the people

of Australia, given what they are going through. The stories of valour that are coming out of Australia, which we have seen in the media and on an individual level, have been deeply moving.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) has pointed out on social media, fighting sustained crises is exhausting and we should support one of our closest allies at this time. She has also rightly drawn attention to the impact on Australia's unique wildlife, including koalas. The Government recognise that the environmental and agricultural impact of the bushfires is staggering. Almost half a billion animals are thought to have perished, and there are concerns that some species found only in certain areas of Australia may have been wiped out altogether. We stand ready to support Australian authorities to address the ecological damage in due course, and this is something that our support and assessment team will cover.

Australia is one of our most valued allies, partners and friends. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with the people of Australia and are ready to help in whatever way they need. The UK deployment this week reflects our measured approach, which will ensure that any assistance is appropriate and meets Australia's specific needs, but the UK support is ongoing and long-term, reflecting the deep ties between our countries. The Australian authorities, from the Foreign Minister to Emergency Management Australia, have expressed how welcome our enduring assistance remains. I commend this statement to the House.

12.20 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): Like all colleagues, let me welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker, following your unopposed election as Deputy Speaker. I also thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. I am grateful for her assurance that support is being given to any British nationals and tourists who have been affected, and that support has also been offered to the Australian authorities. However, like her, my thoughts are with our Australian cousins who have lost their homes, jobs, communities and, in some tragic cases, their lives as a result of the fires. Like her, I applaud the astonishing efforts of the Australian firefighters and other emergency services who have been trying to tackle this crisis, and I applaud too all those ordinary Australians who have so movingly and selflessly risked their own lives to save koala bears and other creatures whose populations have suffered such devastation as their natural habitat has been devoured by the flames. I understand that to date up to 1 billion animals may have perished.

What we have seen in recent weeks has been nothing short of a catastrophe, for not just Australia but the whole world, and I wholeheartedly share the Minister's words of sympathy and solidarity with our close friends for what they are going through at the moment. But when the fires are finally extinguished, it would be remiss of us if we did not discuss the underlying causes of these unprecedented events; 2019 was the second hottest year on record, and the past five years fill the top five positions as the hottest years on record. Any group of individuals who can look at those figures and continue to deny that global warming and climate change are real issues are equivalent to those people who still

insist that the world is flat. Yet, sadly, such individuals include the current President of the United States, Donald Trump; the current President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro; and— I say this with great regret, given what his country is currently experiencing—the current Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison. There is something bitterly sad about the fact that those three leaders have all seen raging wildfires in their countries over the past year—in California, in the Amazon and now on the eastern coast of Australia.

So the question we all face is how we address the challenge of climate change, how we keep the Paris agreement on track and how we stop our world reaching the point of no return on global warming, where events such as those we are currently seeing in Australia become the new normal. Facing a challenge of that scale, we have to recognise one thing—that what we do alone in the UK will make not a jot of difference to the global problems we all face.

What we need instead is what my right friend the shadow Foreign Secretary called for a year ago: “the globalisation of the green new deal”.

The proposition is that we help every country in the world, and indeed use our weight at the UN to oblige every country to use the natural resources at their disposal, whether it be wind power, tidal power or solar power, to move rapidly towards a zero-carbon economy, in the process creating millions of new jobs. Britain led the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. We are in a very good position to lead this green revolution, and I urge the Government to take that lead.

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much indeed for that. We are grateful to him for laying out his thoughts. I do not think he actually asked me a specific question, and I am grateful to him for that as well.

Fabian Hamilton: Climate change.

Mrs Wheeler: Of course, the hon. Member asked about climate change. On that, the most important thing is that we are going to be chairing COP26, so we have ambitious climate change targets for all countries going forward. When I go on trips to other countries, I am looking forward to asking all of them how ambitious they are going to be. On money, specifically, we are increasing our international climate finance offer from £8.5 billion between 2016 and 2020 to £11.6 billion over the period 2021 to 2025, in order to help developing countries take action.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Minister's statement and I am very grateful that the Prime Minister has made the offer to his opposite number Scott Morrison. I also welcome the partnership the Minister has spoken of, but is there more we could do? I ask that because the Foreign Office has such excellent links with the Australian Administration—indeed, we were one and the same until about the 1960s. We have several members of the Commonwealth of Australia sitting on these Benches, and it is a pleasure to have them here. Can we look at co-operating with regional partners, bringing together

[Tom Tugendhat]

an alliance of others not just to engage in Australia but to deal with the forest fires we are seeing around the world?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is perhaps soon again to be the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. [Interruption.] I said “perhaps”. One thing that was really helpful when Lord Ahmad was out in Australia was the fact that we hold the Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth at the moment. One thing we are doing as part of the Commonwealth is getting member states to work together on this matter, through initiatives such as the Blue Charter and the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy. So we are there as a group promoting environmental protection across the world.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. It has been very hard watching Australia burn in the past few weeks. I am fortunate, in that most of my friends and family are concentrated in the west and so are suffering less, but my thoughts, my love and my heart go out to all of those who are in harm’s way across the continent. It is difficult for most people here to appreciate the size of the fires and to appreciate the size of Australia to begin with. These fires have covered an area twice the size of Wales. The fire front in one state, New South Wales, is thousands of miles long. There is always a bushfire season, but not like this. As has been pointed out by others today, Australia is not alone; 4 million hectares of Siberian forest burned a few months ago, and there were fires in Greenland, Alaska and Canada too. Again, fires in the Arctic are normal, but not on this scale, and now the ground itself is starting to burn. In both hemispheres, climate change is driving this. Philip Higuera from the University of Montana describes it as a switch: reach the tipping point and Arctic tundra burns. So although kind words and support for those battling the fires are very moving and of course greatly appreciated, they are just one thing—action to address this climate emergency is another.

There will not be any slowdown in burn rates unless we reverse the causes, so I must ask: when will we see real action from this Government on the climate emergency? The Environment Bill that flickered briefly in the last Parliament missed and hit the wall. Will we see something of substance in this Parliament? The science is 250 years old, the term “greenhouse effect” was coined nearly a century ago, even Thatcher called for climate action and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns us of the dangers repeatedly, yet the UK stands virtually still on this issue. That must change. There must be no more woolly words and no more waffle—it is time for real climate action. When will we see a ban on fracking, incentives for renewable energy production and a roll-out of electric vehicle charging stations? Where is the support for electric aviation and VAT exemptions for home insulation—not a reduced rate but exemptions? Why are we not seeing urgent action? In short, if the Government want to do something about the fires in Australia, in the Arctic and on England’s moors in years to come, they must do something now about the climate emergency.

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the hon. Lady: our hearts go out to her friends and family in Australia. Sometimes in the Chamber, speeches and questions are quite difficult to make and ask, but it is great that she is here to give that extra oomph.

We have the chair of COP 26 with Italy, so we are absolutely taking climate change as the No. 1 priority. In every embassy around the world, every ambassador and every high commissioner has it as their No. 1 priority to talk to other Governments and encourage greater and more ambitious targets for those countries. In particular, we will continue with the Paris agreement and make sure that those commitments are guaranteed going forward. President Claire O’Neill, late of this parish as the Member for Devizes, recently met other energy Ministers at COP25 in Madrid to bang the drum and make clear that this is our No. 1 priority.

In respect of any changes to financial matters, I am afraid the hon. Lady will have to wait for the Chancellor’s Budget, but that is not very far away in March.

On the roll-out of electric charging points, I am proud to have two charging points in Swadlincote in South Derbyshire, and £4 million has been put to one side for councils to bid for so that they can have charging points.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Would the Minister like to say how many Britons have been killed or otherwise caught up in this emergency?

Mrs Wheeler: I am really pleased to say that no UK nationals have been killed and we are not aware of any who have been injured. In fact, only one British national has been in touch to ask for advice and support. We ask everybody—visitors and people living there—to pay close attention to the updated advice from local authorities.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): When the fires are extinguished, there is going to have to be a moment for learning lessons and drawing the links between these incidents and climate change. Our Government should take a leading role, but we would be better able to do so if we had not ourselves just announced that a review of the net zero carbon target had been put off until autumn. Will the Minister speak to her colleagues in the Treasury about bringing that review forward?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and I will of course do that.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you back in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

What has been obvious from constituents in Romsey and Southampton North is the outpouring of affection and support that they are expressing for our friends and allies in Australia. I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend’s comments about the practical support that the Government are giving, but my constituents’ question is about what they can do as individuals. I would be delighted to hear what advice my hon. Friend can give them.

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my right hon. Friend—who is a very good friend—for that question. Interestingly, sometimes in times of adversity really nasty people

come out of the woodwork. I do not want any help that the British people give via charities in Australia or whatever other method to be affected by scammers, so if British citizens want to give or help in any way, will they please double-check that any charity they give money to is registered with the Australian Charity Commission? It would be a tragedy if the good will of people in this country was abused.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I was really quite shocked that in her statement the Minister did not mention climate change once; it is surely the context in which all this is happening. When my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) did raise the issue very eloquently, the Minister had to rummage in her folder to find something to say. The fact is that Australia is the largest emitter per capita of any major nation, yet its Government are still not committed to decarbonisation. The COP25 talks were a complete failure, and we have not even had a written ministerial statement on them. When are the Government going to step up to the plate, show leadership, talk to Australia and say that it has to get with the agenda?

Mrs Wheeler: Please forgive me for suggesting that talk is cheap. Australia is a signatory to the Paris agreement and is committed to a 26% to 28% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on 2005 levels by 2030. In addition—because there are intelligent people in this room—a number of Australian states have already committed to net zero by 2050. Ahead of COP 26, we will look forward to working with all Paris agreement signatories to increase global climate ambition in line with that agreement.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I welcome you back to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does the Minister agree that this is the time not to be criticising Australia but to be helping them? Does she agree that we need to see close allies such as ourselves, the Americans, the Canadians and the New Zealanders coming together to give Australia the package of help that it desperately needs? Does she also agree that individual citizens who want to help can look at the appeals by the Salvation Army in Australia and by the Australian rural fire service, and make donations to them rather than the sort of dubious organisations that may emerge?

Mrs Wheeler: I could not agree more with my right hon. and learned Friend. My constituent Helen Jackson is raising funds for koala care, and I have made it clear to her that she must send the money she raises to the appropriate people, exactly as my right hon. and learned Friend has outlined.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and direct my remarks to you in the Chair, because with these difficult long-term issues there is a real role for Parliaments. Greta Thunberg came to our Parliament and it is this gathering that has taken up the mission and is leading it on; it is not just about the Executive Government. The all-party group on Australia, of which my friend

the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) and I are members, along with the chairs, the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), has come together to encourage all Parliaments around the world—the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is clearly a key friend—to take some responsibility for keeping this on the agenda, because in the end Executive Governments change, but we remain. I hope we can keep that in our thoughts. May I also thank the Speaker's Office for contacting the Australian Parliament? I know from parliamentarians there just how much that meant to them.

Mrs Wheeler: It is great to hear of how much work is going on behind the scenes in Parliament, but I stress again that is a No.1 Government priority and all our embassies are on it. It is a great honour to host COP 26 with our Italian friends, and it will be the success that it needs to be.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome you back to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We should remember that on new year's day National Grid announced that this country just had the first ever year in which the energy from zero-carbon sources exceeded fossil fuels—it is the first time in our history—so we are doing our bit. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should not be lecturing Australia when it is in the middle of a national emergency if it is not yet doing the same? As she rightly says, we should be giving it all the support we can. Will she confirm that if the fires worsen, we stand ready to provide whatever help is needed, should the Australians request it?

Mrs Wheeler: Those are wise words from my hon. Friend. The UK policy on climate change has been dramatic: we are setting out legally binding targets to eliminate climate change by 2050; we have been the fastest in the G20 to decarbonise since 2000; and since 1990 we have reduced our emissions by more than 40% while growing our economy by two thirds. We can get the message out to other countries that it can be done and it does not affect the economy. Exactly as my hon. Friend said, National Grid's use of energy from renewable sources is leading the way as a great example to others.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The suffering in Australia is almost unimaginable. Scott Morrison has finally committed around AU\$2 billion for bushfire recovery, but that is dwarfed by the AU\$29 billion that the Australian Government spend on fossil fuel subsidies every year. Public money is in essence being spent to turbocharge the climate emergency. We do it here in the UK, too: we spent around £10 billion on fossil fuel subsidies last year. Will the Minister agree that it is time to stop throwing money on the fire? Will she commit to ending public financial support for the fossil fuel industry?

Mrs Wheeler: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is asking the wrong person that question.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is good to see you back in your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[*Bob Seely*]

The upcoming foreign policy review is important. Can the Minister confirm that climate change will feature in that review? If it is not going to, may I suggest that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office consider it as part of its global review?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend—a candidate to be Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee—for that interesting question. As I have tried to stress and am more than happy to say again, climate change is the No. 1 priority for all our embassies across the world, and is part of our plans now and going forward.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): I welcome you back to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The huge scale of the fires must leave us in absolutely no doubt of the urgent and radical action that is needed on climate change, so I was also absolutely shocked that I did not hear the Minister even mention the words “climate change” in her statement. Yet, behind the scenes, UK Export Finance schemes are handing out billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money to develop fossil fuel projects, locking countries into high-carbon energy for decades to come. Will this Government put their money where their mouth is and end UK Export Finance’s support for fossil fuels?

Mrs Wheeler: The hon. Lady asks a very intelligent question. The answer is that I cannot give her that assurance right now. We have green finance deals and ocean deals. We are so committed to helping countries around the world to move on to renewable energy projects, and I think that is the way forward.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Congratulations on your return to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I strongly welcome the UK Government’s enduring commitment to support Australia, but will my hon. Friend tell us for specifically how long the experts who are currently there plan to remain in the country?

Mrs Wheeler: It is my pleasure to try to answer my hon. Friend. They are there for a five-day period, meeting all the experts in the region with three sessions covering the three different areas that they are visiting. They will then do a rapid assessment of the assistance that Australia is asking for, and we are ready to assist in any way we can.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Congratulations on being re-elected, Madam Deputy Speaker; we are very pleased to see you in the Chair.

I thank the Minister for her statement on the Australian wildfires. If the area of land that has been burning was imprinted on the United Kingdom mainland map it would reach from Newcastle straight across and halfway down, as far as London—a vast area. Soil will need to be resown, trees replanted, animals replaced and farms restocked. What help can the United Kingdom Government give Australia, given that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has great expertise in abundance?

Mrs Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman asks a good question. We know that of the animals affected a number are cows that produce milk. That will obviously affect Australia’s economy and is an absolute tragedy for the local farmers. We do have expertise in this area; whatever help Australia asks for in which we have expertise, we will help if we can.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is great to see you back as part of the Speaker’s team, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Would the Minister and her Department work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association? Prime Ministers come and go—as we know in this country—but, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said, parliamentarians tend not to. Could we urge the CPA to work closely with Australian Members of Parliament to make them much more aware of the problems of climate change in their country, as well as in the world?

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend—my Derbyshire friend—makes an interesting suggestion. We have great ties with the CPA. Lord Tariq Ahmad in the other place looks after the Commonwealth side of things, and I am sure he will gladly take her suggestion forward.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): You will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, how thrilled I am to see you back in the Chair—your rightful place in this House.

I am grateful to the Minister for her statement. I speak as someone whose mother grew up in Western Australia. I have family living in Victoria and in New South Wales, so I feel the pain of that country maybe as much as other Members of this House. The reality is that when friends speak, they also speak with some honesty. Prime Minister Morrison has ignored the climate issue for a number of years, as other Members have pointed out. The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting is coming up later this year. I accept that it is not part of the Minister’s responsibility, but may I ask her to make representations to the relevant Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister to prioritise climate change as part of that meeting? We must learn lessons. The situation in Australia should be a warning that the world is burning, and the Commonwealth must play a much more significant role in tackling the impact and realities of climate change.

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the hon. Gentleman—I hope I may also call him my friend—for his question. Interestingly, because the UK is chair in office at the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth has actually been a long-standing champion for environmental protection and climate action since its first official mention in the Commonwealth Langkawi declaration on the environment in 1989. We will take this matter seriously and it will be on the agenda for CHOGM.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

May I offer my deepest sympathy at all those in Australia affected by this terrible fire? I spent a year and a half out there as a much younger man and experienced the intense heat myself, working out in the bush. Can

the Minister help us understand how these fires started? Arson plays a role. Does she have any evidence or feedback from the Australian Government on how the fires physically started?

Mrs Wheeler: Very regrettably, it is widely reported on social media that 75% of the fires were started by arsonists.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to see you back in your rightful place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I spent one of the happiest years of my life living in Melbourne, and would be the last person to criticise Australia. However, my friends who live in Australia are very concerned about the current Government's lack of appreciation of the impact of climate change on the disaster they are now facing. What can the Minister and the Government do to persuade their sister party in Australia to take the science of climate change seriously?

Mrs Wheeler: My sympathies are with the hon. and learned Lady's friends who are out there right now. It is without doubt clear that the UK and Australia have their own approaches to climate change. As chair of COP 26, the UK looks forward to continued discussions in the run-up to that conference. We hope to work with Australia and others to increase their ambition in line with the Paris principles. I stress again that, because of Australia's federal system, there is a really interesting dynamic there right now, whereby states are already saying that they will be decarbonise by 2050—the same as us—so all is not necessarily painted as black as we think.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Congratulations on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Australia is a vast country that is suffering a terrible tragedy, and I have two nephews who live in different parts of that country. Large numbers of UK citizens will go on tours of Australia over the coming weeks and months that might be disrupted because they might be going to areas of danger. Will the Minister update the House on what advice the FCO is giving to travel companies and individuals?

Mrs Wheeler: I hope that my hon. Friend's nephews in different parts of Australia stay safe. I am glad he asks his question. UK nationals should follow the FCO travel advice. It was updated on 30 December and we will continue to keep it under review. We have not advised against going to Australia for tourism, to visit family or for business, but we do request that visitors pay close attention to the updated advice from local authorities. One of the great things that has happened through our connections with all the different groups, as well as the embassy and the consulate general, is that really good local advice is being offered. We ask people to keep abreast of that advice as well as with the FCO's advice.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Welcome back to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I declare my interest as set out in the register, not least my personal connection by marriage to Australia, with many friends and family members across that continent.

I echo comments from colleagues across the House and send our prayers to those fighting, suffering and surviving the heartbreaking events on the continent of Australia.

Does the Minister agree that in the year that the UK hosts COP26, we need to re-embolden our climate diplomacy? One practical suggestion might be about coupling industrial strategy with climate diplomacy on decarbonising power generation, because in Australia 75% of power generation is still dependent on coal. Indeed, when I was in Australia for my honeymoon, Prime Minister Scott Morrison was waving coal around in its House of Commons. Can we share our expertise and lessons learned in the UK?

Mrs Wheeler: I hope that the hon. Gentleman's wife's family are safe. I am sure he is in constant contact.

The hon. Gentleman makes a really interesting suggestion. Interestingly, DFID official development assistance money is being used particularly in Brazil to look at decarbonising its energy production. We cannot use ODA money for Australia because obviously it is a first-world nation, but perhaps we can find another way through the prosperity fund or something like that. We will take that idea away. We are always happy to receive good ideas.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your re-election to the Chair.

I was in Victoria last week, and I was very moved by the remarkable resilience of our friends and family, the Australian people, in dealing with the bushfire crisis, which is awful, as we know, with many lives and homes lost, but also up to 500 million animals—farm animals and indigenous creatures as well. What particular assistance can the United Kingdom give in terms of ecological, and perhaps veterinary, support to help with the natural disaster that has happened?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend for his up-to-date information, he having visited so recently. I have asked the same question myself, particularly about veterinary support but also agricultural support afterwards. Part of the brief for our specialists on the team that has been deployed is to ask what Australia would like us to do.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): May I, too, congratulate you on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker?

As others have said, these devastating bush fires have been exacerbated in both extent and intensity by the consequences of global warming. The Minister has already intimated this, but could she confirm that in the light of this catastrophe, UK foreign policy will make international co-operation on efforts on decarbonisation its highest priority?

Mrs Wheeler: That is absolutely key. As has been alluded to, COP25 was perhaps not as successful as it might have been—[*Interruption.*] Well, we have to be kind. We therefore have every incentive to make COP26 a success. Part of that will be using the expertise that we have in emerging countries to help them to make the step change to renewable energies and decarbonising. It is a really exciting time for this country to take those measures to help other countries. Exactly as the hon. Gentleman says, this is the No. 1 priority for all our embassies around the world.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I welcome the news that the Minister has given. Having also lived in Melbourne in Australia and having friends who are still living out there, this has been a great concern to me and also to residents in Meon Valley. What medical assistance are we providing to the Australians, both now and in future, with smoke inhalation and other issues that might have been caused by the smoke?

Mrs Wheeler: I know that a number of my hon. Friend's constituents have written to her, and they will have a reply from me specifically. As regards medical expertise, some of our rapid deployment team were medical experts. We were perhaps initially concentrating on mental health issues arising afterwards. However, the five-day deployment team will ask the questions of Australia, and if there are specialisms that we have in this country that it needs extra help with, perhaps regarding people who suffer from asthma, I am sure we will oblige, if it asks us to do so.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that your generosity to Northern Ireland Members will be unmatched by anyone else who takes the Chair, so thank you very much indeed.

I welcome the statement by the Minister. Indeed, I spoke yesterday, and before then, to the authorities at Australia House, who have also welcomed the immediate support that the United Kingdom Government have given to, as she rightly said, our closest friend, Australia. That is very important. Following on from the questions about lessons learned, surely action must be taken to help Australia with the reforestation of its wonderful land and protection of species in future. We must go on to ensure that any expert help that can be given from these islands is given and that Australia is encouraged to redevelop and regrow in areas that have been burned.

Mrs Wheeler: Absolutely. I cannot thank the hon. Gentleman enough for that very good question. We all know that we need to have that canopy of trees to help with decarbonising for the whole of the world, so it is important to give any assistance we can with that. I am sure that my civil servants are now going to blanch, because he has given me a good idea. We have great relationships with Kew, which has world experts in planting, seeds and whatever else might be needed. I will to ask to see what connections and suggestions Kew might have, subject to Australia asking for such help. That was a great question and I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): May I add my welcome and congratulations to you on resuming your post, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Singapore air force has offered support with two Chinooks, and the New Zealanders have offered some troops as well, but the Royal Air Force has the lion's share of Europe's strategic air lift capability. Will the Minister undertake to see whether there is any aviation assistance that we can supply?

Mrs Wheeler: My hon. Friend asks a question that I asked my officials earlier, so it is clearly one of the best questions that has been asked today. Most importantly,

one of the deployment team is from military liaison. I am not sure whether we have equipment anywhere nearby at the moment, but if, not so much even acting with Chinooks right now, we can find a way to back-fill other areas of the Australian armed forces, that might be the way forward. Again, when Australia asks we will fulfil its requests.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement and commend the support that we are offering to our allies. I agree with the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) about the vital role of Parliaments and parliamentary engagement, especially around the issue of climate diplomacy. Might the Minister want to say to all new hon. Members that joining the CPA and getting involved in having those relationships with parliamentarians not just in Australia, but across the Commonwealth, would be a very good idea?

Mrs Wheeler: I am so delighted that the hon. Lady has been made a dame in the new year's honours—quite right too. We once had a really interesting trip to Jordan. She acted as a lady then and she is a dame now, so that is very good.

On the hon. Lady's point about joining in with the CPA, there is actually the Inter-Parliamentary Union as well. We have lots of new Members and there may be opportunities for the majority for a bit of slipping and pairing—you never know. Yes, I would encourage all Members, particularly new ones, to find out about opportunities with the CPA and the IPU. I am sure that those teams would welcome some new blood coming through as well.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Congratulations on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Like so many, I have family members who live in Australia, and over Christmas I was with my daughter in Melbourne, so I really appreciate the statement and the expressions of support for Australia today. Australia is likely to face more out-of-control blazes tomorrow, and there is a prospect of entire ecosystems being lost. The support being given at the moment is hugely important, but when the fires die down, will the Government have talks with Scott Morrison and the Government of Australia about the environment and how we can help in future, for the good of not only Australia but the rest of the world?

Mrs Wheeler: Indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point; if she will forgive me, I will face the Chair. If I have not said it enough, I stress that this is the beginning of the help that we are offering Australia. We realise that the bushfire season is only just beginning, so this will go on for some time, and then there will be the pressing issues of the regeneration of trees, forest and the scrub that the cows and sheep need to eat. Whatever technical and professional assistance Australia asks us for, we stand ready to help.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Welcome back, Madam Deputy Speaker.

While we sympathise with those caught in this environmental disaster, we know that this is a climate change emergency issue. The last six years have been the

six hottest on record, which underpins the problem we have. In the 2020 climate change performance index, Australia is ranked bottom, with the US ranked second from bottom. We know that the US has pulled out of the Paris agreement. We keep hearing about the new global UK, so can the Minister advise what influence she has in those two countries and what climate change policy changes the UK is pushing for with them?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He has moved to where one of the microphones is, so I heard his question, which is great. With regard to the conversations we have been having, our embassy and our consuls general are talking all the time to the Australian state and the federal states, some of which are already declaring that they will decarbonise by 2050. I think that we are pushing at an open door. Australia has not resiled from the Paris agreement. We will keep them there, and we will ask them to be more ambitious. On every visit that I make as Minister for Asia and the Pacific, whether it be to Singapore or Seoul, it is part of my brief to ask the country to be more ambitious.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): We have heard much about the scale of the fires in Australia. Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the bravery shown by the Australian firefighters in trying to tackle them?

Mrs Wheeler: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and welcome him to this place. I will indeed join him. The stories that we have heard about the huge valour and the trauma that the firefighters—so many of them reserve firefighters, just looking after their villages and townships—have been quite incredible, and our hearts and love go out to those brave people.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): We are a nation of animal lovers. Our first concern, of course, is always the impact on people and their properties, and I thank the Minister for what she is doing on that, but will she join me in thanking Redditch Pets at Home, which is leading on an initiative to donate up to £100,000 nationally to the World Wide Fund for Nature, enabling local people in Redditch to play their part and help with the devastating loss of animal life?

Mrs Wheeler: Indeed. Having mentioned my constituent Helen Jackson, I am very grateful to the constituents of Redditch and Pets at Home for that initiative, but I again ask everybody to ensure that, whatever donations they make, they please check that it is to an organisation registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. I would not want this tragedy to be made worse by scammers getting involved and making money out of it.

BILL PRESENTED

DIRECT PAYMENTS TO FARMERS (LEGISLATIVE CONTINUITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Theresa Villiers, supported by the Prime Minister, Michael Gove, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Steve Barclay, Secretary Simon Hart, George Eustice and Rishi Sunak, presented a Bill to make provision for the incorporation of the Direct Payments Regulation into domestic law; for enabling an increase in the total maximum amount of direct payments under that Regulation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 13 January, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).

European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill

Third Reading

Queen's consent signified.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I must inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Scottish National party.

1.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (James Duddridge): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This Bill will implement in UK law the withdrawal agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union, ensuring that the United Kingdom departs from the European Union with a deal at the end of this month. We are delivering on our promise to the British people. It was a pleasure to spend yesterday afternoon in Committee of the whole House, and I would like to pay tribute to Members across the House for the contributions they have made throughout the debates and the constructive spirit, particularly more recently, in which everyone has engaged. I have no doubt that today's proceedings will be of a similar calibre, and the Secretary of State, who is in his place, and I are very much looking forward to today.

I would like to thank the Public Bill Office for its support to all Members and officials across Government, not just at the Department for Exiting the European Union, for their hard work in ensuring the delivery of this Bill and for supporting Ministers throughout, many of whom have contributed behind the scenes rather than at the Dispatch Box. I would also like to thank the three knights of the realm who stood in as Deputy Speakers in Committee and Her Majesty's loyal Opposition.

This Bill is essential in preparing our country for leaving the European Union and will ensure that the deal that has been reached can be implemented. It also ensures that we can protect the rights of citizens who have made their lives here, that there is no hard border on the island of Ireland and that we take back control of our money and our laws. The Bill will shortly move to another place, with its substantive stages beginning on Monday, and I know that the House will be watching its progress with great interest.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I notice that today, the President of the European Commission is reported as saying that it will be virtually impossible to conclude a trade deal within a year. Given that we start off with exactly the same regulations and tariffs, I am mystified as to what the problem is. What does the Minister think the problem is, given that we are going to protect workers' rights? Unless they want to shackle us forever with business rules, what is the problem?

James Duddridge: I have seen that report, but from my discussions with the Secretary of State, that does not reflect the tone of the meeting with the Prime Minister. There is a political declaration and an interest to move forward and sort this within 11 months.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Minister mentioned the fact that the Bill will be going to the other place and the much more positive atmosphere that has applied in this place. Does he believe that that sends a message to the other place as to how they should conduct themselves, and does he have any reservations about the fact that the unrepresentative make-up of the other place, in respect of the over-representation of remain forces, might derail the hitherto smooth progress of this excellent Bill?

James Duddridge: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. Just as we will be watching the House of Lords carefully next week, they have been watching us carefully during the Bill's passage. They will have listened to the change in tone and seen the majorities by which votes were won, and I am sure that they will reflect on that in their deliberations, doing a proper job of scrutiny as part of the whole democratic process. Mr Speaker—sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

James Duddridge: I will give way, because it will give me an opportunity to get the sex of Madam Deputy Speaker right the second time.

Mr Perkins: The Minister might have said in his answer to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) that if he thinks the other place is unrepresentative, there is a way that we could deal with that and ensure that they are elected by the people, like we are.

James Duddridge: We do like elections on this side of the House at the moment, but I am not going to be drawn into reform of the House of Lords, which is slightly out of scope of the withdrawal agreement Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an historic milestone—leaving the European Union with a deal on 31 January. It will soon be upon us, and I am delighted that we can then move on to other national priorities and help the country come together. I commend this Bill to the House.

1.9 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I join the Minister in thanking the panel of Chairs for presiding over the Committee stages and the work they did in preparation for the debates we had, the staff in the Public Bill Office for the work they did over the Christmas recess and all Members who contributed to the debate in Committee.

The last two days have had their highs and lows. On the one hand, there have been very many thoughtful and considered contributions, and on the other hand, there has been a disappointing and resolute refusal of the Government to seriously consider any amendments however constructively intended. The Minister is right that there was a different tone to the debate, and that is clearly because everybody recognises that the result of the general election means we are leaving the European Union in 22 days' time. But I think there was also a recognition, I hope on both sides, that leaving the EU does not mean that we will have got Brexit done. We will

have completed the first step, departure, but the difficult stage is yet to come: agreeing the new relationship not just on trade, but as many pointed in Committee, on security crucially—but much more besides, from data sharing to research collaboration and more. These are in many ways more complex issues than those we have wrestled with over the last three and a half years, and they are issues with deeply serious consequences for the country.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I thank my hon. Friend for his speech and add to his list the anguish that many of my constituents are feeling—not just EU nationals, but those whose neighbours or family are EU nationals? This is, for many, quite a difficult moment.

Paul Blomfield: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. It is a difficult moment for many, and I will come on specifically to some of the issues involving EU nationals that were not resolved by our discussions in Committee.

As we move into this next stage, I would urge the Government not to overinterpret their mandate in the general election. Yes, they have clearly secured an overwhelming majority of seats, but not of votes. Most people in this country voted for parties that did not support the principle of getting Brexit done at any price. As the Prime Minister observed, many of those who voted for him and colleagues had lent him their vote. I hope, and I sense, that part of the different tone—the subdued mood of those on the Government Benches—was a dawning realisation that they may find it hard to deliver on the high expectations that they have created over the last three and a half years. The Prime Minister has talked about bringing the country together—the Minister echoed that—and we all share the hope after the divisions promoted by the debates of the last three years. However, I have to say that it will need a different approach from the one we have seen over the last couple of days. It needs open ears and a willingness to reach out.

I understand why the Government rejected some of the amendments that we and other opposition parties tabled, but not all. Many were simply restoring previous Government commitments and others were to improve the Bill; none was to frustrate Brexit. In the short debate on the Bill in Committee, we as an Opposition pressed five main issues that in our view reflect the serious problems with both the withdrawal agreement and the way in which the Government have chosen to implement it. Over 100 amendments were tabled in Committee, but not a word of the Bill has changed, and we will therefore be voting against its Third Reading today.

Our first issue with the Bill is that, despite all of Parliament's efforts to avoid a no-deal Brexit last year, it introduces a trapdoor to no deal at the end of December 2020—something that the Brexit Secretary appeared quite relaxed about in his reported comments following yesterday's discussion with Ursula von der Leyen. Other Conservative Members over the last couple of days have expressed total confidence—total confidence—in the Government's ability to secure trade and security deals by the December deadline, citing the EU's commitment to use its best endeavours and good faith

to agree a future trade treaty. That good faith was evident from Mrs von der Leyen yesterday, but I hope Members have also heard her warning, which was echoed by the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), that it would be impossible to reach a comprehensive trade deal by the end of 2020.

I hope Members will reflect on whether it really is wise for the Government to have added clause 33, barring Ministers from extending the implementation period. Of course, this is just a gimmick, and with their majority, the Government could at any point repeal that clause and negotiate a short extension. However, whatever our views on these issues, we should all be concerned that this Bill removes any role for Parliament in shaping that decision, so if the Government have not concluded and ratified an agreement with the EU on our future relationship, the supposed sovereignty reclaimed for this Parliament will be meaningless. We will have no say on whether we crash out on World Trade Organisation terms, even if the Government are days away from securing an agreement with the EU.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): It occurs to me, as I listen to the hon. Gentleman, that foreign policy is often common ground between successive Governments of different parties. I wonder if it has occurred to his party to take such an approach here: to recognise that the political declaration on the future relationship is now agreed between the EU and UK, and to get behind it as the Labour party, so that there can be absolutely no doubt in the mind of the Commission that where we want to go as a nation is the landing ground that is now common territory between both negotiating parties. Does he not agree that that way we could go forward as one United Kingdom and succeed?

Paul Blomfield: I will come on to my observations on how we could have gone forward much more successfully as one country in delivering on the mandate of the referendum in 2016, but I think—this reflects the comment made earlier by the right hon. Member for Gainsborough—that the whole problem with the way in which Conservative Members talk about the ease of moving forward, because we are starting from a point of convergence, is that the objective of this Government is to seek divergence, and that is precisely why these negotiations will be so difficult.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Could we just dispense with this one country, one nation business? The United Kingdom is a Union of nations, and all of them have a particular set of views about Brexit. In Scotland, we overwhelmingly reject their Brexit, and that has to be recognised in the way we go forward from now on. I hope the Labour party takes that on board; I am beginning to sense that it is. Does the hon. Gentleman understand it, and will we now stop all this talk about one nation, one UK? It is a Union of nations with their own particular set of views.

Paul Blomfield: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point that we are a country of nations and regions and I hope, in relation to the comments I was making to Ministers, that in reaching out they will seek to reach out and obtain agreement and understanding on the way they move forward across the entire country of nations and regions.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Blomfield: It would not be the same debate if I did not. I am happy to do so.

Sir William Cash: I refer to what has just been said from the Scottish nationalist Benches because in fact this is about the United Kingdom, which made the treaty in the first place and abdicated its responsibility and its sovereignty, but is now reasserting its status within the United Kingdom. It is about parliamentary sovereignty, and it is also about democracy because that decision was taken by the British people in the full knowledge of the voters of the United Kingdom, not any one part of it.

Paul Blomfield: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We had a whole debate around sovereignty in which my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) made some very astute observations, but the hon. Gentleman needs to recognise my underlying point: the decision of the general election is not a mandate to bulldoze through a particular version of Brexit at any cost on all the peoples of the United Kingdom, and the next few months must be approached with sensitivity and caution if we are to stay together as a United Kingdom.

Mr Perkins: May I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend as we approach the end of this Bill on the incredibly gallant and diligent work he and his colleagues have done in attempting to investigate and scrutinise this legislation? It is tremendously sad that the Government have, in the minds of many people who voted leave, successfully brought forward the idea that any kind of scrutiny and any kind of amendment to their legislation is somehow disrespecting that mandate, as though whatever the Government say is what that vote back in 2016 meant. I accept that we are leaving the EU and I think we need to get on with that process, but it is extremely regrettable that under the guise of taking back control they have sought to disrespect parliamentary scrutiny in the way that they have done, and this will have serious consequences for us in the future.

Paul Blomfield: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments, but also endorse the point he makes, and it has been a constant strand of the discussions over the past two days.

Mr Perkins: Three years.

Paul Blomfield: Yes, three years.

Through our new clause 4 we tried to offer a way of giving Parliament the role for which we were elected—and it is the role that my hon. Friend describes—without requiring an extension to the transition that is longer than necessary. Some Conservative Members who are not here today expressed sympathy with that approach, but not with our specific formulation, so I hope that this issue will be revisited when the Bill moves to the other place.

The second point that was a key concern to us was citizens' rights. Colleagues from all Opposition parties set out why we believe that a declaratory system is

essential to deliver on the Prime Minister's commitment to EU citizens during the referendum campaign and subsequently, and to avoid a repeat of Windrush. This came up this morning in Brexit orals. In the Committee debate, I was pleased to get an important clarification from the Government on appeal rights, but I am afraid that I did not find the Minister's speech on the broader issue of citizens' rights at all reassuring. In a relatively convoluted argument—which the Secretary of State to a degree repeated this morning at Brexit questions—the Minister attempted to put the blame for the Windrush scandal on the safety net that ensured that victims could seek recourse against the treatment that they endure from immigration legislation and argued that the way to avoid a Windrush scandal for EU citizens was to take away the safety net provided by guaranteeing their rights.

We have already seen that almost half of applicants to the EU settlement scheme have not been granted settled status; they have been granted pre-settled status. Ministers have told us that we should be relaxed about this, claiming that pre-settled status is an automatic pathway to settled status. I am afraid we have every reason to be concerned, because it is not.

Catherine West: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a real risk here that once again the Home Office is making a pig's ear of this whole thing?

Paul Blomfield: Well, the Home Office has got form on these things, hasn't it?

Let me explain why I am concerned specifically on this issue. Pre-settled status is intended for those EU citizens who have been living in the UK for less than five years. However, many EU citizens who have been living here far longer, many for decades, are being granted pre-settled status. They will be required to reapply to the scheme before their five years of leave under pre-settled status is up. If they do not, they will lose all their rights in the UK and, as the Home Office Minister pointed out, be liable to deportation.

Despite these risks, my understanding is—I would be very happy to be corrected—that the Government have no plans to notify EU citizens when their leave is about to expire, and prompt them to apply for settled status. If they do not even know of the need to reapply, many EU citizens will face the same difficulties evidencing their five years' residency, so in any closing remarks from the Government Front Bench I would be grateful if Ministers can tell us what will happen to EU citizens who are granted pre-settled status for five years, then reapply to the scheme for settled status but are not able to evidence the required five years' residence, which was the basic problem leading to their being granted pre-settled status in the first place.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent point about the limitations of pre-settled status, but does he agree that there is as a gender element to this, too? Women, and particularly older women, who may have had many years of caring responsibilities and who may not have had their own bank accounts or paid the bills in the household may find it even more difficult to evidence that now and in the future?

Paul Blomfield: The hon. Lady makes an important point, and it came up in Committee. That is why I have pressed Ministers time and again to release their equalities impact assessment of the settled status scheme, which they have refused to do. That failure presents real worries.

The scheme is clearly open to error—and, as has been pointed out, the Home Office has form on these things. It has already thrown up problems, and it is therefore crucial that there is proper and independent monitoring. The independent monitoring authority was set up in the withdrawal agreement, but schedule 2 to the Bill makes it far from independent from Government. I hope this issue will be re-examined when the Bill moves to another place, to ensure that the Government are not allowed to mark their own homework.

The third, and most immediate and outrageous, consequence of the Bill will be to remove the commitments on unaccompanied child refugees. This was a heartless move by the Government, signalling their intention to abandon our moral commitments to the most vulnerable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) was right to point out yesterday that this move is troubling because the measures on unaccompanied children in the EU withdrawal Act were previously supported by the Government and by this House. There is no good reason for them to be removed at this point.

Moving to the fourth point, we have had significant discussion on this and we saw a remarkable moment in the House yesterday. All the Northern Irish parties represented here joined together to table an amendment on the impact of the Northern Ireland protocol in response to the overwhelming calls from the business community there, who fear the deep and long-lasting effects of this agreement. The hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) was absolutely right to express her concern that in the two hours allocated to discussion of the protocol only one representative of Northern Ireland was given the chance to make a speech. By voting against new clause 55 yesterday and rejecting Labour's amendment 1, the Government confirmed that they intend to avoid transparency about the impact of the Northern Ireland protocol and will continue to cut out the people of Northern Ireland from Brexit negotiations. There are clearly serious concerns across the House on that.

Finally, there were amendments on the future relationship with the European Union. The Bill paves the way for the UK to leave, as the Minister pointed out, on 31 January, but that is only the first part of the story. In our negotiations with the EU on our future relationship, Labour has consistently argued for a close economic partnership with our nearest neighbours and our biggest trading partner.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and I would like to echo the comments about the diligent way in which he is going about this task. Does he agree that 52-48 was a mandate to move house but stay in the same neighbourhood? If we are actually about respecting the democratic mandate from 2016 that is about leaving the European Union—yes, leaving the political project—we should be staying aligned on workers' rights, environmental protections and consumer standards? That is respecting the democratic mandate from 2016.

Paul Blomfield: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, which anticipate a point I was just about to make. He is absolutely right. Throughout this process we have called for alignment on workers' rights, environmental standards, equalities and human rights not simply because that is right—although that is hugely important—but because it provides the basis for the close relationship on which our trade and our economic partnership with the European Union depends.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I am slightly puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's decision to oppose the Bill today, since the consequence of the Bill going down would be us not leaving the European Union on 31 January, which is clearly still Labour policy. Is he actually saying that he wants, once we have left the European Union, future laws in this country on employment rights and the environment to still be decided not by this Parliament but by the European Union, without us having any involvement whatever in the shaping of those laws?

Paul Blomfield: I will explain precisely what I mean by my comments, which echo the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock).

The last four years have divided our country like no others. It did not have to be like that. If only, after the referendum, when David Cameron ran away from the crisis he created, the then new Prime Minister had been straight with the British people. If only she had said that our country is split down the middle; it has voted to leave but by a painfully close margin of 52:48, which is a mandate to end our membership of the EU but not to rupture our relationship with our closest neighbours and most important trading partners. If she had said that we would leave but stay close—aligned with the single market in a customs union, and members of the agencies we have built together over 47 years—we would have supported her. She could have secured an overwhelming majority within this House. She could have brought the country together again after the divisions of the referendum. Instead, she pivoted to those whom her Chancellor—not those on the Opposition Benches but her Chancellor—described as the Brexit extremists in her party, risking the economy and security of our country. The Bill continues on that path. We have consistently rejected that approach, and that is why we will do so again today by voting the Bill down.

1.32 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): May I welcome you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your place? I look forward to your wisdom and benevolence.

In our age, hyperbole is commonplace. Exaggeration permeates debate and colours discourse. Superlatives litter our language. Yet there are few in this House who would disagree with my claim that it is almost impossible to exaggerate the significance of the Bill and what it facilitates—our departure from the European Union. The case I make today is that even more important than the Bill's provisions is its purpose. Even more important than leaving is the reason that we are leaving. That is the people's rejection of the prevailing political paradigm that the chatterati and glitterati, the denizens of the liberal elite, believed for years was beyond question. At

[*Sir John Hayes*]

the core of this perversity was an attachment to pan-nationalism and a consequent affection for supranational governance. This led, among the liberal establishment, to a diminished sense of meaningful place. They came to regard it as not just permissible but desirable to erode the familiar touchstones of enduring certainty.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Hayes: I won't right at the moment; perhaps a little later. I know the hon. and learned Lady will want me to repeat that poetic phrase: the familiar touchstones of enduring certainty, epitomised by a spirit of local allegiance and a sense of national pride. The truth is that the bourgeois liberals—and at that point I give way to the hon. and learned Lady.

Joanna Cherry: I am not going to deny that I am a bourgeois liberal, but many people in Scotland who are not bourgeois liberals voted to remain in the European Union. Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the situation he is describing pertains in England but not in Scotland, where 62% of the population voted to remain and where my party, which I do not think really could be described as a bourgeois liberal party but does contain some old bourgeois liberals like myself, won 48 of the 59 seats? Will he do us the courtesy of acknowledging that he is talking about England, not Scotland?

Sir John Hayes: I congratulate the hon. and learned Lady on her honesty. She separates herself not only from most of her party but from most of the voters. She says that she is part of the bourgeois liberal elite, but they are not.

Joanna Cherry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Hayes: I will give way just one more time.

Joanna Cherry: The right hon. Gentleman has made a very personal comment about me separating myself from most of my voters. Would he like to explain why, if I have separated myself from most of my voters, my majority over the Conservative and Unionist party went from 1,000 to 12,000 votes in the general election?

Sir John Hayes: One day, if the hon. and learned Lady continues, and maybe she will for many, many years, she just might attain the 30,000 majority that I got in South Holland and the Deepings, but I think it is very unlikely indeed.

As I say, the bourgeois liberals find it hard to stomach that hardworking British patriots do not share their affection for globalisation and their preoccupation with diversity.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Hayes: No, I won't give way, because I want to make some progress as others want to speak.

Those hardworking patriots prefer tradition, order and established values to the politically correct, poisonous cocktail of egalitarianism and assertive individualism. This paradigm shift is at the heart of the message broadcast first in the 2016 referendum and then still more loudly in the general election at the end of last year. GK Chesterton spoke of the people who had “not spoken yet”. Well, the people have now spoken. They have spoken loudly, clearly and decisively. They have sent a message that this House had better hear. On the Conservative Benches I think we have. Indeed, not only have we heard it, we have rearticulated it and we are proud to do so.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On that point.

Sir John Hayes: I have the greatest regard for the hon. Gentleman and so on that basis alone I will happily give way to him.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He is being very kind in giving way. I would not want to puncture his balloon too much, but here goes. The reality is not as he paints it. The reality is that 43% of people voting in a first-past-the-post system is why all this is happening. It is not that the great British whatever he wants to call them decided it, but that 43% in first past the post and the winner takes all. It is not the great sweep of the proletariat or the bourgeois, or whatever he wants to call it.

Sir John Hayes: I do not want to go off on a tangent. Despite what I described earlier as your wisdom and benevolence, Mr Deputy Speaker, you would not let me, but I will just say this to the hon. Gentleman. This Prime Minister went to the people, at some risk to himself and to others on the Conservative Benches, and put a very clear message to them. He essentially said, “I cannot make progress in the current parliamentary arrangement because of the arithmetic. Do you want me to deliver Brexit? Do you want to get Brexit done or don't you?” The British people said, “That is exactly what we want you to do.” They have sent us here to do just that. Any further prevarication or hesitation will, frankly, ring hollow in the ears of those people. I simply advise the hon. Gentleman that in victory the test of character is humility, but in defeat the test of character is being wise enough to learn the lessons of that defeat. One or two people on the Opposition Benches have learnt those lessons and have made that clear, but others need to do so very quickly indeed.

I know that others want to contribute, so I will bring my remarks to a conclusion by saying this. The Bill is the first step not on a trip to a different place but on a return journey: a return journey for this United Kingdom to hope, to patriotism and to greatness.

1.39 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Third Reading to the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill because the Scottish Parliament has not consented to those parts of the Bill which encroach on devolved competencies, and because it fails to take into account the fact that the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union; and further believes that the Bill is not fit for purpose as it continues to undermine the fundamental principles of the Scotland Act 1998 by reserving to the UK Parliament powers that would otherwise be devolved to the Scottish Parliament upon the UK leaving the European Union.

I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your new position in the big comfy chair—hopefully you have your feet up on the foot stool.

I thank all the staff of the Public Bill Office and the Clerks for the support that they have given right across the House in helping to put the Bills together and in helping Members to draw up and submit amendments, which is no easy thing for many of us. They have had to do that through all the stages of Brexit legislation, and all of us should thank them for their work.

Despite all the understandable triumphalism after winning the election in England, we see in this Prime Minister's deal the potential of a repeat of the Brexit saga of the last three and a half years, as through hubris he is making similar mistakes to his predecessor. She painted herself into a corner with her red lines before carrying out an economic assessment to decide what form of Brexit would be least damaging. There has been no economic assessment of this deal. The last one was in 2018, on the Chequers "cake and eat it" plan, which was such a fairy tale that we could hear the unicorns galloping down Whitehall.

The former Prime Minister launched the article 50 process, with its fixed end-date and the clock ticking all the time, without a scooby as to what the UK actually wanted to ask for from the EU. This Prime Minister has made it illegal to extend transition despite the fact that 11 months is a ridiculously short time to negotiate even a basic free trade deal, let alone the complex shopping list of the political declaration.

The former Prime Minister kept her cards close to her chest, so Parliament had no input or influence on the withdrawal deal as it developed. The removal of clause 31 from the Bill means that Parliament, and indeed devolved Governments, will have no influence on the future relationship with the EU, despite the impact on all our constituents and local industries.

The former Prime Minister was then terribly shocked that, when she finally produced her deal, it was such a flop, drawn like a lifeless rabbit out of a hat and rejected by those on both sides of the Brexit debate, including the current Prime Minister. Members of this House are being sidelined and can therefore only wonder what the future relationship will look like when it is eventually unveiled in December.

Sir William Cash: I say, first, how much I respect the hon. Lady. She sits on the European Scrutiny Committee, which I have had the honour to Chair for some time.

On the question of how the negotiations were conducted—as she knows, we have been conducting our investigation into that—a very important point that we made was that the terms and conditions were set by the European Union and accepted by the UK. That will change now because of the general election result—I just thought that I would make that observation.

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I think that the tone was set when we saw the former Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), turn up to the first meeting with not a piece of paper in his hand to meet the EU negotiators. That was rather naive.

Early in her premiership, the former Prime Minister spoke of consulting across the House, and across the UK, before she went to Europe, but she never did. This

Prime Minister has sought no common ground, within this Parliament or with the devolved nations, despite the fact that two of them voted to remain.

Brexit was never defined during the referendum. Indeed, Nigel Farage and some of the most ardent Brexiteers suggested that of course the UK would stay in the single market—that it would be madness to leave. They just wanted to get back to a common market.

The Scottish Government's report, "Scotland's Place in Europe", put forward as early as December 2016—three months before the article 50 letter was sent—the compromise proposal that the UK should stay in the single market and customs union. With a 52:48 referendum result, that might even have provided the basis of a compromise between leavers who did not want closer political union and remainers who wanted to keep as many EU benefits as possible. However, if England and Wales wanted to diverge further, the proposal was that Scotland and Northern Ireland should be allowed to stay in the single market and customs union, which would have respected how those nations voted.

Sadly, the proposals were dismissed by the Government out of hand, and the fact that 62% of Scottish voters voted to remain has been completely ignored, with no quarter given and no compromise offered. Indeed, Scotland and the majority of her elected representatives have been treated with growing disrespect in this place over the last three and half years. I gently point out that we do actually have television and the internet in Scotland and that this is being seen by the Scottish people.

Our request for a devolved or, at least, regionalised immigration process after Brexit has also been dismissed, despite Scotland's demographic need for immigration. We have to be able to ensure that EU citizens, who have made their home in Scotland—including my other half—can stay without being exposed to the notorious hostile environment of the Home Office, but, in future, we also need to be able to attract immigrants from Europe and across the world. With the risk to our public services and key industries such as tourism and farming, and the threat of depopulation in the highlands and islands, this UK Government are certainly not acting in Scotland's interests.

The UK Government have already taken the overall power to set the rules in 24 areas of devolved competence. All that the Scottish and Welsh Governments requested was that any new UK frameworks should be agreed rather than imposed, but the Tory Government refused—hardly the respect agenda that we used to hear so much about. With the inclusion of fishing, farming, food standards, food safety and food labelling, as well as public procurement, it is clear that this is about being able to tie up Scotland and sell it out in a trade deal. This power grab already drives a coach and horses through the Scotland Act 1998, but in voting down yesterday my simple amendment to protect the devolution Acts from sweeping delegated powers we saw a Government taking power to alter the devolution settlement without even parliamentary scrutiny.

Last night, the Scottish Parliament voted by 92 to 29 to withhold legislative consent from the Bill, due to the risk that it poses to Scotland and the current devolution settlement. Ignoring this voice and riding roughshod over the legislative consent process after 20 years of devolution will undermine the very Union that Conservative Members protest to hold so dear.

1.48 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I heartily congratulate you on your re-election, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I wish you and the new team the very best of luck in your endeavours as you work with the new House.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) on her speech. She made her points very well, but she will not be surprised that I disagree with virtually every single word. Above all, I disagree with her attitude and the gloom and the misery on the Opposition Benches, when I see this as a day of great celebration.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) on coming top of the private Members' Bill ballot today; I hope he chooses a subject that gets agreement across the House. A long time ago, in 2005, I came 16th in the ballot. I must acknowledge the part played by my near constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). He and I worked together closely drafting a private Member's Bill, the European Communities Act 1972 (Disapplication) Bill, in which was used the memorable "notwithstanding" phrase, in clause 1(2):

"This subsection applies to any enactment which includes the words: 'The provisions of this enactment shall take effect notwithstanding the provisions of the European Communities Act 1972.'"

Sir William Cash: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the wording of this Bill's parliamentary sovereignty clause, clause 39, which is about to pass its Third Reading, is exactly the same as that in our private Member's Bill and in the amendment I tabled in 1986?

Mr Paterson: With great prescience, my hon. Friend makes exactly the point I was about to make. Here we are, 15 years later, and, moved by the Government, the "notwithstanding" clause is going into law, subject to the other place being sensible. I pay tribute to him. He has been mocked, traduced and insulted, but he has stood for the simple democratic principle that members of the public, every few years, are given the opportunity to vote for individual human beings to come to this place and make laws. If those laws are satisfactory, they will get re-elected; if not, they will get booted out. They will be sent here to raise money by extracting it compulsorily, by law, from people's bank accounts—that is what taxation is—and if that money is well spent, they will be re-elected; if it is not, they will be kicked out. It is an incredibly simple, basic idea. I find it staggering that we are still today listening to miseries from the Opposition Benches cavilling about this simple principle.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I will give the right hon. Gentleman something joyous to think about: 57% of the people of the United Kingdom did not vote for him or his Government, yet because of our dodgy system, as the 43% and people across the world can see, the Conservative party is in charge—winner takes all.

Mr Paterson: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will not mention that 56% of the votes in the recent general election were for parties that wanted to keep Scotland inside the United Kingdom.

I have made this point many times, so I will be very brief. How many more times do the people have to be listened to? We had the Cameron referendum promise,

which granted a very clear in/out referendum. We had the referendum itself. [Interruption.] It's no good the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) shaking his head. Four times the people have spoken. The result of the referendum was clear: 17.4 million people voted to leave. We then had the 2017 election, when the Labour party and the Conservative party stood on a platform of honouring the referendum result, and 80% of the votes went to parties who promised that. Still the people did not get what they wanted.

With the complexities of the last Parliament, we had the creation of the Brexit party. Incredibly, that party, from nowhere, came top in the European elections. The Conservative party managed to come fifth behind the Greens, which was a remarkable achievement. Then we had the recent election. Yet again, people were bombarded with propaganda, and told they were racist and stupid, and again they voted in huge numbers for the very simple principle that they should send Members of Parliament here to make their laws and that if they cannot make satisfactory laws, they can be removed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Paterson: No. I'm not giving way. We know where the Scottish nationalists are coming from, because they make the same point every time. Just to keep them happy, though, I will give them a little anecdote.

In the town where I was born, Whitchurch, we have six polling stations in one building, the civic centre. On referendum day, people came up to me off a building site, covered in dust, and said, "It is good to see you here, Mr Paterson, because it's about them". I asked, "Who's them?" They said, "We can get rid of you, we can vote you out, but we cannot get rid of them", and then they made the very telling point, "You can do nothing about them either".

We had an interesting debate yesterday about this. We can do absolutely nothing about European law, which is imposed upon us. I had the honour to serve on the European Scrutiny Committee with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone. One day, a Labour Member was ill and a Liberal Democrat got stuck in the lift and we managed to vote that a measure on the dairy industry—of great interest to my constituents—would be passed for a vote on the Floor of the House. It would not have been amendable, but we could have made our points. What happened? The Leader of the House at the time, the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), turned up at business questions and said, "You're not even having a debate". That was the amount of scrutiny we had. I find it extraordinary that people do not welcome the chance to scrutinise Ministers. From now on, they will be able to harpoon Ministers who make bad decisions. They can have Adjournment debates and criticise law. We can get law amended and repealed. None of that will apply to European law until we pass the Bill.

There are so many areas where European law has damaged this country, but the winner by a mile is still fish. In 2005, as shadow Fisheries Minister, I wrote a green paper called "A Consultation on a National Policy on Fisheries Management in UK Waters". It is the paper on which we fought the 2005 general election. For the first time, a serious political party proposed repatriating a power. I come from North Shropshire. One of the

most fascinating experiences of my 22 years here was going all around the coast of the UK—right up to Whalsay, right down to Cornwall and Dover—but above all going to the maritime nations of Norway, the Faroes, Iceland, Newfoundland in Canada and then down the east coast of the United States. I also went to the Falklands. It was extraordinary to see how modern techniques could bring thriving fishing communities—some of the most remote communities in the world—wealth, prosperity, jobs and investment.

By contrast, in this country we have utter devastation. This wonderful occupation delivered wealth and jobs for centuries until we were stupid enough to give the power to the continental level, and we now have the shameful, wicked waste of 1 million tonnes of fish thrown back dead into the sea as pollution every year, and yet Opposition Members this afternoon are defending staying in the EU and the common fisheries policy.

Sir John Hayes: My right hon. Friend will remember that I was shadow Fisheries Minister before him. I was very good and he was even better. The truth is—this is the question that Opposition Members in particular need to answer—that the CFP was not only disastrous for fishing communities and fishermen; it was also a conservation disaster for our oceans. Anyone who signs up to the EU signs up to the CFP and the decimation of our oceans.

Mr Paterson: My right hon. Friend is quite right. The opening line of my paper said:

“The Common Fisheries Policy is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster; it is beyond reform.”

Today we are giving ourselves the power to reform it and take back this power. I would like those on the Front Bench to remember that this is a crucial, totemic issue. We have to take back full power and complete control over our exclusive economic zone and all the marine resources within it.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Given his previous experience, I am sure my right hon. Friend was coming to this point, but does he agree that in the negotiating phase, which we would have been into 10 months ago had Opposition Members voted for the original deal, we must not trade access to our waters for a free trade agreement, and that, despite the scare-mongering—perhaps even wishful thinking—from Opposition Members, there is no evidence that the Government will do that?

Mr Paterson: My hon. Friend, who speaks with great knowledge of this subject and represents his constituents so well, has just spoken with total wisdom. It is fundamental that we do not make the mistake of the 1970s, and allow the allocation of fish resources to be a trading card in these negotiations.

We have said that we will take back control, and I am looking at the Secretary of State. We will take back full control, and we will then behave like a normal independent maritime nation. We will have the very best bilateral relations with our neighbours, exactly like Norway and exactly like Iceland, and, on an annual basis, we will have discussions and possibly do reciprocal deals with them. Let me say emphatically that we must not allow fisheries to be snarled up in these negotiations.

I was disappointed yesterday that President von der Leyen—in what I thought was a very interesting speech, much of which I welcomed—talked of a

“partnership that goes well beyond trade”,

and mentioned fisheries. That is unacceptable. As my hon. Friend has just said, it is absolutely essential that we take full, total, sovereign control of the EEZ and all that is within it, and that from then on we negotiate as an independent maritime nation.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): My right hon. Friend will, of course, recall that prior to our accession to the common market, there was no common fisheries policy. It was concocted entirely in anticipation of our accession, so that our waters could be plundered.

Mr Paterson: My hon. right Friend is absolutely right.

Dr Whitford: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Paterson: I want to move on, because others wish to speak.

I really hope that Ministers take this on board. It is fundamental that we take back full control, and, however much pressure we are under from our current European partners, regain our status as an independent nation, partly because of the environmental harm—the shocking shame of throwing back a million tonnes of fish.

There is one other issue which we did not have time to discuss fully yesterday, and which I hope very much will be resolved in the negotiations. That is the essential benefit of a comprehensive free trade agreement whereby Northern Ireland will be level-pegging with the rest of the UK on every aspect of policy, which will mean that we can drop the current protocol. As the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), agreed yesterday in reply to me, the current protocol is a fallback position. With a comprehensive free trade agreement, all the complexities such as the worries of the Northern Ireland business community—mentioned yesterday by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield)—will fall away, and we will also have a great opportunity to embrace growth around the world.

It is worth pointing out that our exports to the EU grew by 1.3% last year and now total £296.8 billion, while our exports to non-EU countries grew by 6.3%, reaching £376.7 billion. The European Commission itself has said that 95% of world growth over the next 20 years will be outside the European Union, which is why the International Monetary Fund predicts that soon the only continent with a slower rate of growth than Europe will be Antarctica. This is a great day for our economy. This is a great day to escape all the rubbish on the other side about gloom and doom. If we do a proper, comprehensive deal, we will have opportunities to work with the 11 countries in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—which represent 13.4% of GDP—and, of course, we will have a huge opportunity to do a deal very rapidly with the United States.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If we can just assume that the right hon. Gentleman's Brexit utopia will not happen, we are only 11 months away from a no-deal crash-out. We have 11 months in which

[Alan Brown]

to agree and ratify all the trade agreements with the EU. The right hon. Gentleman is a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Can he tell us what is the magic technology that is available to man the borders and prevent a hard border in Northern Ireland in the event of a no-deal crash-out, bearing in mind that it has been said that there will no infrastructure at the border either?

Mr Paterson: We have done much work on that, assessing alternative arrangements, and I have fed into this. As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, these issues have been massively exaggerated. There is a border today for VAT, there is a border today for excise duties, there is a border today for alcohol duties, and there is a border today for currency. It works perfectly smoothly with modern technologies, and that will continue.

Yet again, the Scottish National party is anti-business, cavilling away and looking for problems. There are fantastic opportunities for Scotland. Our largest export industry is food and drink, and a large element of that is Scottish whisky. When I was in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we calculated that if we did a deal with India, where there are currently duties of up to 550%, and we got duties down, there is not enough distilling capacity in the whole of Scotland to satisfy thirsty Indian quality whisky drinkers.

On that happy note, let me add that the other great opportunity is of course the United States, and I urge the Government to move rapidly. From 1 February we should be negotiating rapidly in parallel with the 11 countries of the CPTPP, and we should be moving rapidly to a deal with the United States. I met President Trump in October. For all the colourful aspects of his character, which are much criticised, he is probably the most pro-British President we have had for decades, and we have an extraordinarily well-informed and active US ambassador in Woody Johnson. We will never have another team that is so well disposed towards us. However, the window is tight, given the presidential election timetable, and I strongly urge the Government to push on rapidly. As we saw yesterday, the European Union wants to drag its heels. If we can do a deal with the CPTPP and the United States, that will probably shame the EU into doing a deal with us.

I wish the Bill well, but, touching on the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), I give a very clear warning to those who will deal with it in the other place. They are overwhelmingly for remain, and many of them benefit from their previous employment in the European Commission. However, they should respect four massive votes from the people. The Bill has gone through this House rapidly. Notwithstanding the bleating from the official Opposition, we did not use the time available in the last two days: on both Tuesday and Wednesday, we bunked off early because the Loyal Opposition could not come up with enough good arguments or speakers. Indeed, they can hardly man their own Benches. I hope that those in the other place have watched what has happened.

The Government have a clear and determined goal, which is to honour those votes, honour the result of the general election, and ensure that we leave the European Union at 11 o'clock on the evening of 31 January. I look forward to voting for the Bill's Third Reading tonight.

2.7 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to see you back where you belong, Mr Deputy Speaker—in the Chair—and I congratulate you on your stunning success in securing that position. I think that we have a fantastic team of Deputy Speakers, and I look forward to serving under you for years to come.

I wish I could say that it is a pleasure and a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), but it is not. I think that I represent the almost extreme other side of the Brexit debate. I usually say that it is good to speak in a Third Reading debate, but unfortunately I cannot say that either. This is something that the people of Scotland will very much regret and mourn. We are not “leaving” the European Union; we are being taken out of the European Union against our national collective will, and believe me, Mr Deputy Speaker, that is something that will not stand.

As is conventional on Third Reading, I shall offer my congratulations to a series of speakers. I congratulate the Secretary of State—who has just departed—and his team on getting the Bill through the House of Commons. He is the one Secretary of State to be actually attuned with his Prime Minister, unlike a succession of others who did not quite see to eye with their Prime Ministers and the direction in which their Brexit was travelling. I also pay tribute to all the Opposition teams, and, in particular, to my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who has just assumed her new role and who, as always, has led our debate with such distinction and articulateness.

The people I most want to congratulate, however, are the real winners of today, the hard Brexiteers and the Farageists. Their success has been total, brutal and absolute. Not only have they managed to secure the hard Brexit that they have craved for years, but, with this Bill, they have kept in place the bullseye, the gold standard, of all hard Brexits—the possibility of a no-deal departure from the European Union. Their anti-European obsession will be quenched today: insatiable lifetime ambitions of wrenching this country out of the EU will be realised. Their victory is even more impressive because they started as a small, insignificant, cult-like fringe on the edge of the Conservative party. Such is their tenacity and commitment to the cause that they have now gone mainstream. Just one generation ago they were the B-A-S-T-ards of John Major folklore. Now they run the country. Their commitment to the cause has been so absolutely determined that they were prepared to bring down their own Prime Ministers to get their way—*[Interruption.]* And I shall give way to one of them now.

Sir William Cash: I thought it might be helpful if I could distinguish ourselves from what the hon. Gentleman described as the Farageists, for the simple reason that UKIP and now the Brexit Party were never going to form a Government. They could therefore never negotiate, nor could they legislate and nor could they deliver Brexit. They have now been reduced to dust by the decision that was taken by the British people, including in Labour leave marginal constituencies. It is the Conservative party that has now come back into its own and is doing the right thing for the right reason in the national interest.

Pete Wishart: I am so grateful to the high priest of hard Brexiteers. The reason that UKIP and the Farageists—whatever incarnation they are on just now—have disappeared is that they have become the Conservative party. Their whole agenda has been accepted and subsumed into the Conservative party so that it is almost impossible to tell the modern Conservative party from the UKIP and the Farageists of the past.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: That victory is so complete that, on 43%, their utter arrogance is such that they never need to go back and check with the people that they are doing the right thing. In Scotland, on 45%, we demand a referendum, not to do what we want but to ask the people if they want independence. But that is not for the Brexiteers, oh no; on 43% they will do what they want. The arrogance is massive on that side.

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend makes a good and concise point. I want to return to some of these issues, and I hope that he will come back in, because I think that this is worth being aired, discussed and debated in this House. It is an important key issue—[*Interruption.*] I can tell that the high priest wants to come back in again, and I will obviously indulge him.

Sir William Cash: The Maastricht rebellion took place in 1992-93, long before either UKIP or the Brexit party was even really thought of.

Pete Wishart: There is a fascinating journal, account and book to be written about this, and I am looking forward to the hon. Member's memoirs after all this.

I want to pay tribute to some of the other people who have won today, in the great victory of this Brexit. I know that the Conservatives will, uncharitably, not do this, but somebody has to congratulate Nigel Farage. It is his vision that has been realised today. Without Nigel Farage, there would be no Brexit. Without the pressure that was put on the Conservative party from whatever incarnation of his party existed at the time, there would not be the hard Brexit that they are all celebrating today. Come on, Conservatives—give the man a peerage, for goodness' sake! He, more than anybody else, deserves it. And wouldn't it be comedy gold for a man who rails against unelected politicians to be given an unelected place in the legislature? Please do it, just for the comedy value.

We are not just passing a piece of legislation today. We are actually entering into a new age, a new epoch: the age of hard Brexitism. Everything that this House does from this point on will be informed and directed by this new atmosphere, culture and direction of the United Kingdom. I am trying to think of a poster boy for the new hard Brexit age, and the only thing that comes to my mind is the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) in combat casualties flying a Spitfire to the sound of hope and glory heading straight to the ground because his aircraft has suffered engine failure. That is the image that comes to mind in the new Brexit age, and God help us as we go forward. It is viciously right-wing and isolationist, and takes no account of the views of anywhere else around the whole world today. It is this new age of hard Brexit that we are now entering into.

I am looking around for some of the other hon. Members on the Conservative Benches. Obviously the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) is here, but I am looking for the newly knighted dark lord of Brexit austerity, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). He is not in his place, and neither is the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who so excited us with his tales of English nationalism. None of them is here, but all of them have to be congratulated. They are now the mainstream of the Conservative party. They effectively manipulated what was a moderate centrist party to become this party of Brexit extremists. They booted out all the moderates; none of them is here now. There is no debate or discussion, or any sort of contradiction of the views of hard Brexiteers any more, because they have booted all the moderates out. This is the new Conservative consensus, and I hope that the party today in the Bulldog Club is generous and full of largesse, and that they very much enjoy it.

Sir Desmond Swayne: My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) spoke of the gloom and doom on the other side of the Chamber, and I think that the hon. Gentleman put his finger on it in his complaint about the hardness of this particular Brexit. What was clear throughout the Committee stage was the harking back of Opposition Members to a previous Bill that did not make it through this House in December of last year. It did not make it through this House because those Members voted against the programme motion, and they now feel guilt for having delivered the very situation about which he complains, but which we rather regard as the intervention of providence.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I know he is tempting me to speak about the Labour party, but that is just cruelty. I will resist the opportunity to say a few words to Labour Members, other than: for goodness' sake get your act together, because you have to be an Opposition. Not one of their Back Benchers is standing to be called in this debate today, which shows how humble they have become in this whole debate. However, I say to the right hon. Gentleman that it is a bit rich blaming a useless Labour party for sinking that last Brexit deal, because it was the hard Brexiteers who brought it down. They were prepared to sink their own Prime Minister and reject a deal because of their ultimate vision, objective and all-consuming obsession with the hardest of hard Brexits, which is what is being delivered today.

Alan Brown: It is ironic that the Conservatives are now saying, "You should have voted for our crap deal, but now we've made the deal even crappier, so get it up ye." Does that not sum it right up?

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend has a very delicate use of phrase, and I have to say that nothing could be put more elegantly than that. That is well understood from this side of the House.

The Brexit deal could have been anything. It could have involved a customs union or single market membership. It could have been Canada-plus-plus-plus or Norway-minus-minus-minus, but it is none of those. It is the

[Pete Wishart]

hardest of hard Brexits because nothing else was good enough for the Conservatives, and that is what is being passed today.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Not only that; their victory has been so total that it has also been a victory over arithmetic. They know, or they should know, that their Brexit is going to damage GDP and economic growth by 5% to 6%, and that even if they get a trade deal with every country in the world, they can only make up 1.4% of that. America is only going to give them 0.2%, or a thirtieth of the damage they are going to do. To make up this damage, they are going to have to find 47 planets populated with people as rich as Americans today. That is the level of damage and arithmetical oversight that the hard Brexiteers have achieved in their victory. Numbers do not matter to a Tory party that was once obsessed with numbers. This is just the sweep of Brexit harking back to the 19th century and probably to opium wars and gunboat diplomacy. That is where their minds are stuck, sadly. The unfortunate thing is that the rest of us across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are going to pay a very heavy price for their lunacy.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his very brief intervention. All I can say to him is that they couldn't care less about the economy or about the damage to the UK. They couldn't care less about our relationship, about isolationism or about all the other things that this Brexit does. The only thing they care about is their hard Brexit. That is the only thing that has underpinned their whole approach in the course of the past few years. That is the only thing they wanted. Nothing else mattered other than securing a hard Brexit, so there will be huge celebrations down the Bulldog Club tonight and I hope the champagne tastes good. Will we be celebrating in the White Heather Club in Scotland, or here? Nobody bothered to ask me. Well, no, we will not. We most certainly will not be celebrating this Bill passing today.

The Government may have won their hard Brexit, but they have most definitely lost Scotland. Nothing could sum up the alienation of Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom more than the passing of this Bill. This Bill symbolises the difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK. I sometimes think this House forgets Scotland's relationship with this Brexit disaster and chaos, so let me gently remind Conservative Members what happened. One MP was voted from Scotland with a mandate for the EU referendum, and one MP from Scotland voted for the Bill that allowed a referendum to take place. When Scotland was obliged to vote in an EU referendum that it had nothing to do with, we voted 62% to remain.

Now, people may have thought, given all that has happened, that Scotland's voice would be accommodated, listened to and somehow taken account of—not a bit of it. Every representation was rejected. Everything to try to minimise the blow to a Scotland that wanted to stay in the European Union was ignored out of hand before the ink was even dry. Everything that we brought forward that said, "Listen. Maybe we have a different view about Brexit than the rest of you down here," was totally and utterly ignored and disrespected.

That is why yesterday, when the Scottish Parliament was asked to agree to a legislative consent motion to allow the Government to progress and pursue this hard Brexit, the Scottish Parliament overwhelmingly said no, and only the rump of Scottish Conservatives in that Parliament voted for it. Will that matter to this Government? Will that be listened to? Absolutely not. It will be rejected, ignored and disrespected. I say to Conservative Members that that is what is driving the new demand for Scottish independence. We will no longer be ignored, disrespected, and rejected out of hand. That is why we are back here with 48 Members. That is why we have 80% of the vote. That is what the people of Scotland voted for.

David Duguid *rose*—

Pete Wishart: I am going to enjoy this intervention from a representative of the Scottish Conservatives, who lost half their seats. Why did that happen?

David Duguid: I just want to gently correct the hon. Gentleman. I do enjoy hearing him speak, and we have been known to share a stage together, in fact, because I enjoy his entertainment that much. I will gently correct what he may have said inadvertently. He said that 80% of the vote in Scotland—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: No, 80% of the seats.

David Duguid:—80% of the seats—[*Interruption.*] Listen, I have absolutely no compunction about accepting that the SNP gained seats in Scotland during last month's UK general election. We lost some seats, but it was ultimately a general election to form a Government in this place, not a general election in Scotland. Nicola Sturgeon is not the Prime Minister. On the percentage of the vote, I gently say that 55% of people in Scotland voted for Unionist parties, not for the SNP—[*Interruption.*] I have made my point.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is of course right that the SNP won only 80% of the seats, and I am glad that that is on the record. I say ever so gently to him that it is all very well him standing up and telling me to correct all that, but his party in Scotland has one message—I do not expect him to dispute this—and all the signs in the fields of Perthshire and Banff and Buchan and all the leaflets that went through every door said, "Vote Scottish Conservative to stop indyref 2." All he needs to do is shake his head. That was the main message.

David Duguid *rose*—

Pete Wishart: No, he should just let me finish, then I will let him come back in. That was the main message put out by the Scottish Conservatives at the general election. The result was that they lost more than half their Members of Parliament. They said, "Send Nicola Sturgeon a message," and the Scottish people did. The message they sent was, "We want to decide our own future." The hon. Gentleman must be a little humbler about what happened. He must accept his defeat and understand the reason behind it because at some point—not today, next week, or next month—he will have to respect Scottish democracy. He will have to say that it is up to the Scottish people to determine their own future.

David Duguid: On the subject of democracy, this should be well known, but I point out to the House that each and every SNP Member has two main jobs. One is to speak for their constituents, of which the SNP has more because it won more seats. The other is to speak for their party. It is not necessarily their job, solely, to speak for Scotland. The SNP does not represent Scotland. I am just as much a Scottish MP. The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I accepted my defeat, but I won my seat. I am here with an increased majority, thank you very much.

Pete Wishart: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on that, but he really must accept what is happening in Scotland. Something dramatic is going on. I think all of us agree that there will be another referendum at some point, because things are totally and utterly—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are saying no. Did my hon. Friends hear them?

Angus Brendan MacNeil: We heard them say no.

Pete Wishart: We heard them say no, but whenever they say no to Scotland and say that they will deny Scottish democracy, the only thing that that does—this is a note of caution to Conservative Members—is drive support for Scottish independence. The more they say no to us, the more we will assert our rights, and the idea of Scottish independence will continue to grow and will overrun and consume them.

My little bit of advice to right hon. and hon. Gentlemen opposite is to say, “Just get on with it.” Just give us that independence referendum and acknowledge that we are on a different trajectory to the hard Brexit UK that they want. They can have their hard Brexit. If that is what they want, and if they want an isolationist United Kingdom, please have it. That is their choice and their democratic right. Nobody is preventing them from doing that, and I will be the first person to say, “Good luck.” Let us hope they get on and make a success of it, but do not hold my country back, do not subsume my country into what they are trying to achieve. We do not want it, and we have told them that on numerous occasions. It is over. Scotland will be an independent country, and the sooner this House recognises that, the better.

I will finish now, because I realise that I have kept the House attention’s for long enough. The battle for hard Brexit is over, and Conservative Members have won, but the battle for Scottish independence has just begun.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Craig Williams.

2.26 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you return to your place, as have I. I know that you will correct me if I say that I am making my maiden speech, but it feels a little like that. With your Welsh heritage, I hope that you will allow me a little leeway to talk about my new constituency and pay tribute to a person whom we will all miss: my predecessor, Glyn Davies.

I wanted to make my non-maiden speech on the Third Reading of this Bill, because I was reminded by a colleague that they had looked me up on TheyWorkForYou and saw that I done little speaking for two and a half

years, so I hope that I can correct the record, because I have very little opportunity to do so. I have worked with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the Front-Bench team for several months in different guises, and I pay tribute to him and his team for their diligent professionalism. He has overseen a very difficult situation over the past six months.

This feels a little like Groundhog Day—not giving another maiden speech but talking about this particular subject. I recall being encouraged to leave Parliament by a different constituency when we were on this subject, and I have now returned with a healthier majority while we are still on this subject, and I appreciate that we can now get it done.

If I may say a bit about my home, the seat I now represent is not just my constituency but my home—born and bred. Montgomeryshire is incredibly important to me and was important to my predecessor. It is an old county of Wales and forms the gateway to mid-Wales, covering an area from Welshpool over to Machynlleth, which was the seat of the Welsh Parliament in days gone by, to Llanidloes and Llandinam. It is good to see my neighbours by my side, including my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones). It is truly wonderful—other Members across the House will feel the same—to represent somewhere that I call home.

There are issues—they will, of course, be pertinent to this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker—that I will look to champion, and it has been terrific over the past month to see so many opportunities and ideas come to the fore as we settle the Brexit issue.

I have been given many ideas by organisations, such as opening the Montgomeryshire canal to the network. The Welshpool and Llanfair railway campaign captured the spirit of both Montgomeryshire and this country, and it received the Queen’s award for voluntary service. This week—just to reinforce the fact that Powys and Montgomeryshire are not complacent on any issue, despite our being the safest place in England and Wales—we received the knife angel, which is touring the country to demonstrate and reinforce the message that we need to engage with the community on knife crime and other serious crime to minimise it as much as we can.

I hope the House will forgive me for spending some time paying tribute Glyn Davies, my immediate predecessor, who is a great man. He has 50 years of public service to date, and it is not capped. I know Glyn and, in fact, I was with him on the weekend as he continued his public service. I am sure he will continue in some guise. I know the House will miss him, but I can assure the House that I will not miss him because he will continue to guide, advise, inform and, I am sure, take part in Montgomeryshire life.

Glyn’s passion for representing his home, his passion for Welsh politics and his passion for his nation, Wales—and for the Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, before my Celtic cousins start—inspired me early in life, and he is one of the reasons I got involved in politics. He is one of the reasons I stand before the House again, representing my home seat. That other true son of Montgomeryshire, who I am sure will either read or listen to this debate, can be very proud of what he has achieved, having been an Assembly

[Craig Williams]

Member, a councillor and a Member of Parliament. At his tender age, which I will not mention, he is fit and able. I will send the House's good wishes to him.

This Third Reading debate is a significant moment for the House and the country, and it presents me with an opportunity to talk about some of the issues I will seek to champion during my time as the Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire. I represent one of the most rural seats in England and Wales—I would be immediately corrected by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire if I claimed it was the biggest in England and Wales—and it has both agriculture and tourism, with the former being primarily affected by this Bill.

I was taken by the exchange at DExEU questions this morning, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) spoke precisely about the challenges and opportunities facing hilltop farmers as we leave the EU. He spoke about how the Brexit vote and bringing sovereign power back to this place, which we are doing right now, will mean that we can do things differently. I am heartened to see us moving straightaway on our manifesto commitments on agricultural funding to 2024, and I will be working with the Assembly Member for Montgomeryshire, Russell George—he is a Conservative Assembly Member, so I had better mention him—and the Welsh Government to ensure that that funding and support continues and gives certainty to farmers.

Agriculture is important, but so is tourism. This Bill will now provide certainty. For those who have not visited Montgomeryshire, I give a special shout out to Lake Vyrnwy. The private investment in the hotel and the wider developments at Lake Vyrnwy will push on at pace now that we have certainty on where this country will be going next. That certainty on opening up infrastructure is important to a rural area.

I will mention my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire one last time because I want to work with him on opening up the important Pant-Llanymynech bypass. I will continue apace so that Mr Deputy Speaker does not notice my getting that into this debate.

Finally, the Union is incredibly important to me. I realise that this is not a maiden speech and Members can intervene—I will tiptoe around it so that my SNP colleagues will be kind—but the Union is important to Montgomeryshire and the Welsh Conservative party. It is important to think about the Union in relation to the withdrawal agreement.

When we joined the European Union, the United Kingdom's powers on agricultural support were given to Brussels en bloc as we joined a bigger single market. We are now leaving, and we will be forming a single market between the four nations of the United Kingdom. It is incredibly important to the farmers, businesses and residents I represent in Montgomeryshire that there is a united and regulated framework that allows us to keep our porous border between England and Wales and to continue as one of the most successful Unions in the world.

I will continue to champion the role of Wales, as my nation, in the Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I will build on the work

of my predecessors, such as Glyn Davies and Lord Carlile. So many things have changed over the two and a half years that I have not been here, but there are many similarities. It is good to see Lord Davies of Gower in the Gallery, as it was a privilege to watch his maiden speech in the other place yesterday. I am heartened to see him return favour.

So many things have changed, but there are some similarities. I am delighted to represent my home, and I am delighted to take part in this important Third Reading debate. I pay tribute to all the parliamentarians on both sides of the House, the civil servants and the other bodies that have got through what looked from the outside, at times, like quite a challenging two and a half years. I hope we can now move on, and I am glad to have given my semi-maiden speech on Third Reading.

2.36 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the honour of calling me to give my maiden speech, especially on this European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill that has dominated our political life for years and will dominate and define our country for a generation or more. There could not be anything more important to speak about.

I start by thanking God, and I start as I mean to go on by thanking the residents of Putney, Roehampton and Southfields for putting their faith in me and for electing me to represent them. I also thank my family for all their support.

I pay tribute to my predecessor Justine Greening, who is held in very high respect for being a hard-working local MP. Many people told me during the campaign and before that she made their issues her own. She championed local causes and, nationally, she championed the cause of social mobility. She represented our views on Brexit, even when it cost her politically. We can always have a few more independent-minded female MPs, and I wish her and the Social Mobility Foundation all the very best.

Putney, Southfields and Roehampton are fantastic places to live and work. We have the best of urban London life, the river and brilliant green spaces. For any new MP looking for their London home, I cannot imagine anywhere better. Please come to Putney.

We have a strong community. We have faith groups, residents associations, great pubs to meet up in and community organisations that bring people together, including—I hope the House will forgive me for indulging a few local organisations—the Putney Society; Regenerate and Regenerate RISE; the Independent Food Aid Network; local food banks; Growhampton—doesn't that sound fantastic?—Green the Grid; Abundance, which makes cider; the tidy towpath group; the Roehampton cultural centre; the over-60s lunch club in Roehampton; and over 20 rowing clubs and the most famous boat race in the whole world.

I have been running a local community centre for three years, so I know how important and how threatened community spaces are, and I will continue to champion them. Clement Attlee is one of Putney's most famous former residents. He was born in Putney in 1883, when it was in Surrey, and he went on to be Labour Prime Minister from 1945 to 1951. He also went into politics because of his experience running a London community

centre, so we have much in common. His Labour Government founded the welfare state—both the NHS and the benefit system—which defines us a country. To this day, it is one of the jewels in our crown, which I will make it a priority to defend.

But the current welfare state is failing families in my constituency. One in three children is in poverty and 30% of families in Roehampton live in overcrowded homes, most of them hard-working families. More than 3,000 children in Wandsworth borough are homeless, living in temporary accommodation. The Alton Estate and Putney Vale include areas that are among the most deprived 10% in the country in terms of income and housing. It is not all about the boat race. Two of the most important marks of the Government's success or failure in the next five years must be whether they reduce child poverty and end the need for food banks.

Before I turn to the subject of the debate—I know that we are talking about Brexit; I will get there—I want briefly to highlight some important issues for Putney and the country. The first is the environment. This must be the climate Parliament. I have worked with aid agencies around the world, and in Bangladesh I have sat down with communities of women whose jobs, livelihoods and ways of life have been devastated by rising sea water as a result of climate change. It is already happening. I have also met parents, like me, who know that our London children have permanently damaged lungs because of our air pollution. In both situations, it is always the poorest who are most affected. We need urgent action on climate change. We cannot wait five years.

Housing is a major issue. Overcrowding, uncertainty for private renters, leaseholders' rights, lack of social housing and homelessness must be a priority for the next five years.

Youth services and youth centres are closing across our country. More than 700 have closed in the last nine years. Together with school cuts, that takes away opportunities for our young people. Roehampton youth centre was closed just last summer.

Adult social care is beyond crisis. It came up time and again in all my seven hustings during the election campaign. It needs urgent action. Joining up the NHS and community care services is essential. We do not need just a cross-party wish list, but urgent action. I know that that was in the Queen's Speech, and we will have to see what the result will be.

The NHS, crime, transport, daily commuter misery, saving our high street, international development and saving the Department for International Development, not merging it with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are all issues that I will return to in future debates.

And so to Brexit. It was the main issue of the election in Putney: 74% of Wandsworth residents voted to remain—an even higher figure than in Scotland. More than one in 10 constituents in Putney are from other EU countries and are a very welcome part of our community. I believe that Brexit is an act of monumental self-harm. In Putney, I have spoken to people who have burst into tears on the doorstep, not just from seeing me, but because of their heightened anxiety about their rights and status as EU citizens, no matter how many years they have been here. I have met NHS workers who are struggling to cope at work because so many other

staff have left and returned to other EU countries, and people whose businesses have been damaged and even closed—and we have not even had Brexit yet. We know the risks. We know that Brexit will not be done for many years, so my mandate to protest against the harm that it will do is certainly not over.

The Government have made big promises over the days of the debate, which I do not believe, given their track record in the past nine years, but I hope they prove me wrong. For a start, there are promises that there will be no regression on environmental standards. We must have a UK version of dynamic alignment on environmental policies. I know that the Government do not want dynamic alignment because it means that we are in hock to the EU, but there must be a UK version, whereby we do not end up with zombie policies and stay backward while the EU moves forward. We must always vie to keep outdoing the EU on climate action. We must phase out diesel and petrol cars, bring in eco-friendly homes and achieve 100% clean energy. I hope that all those policies will be in the upcoming environment Bill. The measure must have teeth to match the European Court of Justice.

There have also been promises that workers' rights will be retained so that we will not have a race to the bottom. I have worked with countries around the world on trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation and I have seen, time and again, how free trade fails communities and is especially bad for women. We need to know the impact, including the gender impact, of future trade deals.

There have been promises not to have a no-deal Brexit, but we could still face that at the end of the year. We are just pushing it down the line. There have been promises of rights to stay for EU nationals, with yet more paperwork and checks for pre-settled and settled status and issues that are not yet resolved.

There have been promises that the rights of vulnerable refugees—children, whose rights have been removed from the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill—will be enshrined in the immigration Bill. Why take reuniting children with their families out of the Bill? I am as flabbergasted and perplexed as everyone else on the Opposition Benches. Families belong together. The policy had cross-party agreement. It is not many children. I have seen the conditions in which young refugee children live and I have seen the traffickers circling and preying on them. Those children are amazing. My children often cannot find their way from the table to the dishwasher to put their plates away, but those children have found their way across Europe to other countries, desperate to return to their families here, who are just as desperate to see them. Yet we have closed the door on them. I do not understand why and I hope that it is not a sign of the kind of country we are going to become.

There have also been promises that the NHS is not for sale to the US. Well, we'll see. The Bill is a huge power grab, with the Government running scared of scrutiny and transparency, yesterday rejecting all the amendments that would have meant that we as elected Members rightly saw the aims, objectives and progress of negotiations.

We are leaving, but our role now is to define what leaving means: what our values are and what nationalism means. There is a high risk that racism and discrimination

[Fleur Anderson]

will be given permission by the Bill. I have seen it happen. It happened straight after the referendum and it has happened since. It is therefore important to say here, in this place, that we may be leaving the EU, but we are proud of our place in Europe and the world. We must be a society that is ambitious for everyone, welcomes diversity and is open to all. We must both take pride in our country and define that pride as being more internationalist than ever. That will make us all stronger.

I thank the people of Putney again for electing me. It is such an honour. I promise that I will work hard every minute of every day to serve and represent you.

2.48 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): First, Mr Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you on your successful re-appointment. Thank you for everything you have done for us in the past.

I welcome the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) to the House of Commons. Her speech was very measured. I do not agree with much of it, as she will expect, but it is a pleasure to have her in the House. I worked extremely closely with her predecessor, Justine Greening. The hon. Lady may not know this, but the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, which I introduced as a private Member's Bill, got through despite being 16th in the ballot largely because of the support I had from her predecessor, as well as Opposition Members and many others, including Glenys Kinnock and Mariella Frostrup. Justine Greening put real effort and determination into getting the Bill through and it was a real privilege for me to work with her. The purpose of the Bill was to make sure that women and children in the third world and developing countries were protected against female genital mutilation and things of that sort. In saying all that, I want to make it clear that there is a degree of continuity of some sort between the hon. Lady's speech and mine, although I have to dissociate myself from remarks of hers on which I will not comment right now.

I always enjoy speeches by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—they are such fun. He comes at us 100% and there is never any let-up. I pointed out that we Maastricht rebels—I had the honour to lead that rebellion in 1992-93—acted as we did because for us it was about democracy and the benefits that will now come to us as we leave the European Union. The European Union was going to take the democratic decision making of this country and hand it over to what was, in effect, a European government. As I said yesterday, parliamentary sovereignty and democracy run together. We are not “hard Brexiters”; we are democrats. We are people who believe that this country should be governed by the people, that people should be governed by themselves, and I would have thought that SNP Members, above all others, understood that.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Cash: In a minute. It may surprise the hon. Gentleman to hear that, while I am a fervent believer in the United Kingdom, which includes Scotland,

Northern Ireland, Wales and England, I do understand, for reasons not far removed from my reasons for wanting the UK not to be subjugated to the European Union, why the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire and his colleagues indulge this passion—understandable but wrong—for leaving the United Kingdom. I understand where they are coming from, so to that extent I appreciate some of the remarks he made, but I disagree fundamentally regarding the outcome they desire. It would lead to a lot of trouble for Scotland were it to leave the United Kingdom, as the referendum demonstrated.

The European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill is not just about Brexit. It is primarily about the United Kingdom and our future. The reason why we adopted the position we took on Maastricht, and later on Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon, and in the debate of the past few years and on the referendum, hinges on one simple principle: the ability of the people of this country to govern themselves through their elected representatives on the basis of their free choice in general elections. We are not little Englanders or trying somehow to make our country less democratic. We fought this battle for democracy and the rights of our own people, our own voters. That is why I am delighted that we now have a significant majority and will be able to put into effect the right of the British people to govern themselves through a range of policies, unconstrained by the European Union and the European Commission.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The argument the hon. Gentleman is making about voters getting who they vote for and governing themselves is pertinent in Scotland. His party have been rejected by 75% of the people of Scotland. We have an unelected Tory Government governing Scotland. Surely he sees the justice of being able to ask the Scottish people whether they want to continue with a Government that 75% of them have rejected, and what they want to do about the European Union, where 62% of them want to remain.

Sir William Cash: If the people of Scotland ever were to obtain independence and stay in the European Union, the extent to which they would be subjugated in a range of areas—fishing and many others—would become very apparent to them. That would be extremely damaging to the Scottish economy. Through the qualified majority votes of other countries, Scotland would find that, as a relatively small country, the experience would not be at all advantageous.

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Is it not so nice, after so much anguish over the past three years, that tonight we are at last delivering on the result of this referendum, a democratic vote that we are now respecting?

Sir William Cash: I so much agree with what my hon. Friend has said, because he has been with us right the way through the passage of this over the past decade and more. People on this side of the House have fought, sometimes against the establishment, in order to achieve this objective. I can only thank the British people with all my heart for the decision they have taken. We have been the catalysts. We have tried to present the arguments. If the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire is right at all, it is about the fact that there has been a

victory in the general election: the British people have spoken and they have supported the idea of leaving the EU, and we will do so accordingly on 31 January.

I wish to make a further point. The decision to leave was taken by the British people, but not on a party political basis. The argument in this House always gravitates around party politics, but the decision in the referendum was taken by the British people in their individual homes; at breakfast or on the night before they sat around and talked to one another, asking, “What are we going to do tomorrow?” They made that decision but then found that remainder MPs, whether on the Opposition Benches or even on our Benches, were repudiating the decision that the individual voters had made, whether they came from Labour, Liberal Democrat or, more likely, Conservative constituencies. They deeply resented the fact that they had decided, with their families, to go to the ballot box to vote to leave the EU in that referendum and then found, to their intense annoyance, fury and disappointment, that their Member of Parliament had used the position they had in this House to frustrate the decision that the people had taken. That is why so many Labour Members lost their seats. People in this House did not appreciate the fact that in Labour leave marginals—in particular, in places north of Coventry in coal and steel communities—the European Coal and Steel Community and the massive subsidies given to the other countries had deprived people of their livelihoods, with much of the collapse of the steel and coal industry being driven by the anti-competitive nature of the European Coal and Steel Community framework. If we were to take a map of the UK and superimpose upon it the coal and steel communities, we would see a direct correlation with the decisions taken in the general election, when people drove out Labour Members of Parliament because they were not doing what voters wanted them to do. They wanted to leave the EU, and the Labour Members who were driven out had refused to allow them to determine their own constituency and national interest. That is where the problem lies. The Labour party simply cannot bring itself, even now, to understand the feelings of the people north of Coventry and in other parts of the country who found that their own Member of Parliament had let them down.

There was a simple reason for the referendum: it was clear that the collusion between the two Front-Bench teams in 1992-93 would lead to our having to stay in the European Union and accept the Maastricht treaty. That was what the referendum was all about. We now have a huge opportunity, in a completely new environment where we take control of our own laws in this House in accordance with proper democratic principles, to create a new global trading relationship to ensure that we are able not only to govern ourselves but to work in co-operation with other countries on our own terms, not on the terms that were laid down by the European Union. I look to the Secretary of State in the full knowledge that he and the Prime Minister, and any other Ministers involved in developing policies on the European Union over the next year or two, will do so on our terms and conditions and not those imposed upon us by the European Union.

This is a great moment in our democratic history; furthermore, it is a great tribute to the British people, who listened to the arguments that were presented to preserve their democracy. I have said this before and I

will never apologise for saying it: the decisions were taken for democratic reasons. That is why we have ended up getting back our sovereignty, which we abdicated in 1971, after which we gradually gave up the veto. We will now be able to govern ourselves. It is a great tribute to the British people, and to the Members of Parliament who were returned in the election, that they will, through the majority we now have and with our Prime Minister, guarantee that this country will have a bright and effective future.

3.1 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Like others have done, may I welcome you back to your restored position in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker? We very much look forward to your presence moderating our proceedings in the years to come.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) on her maiden speech, which was a very accomplished contribution. There are a number of conventions and courtesies that need to be observed, but, as well as managing to observe them, the hon. Lady had something of substance and significance to say. I am sure we look forward to hearing her future contributions in the House.

A number of contributors to this debate have spoken about the way in which the tone of the debate has changed in the past few days, and that is a fair point to make. Some of that change in tone relates to the inevitability of the fact that the Bill will gain its Third Reading tonight. Another quite remarkable aspect is that there has been, if anything, an even greater inflation of the claims made about what will be possible. On that, time will tell.

Listening to the speech from the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), who was present until a minute or two ago, I was struck by what he said about the fishing industry and the opportunities that would be open to it outside the common fisheries policy. I have heard him make that speech many times over the years. It would, of course, have been a done deal had the Government led by the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) done what they said they were going to do and put the UK's removal from the common fisheries policy in the withdrawal agreement and not in the political declaration. Had that been the case, we would be looking at an exit from the common fisheries policy at the end of the month. Of course, they did not do that, despite their promise. They did not do it because, frankly, they did not have the political will to do it.

The removal of the United Kingdom from the common fisheries policy remains in the political declaration. It is not in the agreement that was negotiated by the Prime Minister either. Although we have never heard the reason why, I presume that there was not the political will to put it in the withdrawal agreement. As far as the claims made on behalf of Brexit regarding the future of the fishing industry are concerned, we shall have to wait and see. It will require the political will to deliver these promises, probably at the expense of commitments made to other communities and sectors.

David Duguid: The right hon. Gentleman and I obviously share a lot of interests in the fishing industry, as he has one of the largest ports in Scotland—but not the largest—in

[David Duguid]

his constituency. Does he not agree that by virtue of leaving the EU, we have no option but to leave the CFP? We leave the EU, we leave the common fisheries policy—no ifs, no buts.

Mr Carmichael: That is absolutely the case, and I think the hon. Gentleman knows me well enough to know that he will never get me to defend the common fisheries policy. But what follows thereafter will be down to the political decisions made by this Government and others, and to whether they have the political will to deliver the things that they have promised. He will remember the damage that was done to his party by a previous generation of Conservative Ministers who, at the time of our accession to the EEC in 1975, regarded the fishing industry as expendable. That is why the promises become ever more extravagant, but the more extravagant they are, the greater the consequences will be if they are not kept.

The Liberal Democrats will vote against the Bill on Third Reading, because we believe that this is a bad deal that risks the future integrity of the United Kingdom as a single unitary state, principally and most immediately because it risks the possibility of leaving Northern Ireland subject to different regulatory arrangements from the rest of the United Kingdom. That was something against which the former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), warned, along with Ruth Davidson, the then leader of the Scottish Conservatives. Those warnings were good and the former Prime Minister was wise to heed them, but the current Prime Minister has ignored them. If after 31 December we do find ourselves in the situation I have described, the future of the United Kingdom as a unitary state will be that much more bleak—and that is quite apart from the division and discord that we have heard mooted from the SNP Benches today.

I am also concerned that this deal very much leaves open the possibility of a no-deal Brexit at the end of 2020. In fact, the inclusion of clause 33 makes it that much more likely. My views on a no-deal Brexit are formed and reinforced by the businesses that come and talk to me. I think of one significant food-producing company in Orkney that directly employs 23 people, which may not sound like a great deal, but it is also an important part of the supply chain for farming in Orkney. Farming, of course, is the staple that keeps our economy in the Northern Isles stable and growing. That company tells me that for the past 20 years it has done everything that any Government would have asked it to. As a food producer, it has not gone for the low end of the market, but for the top—the niche market and the high-quality produce. Part of the reason that it went for that high-end product is that it was able to export. If its exports are now going to be put at a competitive disadvantage as a consequence of tariffs coming from a no-deal Brexit, the future of those 23 jobs and the farms around Orkney that supply the company will be bleak to say the very least.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman is making a point that pertains to my community in Na h-Eileanan an Iar as well. I heard Conservative voices saying that today the anguish will end. The anguish

might end for those in the Conservative party and their psychodrama, but with this Brexit coming—and there is no good Brexit—the anguish is just beginning for an awful lot of people outside this Chamber.

Mr Carmichael: I fear that the hon. Gentleman may well be right on that. As I said in relation to the fishing industry, time will eventually tell. I fear, as I say, that he is probably right. The worst of it is that I really hope he is not, because the people who will suffer are not the people sitting in here but those in the crofts, in the hill farms and in the fishing communities around his constituency and mine.

Another reason we consider this to be a bad Bill is that it is another step in the walk that the Government are taking away from commitments they have previously given on environmental protections, labour rights, food standards, and—worst of all, in a really quite mean-minded step—the protections that would be given to refugee children. If ever there were an illustration of the way in which we risk diminishing our standing on the world stage, that is most surely it.

As we have heard, the Secretary of State's Department is due to be wound up after the end of the month, but there is no doubting that even after that—even after 31 December—Brexit will continue to be a political phenomenon that will have a dominant effect on our politics for years to come. I make this plea today to those on the Treasury Bench: even if there is not to be a Department for it to shadow, this House should continue to have a Select Committee to look at the nature of the impact that Brexit has on our economy and our society.

The mantra on which the Government won their majority was that they would “get Brexit done”. The Prime Minister told us that he had an “oven-ready” deal. I think that to describe it as oven-ready was actually untypically understated for the Prime Minister. Many of us on the Opposition Benches see it in fact as being more half-baked than merely oven-ready. Ultimately, however, it is a deal that is going to leave us poorer and more isolated on the world stage, and it will affect us all.

Like many in this House, I am the first generation of my family to have had the opportunity to come here and to serve my community in this way. I did that because I was given opportunities principally by access to higher education, which I and my sisters all had. As a result of those opportunities, I have been able to develop whatever talents I have had. It grieves me enormously that the opportunities that we will now pass on to my sons—the next generation of my family—will be lesser than those that we inherited. It is for that reason that we shall vote against this Bill on Third Reading.

3.12 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): The European Union was a subject of enormous interest to my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, Nick Hurd, and indeed to his father, Douglas Hurd, who served this House with distinction and was the Foreign Secretary who took the United Kingdom into the Maastricht treaty through discussions that we have heard a great deal about in the course of the debate on this Bill. It was my great pleasure to work over many years with Nick as a local councillor in the constituency. I always found him

to be someone who was hugely engaged and passionate about the interests of his constituents. I have been very struck by how hon. and right hon. Members of this House on all sides, in all parties, have fed back what a pleasure it was to have him as a colleague, and I am sure we all wish him well as he moves on to new challenges.

It has been a great honour to be elected Member of Parliament for the constituency of Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, where I have been a councillor since 2002. Among the many characteristics of that outer London suburb is its long history as a place of settlement for those who have sought refuge in our country from persecution elsewhere. In particular, we have very large communities of those Jewish people who fled to the United Kingdom during the second world war and those Polish service personnel who came to this country to join our armed forces in that period and who subsequently settled and are still very significantly represented among our local population today.

The constituency is part of the London Borough of Hillingdon, of which I remain the deputy leader for another few days. Hillingdon is distinctive, among other things, for the fact that it is a gateway authority—one of the ports of entry into the United Kingdom—by virtue of the fact that we have Heathrow airport. Since the 2003 Hillingdon judgment, which clarified the legal responsibilities that local authorities in this country have under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 for unaccompanied young people in this country, it has been an area of great personal interest for me because of the impact on my home area. For the past decade, I have had the privilege of leading the national work across local government on the resettlement into the United Kingdom of refugees and, in particular, child refugees, alongside politicians from all the nations of the United Kingdom and representing all the political parties that are found in those nations. Over that period, we have seen more than a doubling in the arrival rates of child refugees into the care of local authorities, and we have seen our Government play an ever more active role alongside the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, with schemes such as the vulnerable persons relocation scheme from Syria and the vulnerable children's relocation scheme.

When I turn to clause 37 of the Bill, which has been the subject of comment and attempted amendments during its passage, it is clear that issues around the resettlement of vulnerable children are very much in the minds of many Members of this House. But it is vital that we recognise the strength of both the Government's and the United Kingdom's position when it comes to ensuring in practice the safety and wellbeing of refugee children. Border policy is, and has always been, a national competence, not one of the European Union. It is absolutely right that the opportunity to fully debate these issues will come in due course, when an immigration Bill comes before the House. But those of us closer to the sharp end of refugee resettlement will welcome the rejection of the amendments to clause 37, and I will briefly explain why.

The family reunion provisions are only relevant to a very tiny minority and to those children who are already in the care of authorities in other European countries. Those of us who had the opportunity to visit the Jungle camp in Calais and see the traffickers circling like sharks among nearly 10,000 vulnerable and destitute

people will recognise that those provisions have long been seen—in the case of the United Kingdom, because of our geography—as an exploitable route for traffickers to create the opportunity of family reunion and encourage people to consign vulnerable people, sometimes children, to the backs of lorries and to dinghies across the channel in an attempt to open a family reunion route. We hear Members talking with concern about the hostile environment, but I think we have seen in the past few months that there are few environments more hostile than those when it comes to the life and wellbeing of vulnerable refugees.

The second reason that we need to be pleased that those amendments have been rejected is the issue at the heart of family reunion provisions, which is parental responsibility. It has been said by many Members, and it is said a great deal in the media, that we want to reunite children with their families. But those of us who have experience of those provisions have found that, in practice, what tends to happen is that young people are brought to the United Kingdom to be linked up with a distant cousin—maybe a teenager—and they almost immediately become an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, and therefore in the care system of this country.

That really links to the third reason, which is that young refugees who are in the European Union are already within countries that have child protection systems that are very similar or equivalent to—in some cases better than—our own. The arrangements that the European Union, supported strongly by the United Kingdom, has in place, in particular with Turkey but also with other countries around the middle east and north Africa area, mean that there is usually a very real prospect of reuniting those young people with those with parental responsibility—either mum or dad, or at least close family members—who are in a refugee camp in the system in one of those countries. So it is going to be extremely rare that the best interest test will be passed in demonstrating that someone is better coming to a distant cousin who cannot look after them in the UK, rather than being reunited with mum and dad who may be in a refugee camp in Jordan or, indeed, in Turkey.

In conclusion, our local authorities in the United Kingdom have long battled with the consequences of the exploitation by traffickers of some weaknesses in our border system, and they do a remarkable job in challenging circumstances when we look at the outcomes that those children and young people go on to achieve. The UK has a huge reservoir of good will, and that good will is reflected in the actions of both this Government and previous Governments when it comes to support for child refugees, but our communities expect, in order to maintain that good will, that there will be robust, effective, efficient and just arrangements that minimise the risks to children. Clause 37 of this Bill, as proposed by the Government, opens the possibility of such arrangements when the immigration Bill comes forward. It is in practice a more compassionate and more pragmatic way forward on this issue than anything that I have heard proffered by the Opposition. It is one of many reasons to support this Bill, and I commend that clause to this House and to all Members with an interest in refugee children.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming numbers on this side of the House, many of us are listening with close attention to the points that are being made across this

[David Simmonds]

debate and we will be pressing to ensure that, when this Bill is passed today, it is not just the end of something, but the start of a new, constructive and positive relationship with our allies in the European Union.

3.22 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Congratulations, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your restoration to the Chair. I am pleased to speak after the new hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds). I wish I could say that I agreed with more of what he said. I do not for a moment doubt his personal commitment to refugee children, as I hope he will not doubt my own, but I think we have very different solutions to how we would address their plight. Frankly, I think our country has an awful lot more to do to honour our obligations to refugees, and in particular to child refugees, than perhaps was reflected in his words this afternoon.

I want to say a few words about the withdrawal agreement that is to be passed, I fear, later this afternoon, and I want to summarise some of the reasons why I will be voting against it. It does still contain this trapdoor to no deal at the end of this year, and despite everything that has been said from the Government Front Bench, I fail to understand why they are so doggedly remaining with this 11-month period—an entirely arbitrary period—and saying that that is the period within which they want to have agreed a new trade agreement. The President of the Commission said just yesterday that that is not going to yield the kind of deep agreement that apparently the Prime Minister wants, so it is very hard to see how this is actually in the best interests of the country.

Secondly, I worry deeply about the race to the bottom on social and environmental standards, which I think is at the heart of this withdrawal agreement. We heard again yesterday, when we raised these in the debate, that there is no guarantee against regression on environmental standards. There is certainly no dynamic alignment being suggested. Indeed, I fear we will see a wrecking ball being taken to the precious environmental standards in particular, which we have been absolutely dependent on our negotiations in the EU to achieve. The Prime Minister has of course famously said that Brexit is an opportunity to, in his words, “regulate differently”. When he says that he wants to regulate differently, I find it very hard to believe that he actually means improving regulations when it comes to the environment in particular.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The hon. Lady is raising two very important issues—their importance is, I think, recognised in all quarters of the House. I just wonder on what she is basing these fears. Is it from what she has heard in debates or read in our party manifesto or in anything else? On what is she basing these fears, other than shroud-waving and her own prejudice?

Caroline Lucas: I am basing my fears on the fact that, for example, I was a Member of the European Parliament for 10 years and regularly saw how the British Government, or not necessarily the Government, but Conservative MEPs, were the ones who were watering down. [Interruption.] I appreciate it was a Labour Government; I misspoke. I meant—[Interruption.] It feels as if the Conservatives

have been in power for so long that it is easy to forget that they haven’t been. What I want to say—let me say this correctly—is that what I witnessed over my 10 years in the European Parliament was Conservative MEPs constantly trying to water down the positions on the environment that the European Parliament was taking and therefore—

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: Not until I have finished answering the previous intervention. What I want to say in response to the first person who intervened on me, and who I have not yet finished answering, is that my concerns about what will happen to environmental standards under the withdrawal Bill are not being dictated by dogma; they are being dictated by my experience over 10 years in the European Parliament, watching Conservative MEPs constantly trying to water down environmental regulations.

Vicky Ford *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: As the hon. Lady is a former MEP, I happily give way to her.

Vicky Ford: As a former Conservative MEP and as a former member of the environment Committee of the European Parliament and a former Chair of a Committee of the European Parliament, may I completely refute the allegations the hon. Lady has just made? It was Conservative MEPs who led the negotiations on the Paris climate change conference that led to the global commitment to deal with the emissions that are threatening our planet, and it will be a Conservative British Government who will lead the negotiations for the next global climate change conference that will save our planet.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Lady doth protest a little too much, because the reality is that again and again I saw the briefings being provided by the Conservative party to Conservative MEPs, and they were all about watering down key environmental legislation. I was the rapporteur, for example, for a piece of legislation around illegally logged timber, and I can assure the hon. Lady that Tory MEPs and many others were watering it down.

Vicky Ford *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: I am not going to give way to the hon. Lady again.

Vicky Ford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: No, because this is not a very constructive conversation. I am very sure about the position that I am taking.

Vicky Ford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: No, the hon. Lady can sit down.

The fourth thing I want to say is that, as well as being deeply concerned, on the basis of evidence, about the very real risks of the Conservatives watering down

environmental legislation, there is the issue that many have returned to again and again today: the cruel and hostile position on refugees in general and on child refugees in particular. Frankly, I thought that what happened yesterday, watching the Tory MPs troop through the Lobby to vote against provisions that would have protected child refugees, was quite shameful.

I want to focus on parliamentary sovereignty—an issue that should be, I would have imagined, a concern to all of us in this place. Surely we ought to be able to agree that, irrespective of our very different positions on Brexit or even on environmental standards, we do want a voice and a say for MPs in this place. For almost four years we have heard that leaving the EU would mean taking back control, and yet it is now clearer than ever that that control will not rest with communities, regions or even Parliament, but will be almost entirely in the hands of No. 10 Downing Street.

For this Government, democratic scrutiny is apparently a mere inconvenience, so MPs are to be denied a say over our most important post-Brexit trading relationship. So let us be very clear: this is an Executive power grab. Indeed, ironically given all the rhetoric about taking back control, this withdrawal agreement Bill gives MPs in this place less of a say over our trade with the EU than Members of the European Parliament will have in Brussels, who have a guaranteed vote on trade deals as well as sight of the pre-negotiation mandate.

Trade agreements may not always be headline-grabbing news, but they are very far from just being a dry subject about tariffs and taxes. They now have a profound impact on our efforts to tackle the climate crisis, and on our food standards, workers' rights and vital public services. Our future relationship with the EU should be open to scrutiny and approval by this Parliament. We should be able to prevent the setting of a dangerous precedent of MPs being denied any oversight not just of this agreement but of future post-Brexit trade deals, such as that to be concluded with the US. Significantly, as we heard yesterday, the Prime Minister's previous EU withdrawal agreement did include much-needed provisions for parliamentary scrutiny. They were outlined in clause 31. They gave MPs oversight of the negotiating objectives and a vote on the final deal, and required regular reporting during negotiations. That clause is conspicuous by its absence from the new Bill.

There is to be no parliamentary scrutiny of the future relationship with the EU, which is by far our largest trading partner. Indeed, any transparency will be entirely dependent on the good will of the Executive. We should have had an obligation for the Government to publish their negotiating objectives. They should have been unable to proceed with those negotiations until they had been approved by this House. We should have had real transparency during negotiations. Texts should be published after each round of negotiations, giving MPs the opportunity to review progress. The Government have often sought to reassure the public and parliamentarians alike about trade negotiations, but unless we have full transparency those reassurances are worth nothing.

We should have had a meaningful vote on the deal itself and, of course, it should have been on an amendable motion before any final deal was ratified. The lack of scrutiny afforded to trade agreements is a relic of a bygone era. Today, trade agreements permeate every

element of our lives, from the food we eat, to our environment and labour standards to the protection of public services such as the NHS, yet it is staggering that MPs have less of a say over trade agreements than far narrower policy initiatives. Last, but not least, we should have had a comprehensive impact assessment that is available for proper review. So far, the Government have completely failed in their duty to assess the impact of Brexit. In the amendment that I moved yesterday, I proposed an independent body to consider the impact of any new deal on climate change, human rights and the economy. It seems a great shame to me that that amendment was defeated.

All I am asking for is that we should have our democracy upheld, so that MPs can do their jobs and hold Government to account. Significantly, the other place did pass an amendment to the Trade Bill in the previous Session, which would have given Parliament a say over post-Brexit trade deals, including on transparency during negotiations, a vote on the mandate and a final vote on the deal. The other place seems to be doing a better job of standing up for all our interests than we are doing here ourselves. We should not be letting this go through without parliamentary scrutiny. We should not be setting a precedent for Parliament to be denied scrutiny, not just of this agreement but of future trade agreements too.

The final point that I want to make is that clearly, under our rotten electoral system, the Government won the election with a majority of 80 seats. However, that does not reflect the public's views on the deal, and, indeed, on the confirmatory referendum. I accept that under this electoral system they have a majority of 80, but that gives them particular responsibilities—*[Interruption.]* One of which might be to actually listen to what someone on the Opposition Benches is saying. A majority of 80 gives the Government particular responsibilities. Those responsibilities are to address the very many reasons that people voted to leave the EU. I have been travelling around the country listening to leave voters on the many reasons they had for voting leave. Of course, yes, some of them did indeed vote that way because they have fundamental disagreements with the EU, but many, many people I spoke to voted leave because they wanted to send a clear message to all of us here.

The message they wanted to send was that they believe the status quo is intolerable. To that extent, they were right. The social contract is broken, and the power game is rigged. The referendum outcome was a resounding radical rejection of the status quo, of an economy that brutally fails so many, forcing parents to use food banks to feed their children, demonising immigrants and condemning us to climate breakdown. It was also a powerful and furious comment on our broken democracy.

All too often, it feels to people—particularly those who are more distant from London—that politics is something that gets done to them rather than by them, or with them. Brexit laid bare the extent to which our governance structures are derelict. When citizens were deprived of a credible representative power that clearly belongs to or is accountable to them, it led to anger with the most remote authority of all. The EU was effectively blamed for the UK's structural elitism and held responsible as the source of all powerlessness.

[Caroline Lucas]

The Bill shows no sign of giving us back control, or crucially, of giving back control to many of the people who voted leave in good faith, expecting that that was what it was going to be about. There is no sense here that there will be any change to the settlement on the way we are governed. There is no sense that this Government will be one who, as well as redistributing financial resources, might just consider redistributing power. Those are some of the many reasons why I will vote against the Bill today.

3.35 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I congratulate you on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker, and on becoming the first woman ever to be Chairman of Ways and Means—you make us all very proud.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). Something that she missed out of her speech—inadvertently, I am sure—was that the Prime Minister's father led the way on landmark legislation. He led the habitats directive through the European Parliament, showing that Conservative leadership on the environment runs in the family.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) on his excellent maiden speech, showing not only that he understands in great detail the plight of refugees, including child refugees in particular, but that he has the experience and some of the solutions to make sure that we keep those people safe. We in the Conservative party always want to keep children—particularly refugee children—safe.

I am delighted that the Bill finally paves the way for the UK to build a relationship with the European Union that is based on a free trade agreement. After nearly three years of being stuck—effectively re-running the result of the referendum—this Parliament is free to take a significant, positive step forward. Once we pass the Bill, a horizon of opportunity is in front of us. The political declaration set out our aim to have no tariffs, no fees and no quotas in the economic relationship. I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and his ministerial team for their relentless determination to deliver on the referendum result. That is what we have been trying to do for the last three years, and I know that he has worked incredibly hard and taken hundreds of flights. It is very much appreciated by me and the British people.

As someone who has worked for decades in impacted industries, including car manufacturing, banking, fintech and travel tech, I am pleased that we will leave with a deal, in an orderly way. This Government's ambition is to ensure that we not only maintain but build on our relationships with our partners across the channel. It is often said that trade negotiations take many years and that it is therefore overly ambitious to try to conclude an agreement by the end of the year, but there has never been a trade negotiation like this one in the history of the world. We start from a position of 100% alignment. We need to agree where it makes sense to stay aligned and how we do that, and where we want to diverge. It seems to me that this is a perfectly achievable objective, given good political will on both sides of the negotiating table.

Regulatory alignment is a complex system of product standards, safety standards and type approval processes. I want to speak about that as I believe that some of the rhetoric on legislation has been unhelpful. We can all remember talk of bendy bananas, curved cucumbers and unhappy hoovers, but in reality, the vast majority of regulation facilitates trading safely and fairly, especially within the manufacturing sector, where international and EU standards have remained stable for many decades. The vast majority of them are driven not by Government or in Committee rooms but by industry. Most trading arrangements aim to optimise interoperability through the recognition of other parties' standards and agreements on equivalence and adequacy. This is standard in global trading arrangements.

Alan Brown: If, as the hon. Lady says, all these regulations and agreements are actually driven by industry, what is there to be gained from leaving the EU? The Conservatives claim that the Government are taking back control, but according to her, industry drives all this regulation.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, but it drives standards. There are three global standards across the world—one from the EU, one from the US and one from China—and they do not always have to be the same. They largely do align, but there could be differences based on geography and specific things we want for our industries. As we move forward, we might want to diverge in some areas, particularly in emerging technologies. Yes, industry drives them, but industry will be talking to us here, probably encouraging us to align in areas where there is no reason to diverge, but in other areas there will be opportunities to diverge. I can think of some areas where we could enhance things in a way that the EU has not been able to do. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"]

Rolls-Royce is based in Chichester. Like all car manufacturers, it relies on just-in-time supply chains, with parts and components moving across the channel from country to country several times during the manufacturing process. Such frictionless movement requires regulatory alignment or recognition of equivalent standards. This ensures quality, safety and environmental mitigation. It also avoids the need for car manufacturers to invest in large stock levels of critical components, which is important because it enables safe sustainable profit margins in a highly competitive market. We understand this. There is no need to go backwards and put barriers in the way of highly integrated UK-EU manufacturing, but we must work with the industry on both sides of the channel to put new IT systems in place to automate these new arrangements.

Despite my firm belief in recognising and standardising regulations, I recognise that they can stifle growth if they are not implemented carefully, particularly in fast-evolving sectors. Tech is a prime example—another area where I have spent many decades in my career. The UK has a significant advantage in tech and some of the world's finest academic institutions—we now boast three of the top 10 universities worldwide—and our pool of top talent is world class. Developing and retaining employees with key skills is critical for our knowledge-based economy. We are home to many new businesses, with digital venture capital investment exceeding £6 billion in 2018 alone—the highest in Europe. The UK is one of the world's largest technology ecosystems.

To ensure that we keep our competitive advantage, I urge the Government to review techUK's recommendations on our future digital trade policy to ensure that we continue to lead in the global digital landscape. The UK is a global leader in fintech, biotech, environmental tech, which is sometimes referred to as green tech, and education tech—to name just a few fast-growing areas. We are the best country in Europe in which to start a technology business and must continue to be so. To prevent the rise of too many new barriers, we must adapt our regulatory frameworks as new and exciting technologies emerge and we change our interactions with them. That is the opportunity.

Simultaneously, we must be vigilant against the threats that new tech can bring. We must enable cross-border data flows in a way that protects our citizens' data without impeding business growth. Here we must collaborate internationally, not just with the EU but with the OECD and the G20, and avoid digital protectionism. For example, the forced localisation of data—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members asked for advantages, but they do not seem to be listening. I am giving an example of an area where we could improve. We must avoid the forced localisation of data, the imposition of tariffs and the enforced mandatory transfer of source codes, algorithms or encryption keys as conditions of market access. We must also acknowledge where the EU has got it right and co-operate with it. Some of us might have found the recent GDPR legislation a bit tricky in our personal lives, but it is an example of protecting citizens' rights in the digital space.

In accepting that dynamic alignment in some sectors such as the automotive sector may be advantageous for the UK, I would argue in the same breath that greater divergence will be vital in future emerging technologies. For sectors focused on artificial intelligence, cyber-security, data mining or the internet of things, speed and time to market are key to enabling emerging technologies, and we will have the opportunity to build simpler processes that work for the UK market.

Opportunity awaits the UK, and only by passing this legislation can we get there. I hope that when we do, Members throughout the House will call for compromise, and will take an informed approach to regulation that protects existing industries while creating competitive advantage in emerging ones.

Finally, let me say this, as someone who voted to remain in the referendum of 2016 but has voted to support Brexit ever since—five times, and counting. The step that we are taking in leaving the EU is a major change, and with change comes some risk but also opportunity. We must all show leadership; we should not be scaremongering. The whole of the UK, including all its constituent parts, is a dynamic, agile and trusted global partner, and we are already a global leader in foreign direct business investment. We have so much to build on. I look forward to supporting the Government and colleagues across the House to make Brexit both a reality and an opportunity.

3.45 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Let me begin, Madam Deputy Speaker, by congratulating you on your recent election. It is a matter of some regard that we now have the first female Chair of Ways and Means.

It feels as though we have been at this for quite a long time. Here we are at, perhaps, one minute to midnight, and we have probably the penultimate opportunity to discuss these matters before the deed is done. It is a matter of some sadness to me that the proposals before us today are an even more myopic, small-minded and miserable set of proposals than the ones that were mooted at the beginning. I was sent here at the election of 12 December to oppose them, which is why I will vote for the amendment and against the substantive motion this evening.

There are many reasons why that is so, but I shall touch on just four. First, this course of action diminishes the character of the people who live in these islands. It makes us seem selfish, unco-operative and insular, and I do not believe that that accurately characterises the people who live not just in Scotland, but in England too.

Secondly, these proposals make foreigners out of many of our neighbours who have lived among us for a generation or more. In my own city, tens of thousands of people who were born in mainland Europe but have made the decision to raise their families and build their homes and careers in our communities will lose their status, or have it fundamentally altered. More important, in the longer term, the loss of freedom of movement will pose an existential threat to the future prosperity of my country.

Thirdly, the proposals represent a fundamental shift in the relationship between the devolved Administrations in the United Kingdom and the central Government. That is not to say that when we talk about a power grab it means that some responsibilities are being taken away from the Scottish Government. I do not say that. The responsibilities remain, but the power to act in those areas is being severely constrained and curtailed by frameworks and statutes set by this Parliament—even to the extent, in these proposals, that United Kingdom Ministers are taking the power to make secondary legislation in areas that this Parliament has decided should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Finally, I am against the proposals because they will impoverish the people whom I represent. I do not say that this catastrophe will be visited on us the day after exit day; I do not even say that it will happen in the weeks and months after that; but there will be a slow, insidious, grinding reduction in the living standards of the people of this country, until we wake up in a few years' time and realise that we are so much poorer than we might have been, and so much poorer than similar communities in mainland Europe.

Mr Perkins: The hon. Gentleman and I have voted in the same way on many parts of this Bill. He is right to say that all the forecasts suggest that Brexit will make people in Britain poorer, but those same forecasts say that Scotland leaving the UK will make Britain poorer, so why is he in favour of that?

Tommy Sheppard: They do not say that. I will happily supply the hon. Member with lots of compelling evidence as to why Scotland would prosper as an independent country rather than being dragged down by the central Government of the United Kingdom.

I know that many people are looking to the future in this debate, and that many envision this as a bright new dawn for the United Kingdom. They see a world where

[Tommy Sheppard]

the authority and status of this nation will be restored in the eyes of the world. I know that people genuinely think that—I do not say that they are insincere in this belief—but I do say that it is a delusion, a mirage, to suggest that this will happen. If you want evidence for this, look no further than what has been happening over recent months. A compromised United Kingdom Government, understanding that their ability to negotiate a trade agreement with the United States will be so much more diminished compared with their ability as part of a major European bloc, have got themselves into the embarrassing situation of demonstrating servility to the Trump Administration in order to try to protect their future economic prosperity. That is what the future holds. We will have to make unholy alliances and awful justifications for doing deals with certain people in order to get trade agreements.

I am sure that there are Conservative Members who have sympathy with some of the points that I have made but they are not going to express them today, because that great political party—arguably the greatest, historically, in Great Britain—has got itself into a situation whereby it is impossible to progress in that party unless one evangelises the cause of Brexit. Dissenting voices are no longer allowed. The right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) is typical of many whose joy and enthusiasm for what is about to happen are unbridled. He cannot wait to pop the champagne corks and break out the bunting in celebration, but I am afraid that the future is nowhere near as rosy as he expects. He and others who have chosen this path are going to be severely disappointed.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Member agree that, regardless of our political views on whether Brexit is good or bad, the reality is where we are? Does he also agree that all Members need an evidence base on which to make informed decisions? Does he share my concern that the Regulatory Policy Committee report that was issued in October stated that the Committee did not have sufficient time to make a proper assessment of the impact and that it had not been able to meet Ministers? Surely there has been sufficient time between October and now to rebuild that impact assessment so that we may all know what we are voting for.

Tommy Sheppard: Throughout this entire process, we have been asked to take decisions without adequate information, so that is entirely consistent with the way in which this matter has been conducted.

I want to move on to consider the question of political mandates, which are quite important in this discussion. To do that, we have to consider the election that took place on 12 December, in which people were asked their view and Brexit was very much the central issue of the campaign, certainly in most of the United Kingdom. Others have said—my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) has said it repeatedly—that a majority of the people who voted in that election throughout the United Kingdom voted for parties that either wanted to stop Brexit altogether or wanted a fundamental re-examination of the terms on which it was being proposed.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tommy Sheppard: I did not think that there was a factual dispute about that, but I will happily be corrected if I have got it wrong.

Alex Chalk: On the issue of factual disputes, is it not also right to take into account the fact that in Scotland 55% of people voted for parties that are Unionist and want Scotland to remain in the United Kingdom?

Tommy Sheppard: If the hon. Gentleman had had the patience to wait for another couple of paragraphs, he would have allowed me to develop my point. I will address explicitly what he says.

The point is that we have a Government elected on 43% of the vote in an electoral system that I believe corrupts the expression of popular opinion across Parliament, rather than allowing it to be deliberated. But rules are rules, and we all went into the election understanding the rules of engagement and what the contest would be. I am not in any way saying that I do not accept the result and the Government, even with 43% on a first-past-the-post basis and a majority of more than 86, have a legitimate democratic mandate not just in principle to leave the European Union, but to deliver Brexit on the terms that it proposed to the electorate. I accept that.

However, I do not accept—this is my central contention—that that mandate runs in Scotland. The 12 December vote was very much a tale of two election campaigns. The Conservative party won the campaign in England, which was dominated by the relationship that this country will have with the European Union. The SNP won the campaign in Scotland, which was dominated by whether Scotland would have the right to choose to go down the path set here by the United Kingdom—[*Interruption.*] I am being heckled by the right hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly), who I think is still a co-chair of the Conservative party, so let me explain and offer some rationale. I do not say these things glibly.

Others have talked about statistics. The Scottish National party won the election in 80% of the areas in which it was contested in Scotland, and 80% of the Members of Parliament returned here from Scotland are from the SNP. We won 45% of the popular vote, and the central proposition that we put to the electorate was that Scotland and the people who live in Scotland should have the right to choose how they are governed and whether they want to go down the path chosen by the United Kingdom Government.

There are echoes and similarities between what happened in December 2019 and what happened in May 2015. Then, as now, a Conservative Government were returned with a majority. Then, as now, the SNP won an overwhelming majority of seats in Scotland. The difference is that in 2015 we did not seek a mandate from the people of Scotland in relation to the constitutional position or how the country should be governed. We did not do that because the election took place just months after the 2014 referendum, when the electorate made a choice and decided to remain in the United Kingdom. That does not apply now, because in December 2019 we went to the Scottish electorate and explicitly

asked them to endorse the proposition that people who live in Scotland should have the right to choose how they are governed and whether they wish to go down the Brexit path being offered by the United Kingdom Government.

Simon Hoare: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tommy Sheppard: If the hon. Gentleman wants to dispute that that was the central part of our campaign, I will happily take his intervention,

Simon Hoare: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who came into the House at exactly the same time as I did. Unless I was living in some parallel universe, I seem to remember hearing loads of speeches from SNP Members immediately after the 2015 election arguing for and advocating Scottish independence. What he has just said is therefore not actually a correct reflection of history. As close as the 2015 election was to the referendum on independence, his party was advocating it loudly and with great passion from those Benches.

Tommy Sheppard: I am unsure whether the hon. Gentleman is listening. I am saying that the SNP put a proposition before the people in a democratic election and they voted for it. Just to be sure, when I talk about this mandate, it was not only the SNP that talked about this matter. The central proposition of the Conservative party in Scotland was, “Say no to indyref 2.” The Conservative party in Scotland asked the people of Scotland to reject a referendum on independence, but the people of Scotland instead rejected the Conservative party. That is the truth of the matter, and that is why that party now has less than half the Members it had four weeks ago.

We have a new situation in these islands. For the first time in history, in this Chamber, which is charged with representing the whole United Kingdom, are Members elected from the two principal countries within the United Kingdom who have different mandates for the constitution of the country. I invite the Government to say—this will not go away—how they will respond, how they will acknowledge Scottish public opinion and how they will come to an accommodation with the political representatives of Scotland. The start of that process will be to understand what their response will be to the approach from the First Minister of Scotland, who has asked for negotiations with a view to transferring powers to the Scottish Government so that they may consult the people on how they are governed.

To be crystal clear, we are not asking the Conservative party or this Parliament to agree with the notion of Scottish independence. We are not even asking them to agree that there should be another referendum. We are simply saying they should agree that when and whether that happens should be a matter for the people who live in Scotland, and no one else. The decisions on these matters should be made by the people via their elected representatives in the national Parliament of Scotland in Edinburgh and not here in the Union Parliament in London.

That is the central proposition and, in making it, we are consistent with the claim of right for Scotland, which was debated in this very Chamber in July 2018 and endorsed by the House without opposition. I know

that many Conservative Members did not really support it and thought the better option was to ignore the debate and pretend it was not happening, but it did happen and it will happen again.

If the request from the First Minister of Scotland and the request from the Scottish Parliament are denied and ignored, it will be inconsistent with the claim of right for Scotland. It will mean this House does not agree that it is a matter for the Scottish people to determine their own form of government. That would be a very serious position, because it would mean this Parliament is advocating that this United Kingdom should continue to include parts of this island even against the wishes of the people who live there. That would undermine the fundamental principle of consent on which this constitution has so far been based.

We would no longer be talking about a Union of equals, or a Union at all; we would be talking about the subsumption of Scotland as a territory into a wider political territory known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is a different constitutional position. If people want to argue it, we are happy to take them on and have that debate, but at least be honest about it.

The most important people in all this are not those who voted for the Government or for the SNP in opposition. The most important people in this debate are those who voted for neither. Many people, including in my constituency, put their faith in the capacity of the United Kingdom to reform itself and to give voice and expression to their needs and fears within this Union Parliament. They voted in significant but not overwhelming numbers for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in particular, and many of them are now asking themselves whether, indeed, the type of society they wish to live in can be delivered by this Union Parliament and this Government, or whether it would be a better course of action to consider Scotland becoming a politically independent country capable of setting its own priorities and giving vent to the aspirations of its own people.

They have not yet made that decision. They are on a journey and the debate, my friends, is wide open, but one of the key things that will focus that debate is the attitude and reaction of this United Kingdom Government. If the Government decide to keep their head in the sand and to pretend that this did not happen north of the border, if they pretend it is business as usual, if they use their 80-seat majority to railroad stuff through Parliament, if they drag Scotland out against its will, if they refuse to give Scotland a say and if they refuse to make any accommodation, they will become the best recruiting sergeant for the cause of independence in Scotland. We look forward to explaining to the people of Scotland the consequences of the Government's actions.

We will be voting against this miserable set of proposals because we have not voted for them, the people we represent have not voted for them and the Scottish Parliament will not consent to them. These proposals are wrong and they do not represent the aspirations and the character of the people of Scotland. That, in the long term, will be represented much better by Scotland becoming an independent European nation in its own right.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Neil Parish.

4.4 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—patience pays in this House. Congratulations on being elected not only as Deputy Speaker but as Chairman of Ways and Means. It is a great privilege to have you in that role.

This afternoon, we have had three maiden speeches. First, there was my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), whom I very much welcome to the House. I also pay tribute to his predecessor, Glyn Davies, whom I worked with a great deal on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and elsewhere. There is huge interest in Montgomery in farming, especially sheep farming. The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) made a very good maiden speech, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who brings to the House huge expertise on migration and dealing with those whose families are seeking to come to this country.

It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate because it is a historic moment. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State and his team, not only for what is happening now—it is much easier now we have a majority of 80 to win some votes—but for his patience and tenacity through the hours of debate that went on for several years. I pay tribute to Opposition Members who opposed the Bill because they did not like the type of Brexit, but many Opposition Members opposed it because they just did not want Brexit. That is what the British people worked out in the general election. There are no two ways about it. When we were on the doorstep, it was clear that they had worked out that Brexit needed to be done. I therefore welcome the Bill.

I also welcome the fact that the Government will take Executive powers to negotiate in Europe. In the past two and a half to three years, we were dogged by the fact that while we were busily trying to negotiate with the European Union, this British Parliament was busy undermining our negotiations and our negotiators. Did people think that the European Union and the European Commission were not watching what was going on? Were they feeding into it? I do not know. Perhaps that is one conspiracy theory too many and I will leave such matters to the Leader of the Opposition.

To be serious, we are at a moment when we can deliver Brexit. In a way, the two great planks of the European Union are the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. I have had direct experience of chairing the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development for two years. Do hon. Members honestly believe that we cannot create a better agriculture policy for the four nations of the United Kingdom instead of the one for 27 or 28 countries in the European Union, from the north of Finland to the south of Greece? Of course we can. Why do we have a three-crop rule that makes us plant all sorts of crops that we do not necessarily need in this country because we grow a lot of grass, which is excellent for the environment? It is because east Germany grows nothing but maize, maize, maize, year in, year out. That is why we have the three-crop rule.

With all those matters, we can make things simpler. We can even help our friends north of the border. We can do all sorts of things to create a better agriculture policy once we have got the Bill through.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Alex Chalk *rose*—

Neil Parish: I will give way first to my hon. Friend and then to almost a friend on the other side of the Chamber.

Alex Chalk: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is making an excellent and impassioned speech. Does he agree that as part of creating a better agriculture policy, we can include restoring, promoting and incentivising biodiversity so that we have a richer, more diverse and secure countryside?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is not only about the Agriculture Bill; it is about the Environment Bill and how we link the two together. It is about the way we deal with our soils and plant trees. Everybody in this place and outside wants to plant more trees, but let us plant them in a smart way so they hold our soils and prevent flooding. Let us do all those things so that our biodiversity increases. Then we can make sure that we keep good agricultural production and good soils, which are key.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I will go a step further than “almost a friend” and say that I am grateful to my friend for giving way. Dropping the friendliness for a moment and bringing the politics back into it straight, surely the hon. Gentleman would respect the devolved competences of the Scottish Government in agriculture and fishing in the new way of negotiation that the British Government plan to use to handle things in Brussels? We would not want to see the rise of a UK centralised superstate, would we?

Neil Parish: A superstate is precisely what the European Union wants to make itself into, and that is one of the reasons why we are leaving. To throw the ball straight back, as the hon. Gentleman knows I can, although we do not want to create a United Kingdom superstate, as he puts it, what we do want is some similarity between agricultural policy north of the border and south of it. We do not want to create huge competition in different policy areas. Let us work together to deliver a policy that works. I am not arguing against having an English policy or a Scottish policy, but let us work together to produce a policy that works.

Alan Brown *rose*—

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

Neil Parish: I had better let the hon. Gentleman, who was on the EFRA Committee, speak next.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman must know he is undermining his own argument about taking back control in saying that we cannot have divergence between Scotland and England. We now face 11 months where there is the risk of a no-deal crash-out. Will he confirm that the EFRA Committee he chaired and which I sat on heard evidence that if we were to trade on World Trade Organisation rules, we could not stop the import of chlorinated chicken or hormone-injected beef because

of most-favoured-nation status? We could not prevent that under environmental standards. Did we not hear from the farming industry that the big concern was the market being flooded by Argentinian beef, which would ruin our industry? We can have any policy we want, but if we trade on WTO rules, farming is finished.

Neil Parish: The answer is clear. We now have a clear mandate to leave the European Union, and we can negotiate with the EU having the ability to walk away if we choose. That is precisely why we will get a trade deal with the EU. We have spent three years tying the hands of the Government's negotiators and making sure that that deal does not happen. I am a farmer, as the House well knows. I know that either you decide to do a deal and shake on it, or you decide the price is too high and walk away. Parliament has spent all its time tying our hands. It is now time to get that deal. I have every confidence in the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to deliver that deal. Opposition Members have spent the last three years thwarting us, and the British people have finally worked it out.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): My hon. Friend has chaired the EFRA Committee. Can he confirm that in relation to sanitary and phytosanitary standards, each country that chooses to import grants a licence specific to the product, so whatever we choose to import, it is down to DEFRA to grant the licence and has nothing to do with WTO rules? It is to do with the individual country's sanitary standards.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend is right. With chicken, the issue is not the use of chlorine gas in the processing—in fact, only about 20% of American chicken is dealt with in that way. The point is the Americans rear broilers at probably three or four times the density that we do and they use far more antibiotics, and they use the chlorine process to enable them to bring their chicken to the market. All we have to do as we do a trade deal with the European Union is lay down the rules on the welfare of chickens. We are actually proposing higher welfare standards in the Agriculture Bill. That is how we deal with it. Chlorine is not necessarily the issue.

Deidre Brock: Let me return to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the NFU and common frameworks that were discussed when we considered the Agriculture Bill in the last Parliament. I was surprised to hear those comments because all the NFUs that gave evidence to the Committee were telling us that they wanted to see their ability to differentiate the different jurisdictions maintained and that frameworks should always be agreed between the four NFUs, not imposed. What does he say to them?

Neil Parish: I have no problem with that proposal, but this is about how people work together. For example, we would not want a beef special premium being paid north of the border and some sort of area payment being paid south of it, because that would immediately create competition in the British market.

Deidre Brock *rose*—

Neil Parish: No, I am not going to give way again, because I have been very generous. The key is getting the farming unions to work together in order to say,

“Let's have a policy that has some similarities.” I accept that it will have differences, but we have to make sure that we have a policy that works for the whole of the United Kingdom, because the Conservative party is not the party that wants to break up the UK.

I wish to go on to fishing—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Neil Parish: I have given way four or five times, so I will keep going because the Deputy Speaker is saying that at some stage we might like to vote this evening. Do we really believe that there will not be much greater access to fish and fishing rights? Do we not believe we will be able to have a better environmental policy than the common fisheries policy?

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that what we have found when speaking to real fisherman, as he and I have, over the past 30-plus years is that all they have said is that they want to withdraw from this terrible policy, whereby in the south-west 8% of the cod comes to the UK and almost 80% goes to France?

Neil Parish: If anyone can speak for the fishing industry in this House, it is my hon. Friend, who has huge experience of this, as did her previous husband. I pay a huge tribute to that. We need to leave the CFP. As we set our new policies for fishing, we will get greater fishing rights, because the problem in 1972-73 was that the fisherman were sold away and we had terrible quotas. That needs to be put right and I know that she, like me and many others in this House, is determined to ensure that those wrongs are put right. Not only will we be able to address fishing rights and the amount of fish, but there is also the possibility of having much better environmental management. We will be able to examine the types of nets being used and to make sure that we sort out many of the issues relating to porpoises, dolphins and everything that is caught in bycatch. So there are many positive sides of leaving the CAP, the CFP and the EU.

I wanted to make this speech today because I have listened for three years as the opposition of all sorts of shapes, sizes and colours have thwarted Brexit in this House. They put forward all sorts of reasons, some spurious, some right and some not, in order that we would not leave the EU. Now we will leave it and let us be positive. We can get this trade deal, an agriculture policy that works and a fishing policy that works. We have an environment Bill coming through whereby we are going to put an office for environmental protection in place to make sure that our rules are not only as good as those of the EU, but better. Let us be positive tonight. Let us actually believe in this great United Kingdom. The best union of all is not the European Union but the United Kingdom, so let us not destroy that. Let us go forward and, together, this Parliament will deliver. I look forward to hearing from the Secretary of State and Ministers exactly how we are going to do it. I have every faith in not only the Secretary of State and Ministers, but the Prime Minister being able to deliver a good deal for the UK. For goodness' sake, let us once and for all actually leave the European Union.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It is a pleasure to call to make his maiden speech Mr Stephen Farry.

4.20 pm

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I should say that I have already had that privilege, before the Christmas break. None the less, thank you for the entreaty.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I sincerely apologise to the hon. Gentleman. It will be obvious that I have been absent from the Chair for a few weeks. Given that the hon. Gentleman is not making his maiden speech, he can take lots of interventions and everyone can shout at him.

Stephen Farry: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for setting me up in that regard. May I pass on formally our congratulations on your election as Deputy Speaker?

I wish to introduce Northern Ireland into the debate, given the fact that it has been so central to the Brexit process so far. There are still so many unresolved issues and questions and it is important that we reflect on them as the Bill passes Third Reading, because there is still a long journey ahead.

Before I do that, I wish to make some general comments and to share in the concerns expressed by many Opposition Members about where we are with the Bill. There is uncertainty as to whether a trade deal can be done in the next 11 and a half months; there is the risk of no deal; there is the nature of the future relationship to consider; and there are issues of the parliamentary scrutiny, or lack thereof, of where we go from here. Of course, there is also more general regret about the Brexit process, which is going to leave the UK in a worse position overall in terms of the economy, society, security and the environment. That is particularly true of my own region of Northern Ireland.

I wish to focus on the unresolved issues. Brexit throws up a unique set of challenges for Northern Ireland, because, perhaps more than any other part of the UK, we are part of that wider network—that integrated framework across these islands. We are interdependent in terms of our trade and our society, both north-south on the island and in the wider whole-UK context as well. The problem of Brexit is that, whatever way it falls, it entails some degree of new barriers, borders or friction. In the context of Northern Ireland, that creates a sense of winning and a sense of loss, in terms not only of the economy but of wider society and the emotional and psychological impacts. We also need to be acutely aware of the potential political ramifications in the medium to long term.

That said, we saw this week the almost remarkable situation in which, across the political divide in Northern Ireland, we had all the parties coming together behind a common set of amendments, which were also backed by—and, indeed, in many respects driven by—the local business community in Northern Ireland, which has itself come together in an almost unprecedented way because of the huge importance of the issues before us. I remain very much convinced, as do my colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party, that Northern

Ireland's place is as part of the European Union. The Democratic Unionist party comes from a leave, pro-Brexit perspective. Regardless of how we reached this point, we all share the desire to ensure that we have the seamless, unfettered trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain that was the theme of the amendments, to protect the wider UK internal market and to ensure that the GB-to-Northern Ireland interface can be managed successfully.

Several wider points need to be made about the context. First, we should not see emerging—or indeed being forced on us—a choice or a trade-off between some sort of border or interface on the island of Ireland and a border or interface down the Irish sea. We want to avoid both those possibilities, but there will be a huge challenge in the way things have fallen in that respect. Indeed, the Assembly has almost been set up with this choice to make in four or eight years' time: whether to maintain ongoing regulatory alignment for goods on an all-island and European basis, or align with the rest of the UK. It is not a choice that anyone particularly relishes and it builds a degree of instability into our political structures. Members will be aware that talks are ongoing back in Belfast as we speak to try to restore the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly—I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for his work in that regard over the past months—but Brexit adds a new layer of complexity to that wider context.

The focus of the debate and the amendments has largely been the interface between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, mainly because that is much more under the control of the UK Government. However, the process from Great Britain into Northern Ireland—and, indeed, beyond into the European Union—is just as important, if not more so. I think that those plans were not tested so much through amendments because that work depends on the outworkings of the future free trade arrangement. In that regard, it is worth stressing that a free trade agreement—even one that is very far reaching and inclusive—is not the same as the arrangements we currently have as part of the European Union; it is not the same as a customs union and a single market. A free trade agreement is a qualitatively different concept. We currently have a free trade arrangement through which we can access trade agreements with the rest of the world, and that is what we are giving up for an untested future.

There is ambiguity about where Northern Ireland will sit with respect to these future trade relations—whether we are part of a wider European Union framework when it comes to goods, or whether we are part of the wider UK trade policy. There was a time, particularly under the proposals of the former Prime Minister, when Northern Ireland could have had a foot in both camps, and the business community was embracing that. The danger now is that Northern Ireland could be marginalised and peripheral in both UK and EU trade terms, with local businesses facing considerable ongoing economic costs. In particular, there may well be barriers to accessing certain markets or attracting investment, because people will just see Northern Ireland as a complicated place and think that it is too difficult to engage with us. Our economy, which is already struggling from a low starting point, will continue to be marginalised.

As we look to a future relationship, it is important that we bear in mind the importance of integrating goods with access to labour; I am particularly thinking about ongoing freedom of movement and the service economy. It is very difficult to uncouple the four freedoms of the European single market. We need some degree of new deal for Northern Ireland because local businesses are going to face considerable economic costs. There will be a need for financial support as mitigation, or to support the transition as local companies adjust to the new arrangements and the new market frameworks.

Let me return to what happens as we look ahead to the next phase. There is a gap between: the rhetoric, declarations and promises of the UK Government and Ministers, particularly the Prime Minister; what we have been told by a range of different experts; and the reality of international and European law on customs and regulatory matters. That is an ongoing challenge which needs to be addressed, but Northern Ireland businesses want to see the commitments to unfettered access being honoured. We want to ensure that there is no discrimination against Northern Ireland goods, and it is important that we assess on an ongoing basis the economic impact of the Northern Ireland protocol.

My final point is that there has been a lot of focus on the joint report as being the almost magic solution to every unresolved question at this stage, as well as on the free trade agreement and negotiations. Given the very particular circumstances faced by Northern Ireland, my appeal would be for Northern Ireland representatives to be integral to those discussions and for there to be a proper feedback loop to the Northern Ireland Assembly, Executive and whatever democratic structures we can put in place back in Northern Ireland.

4.29 pm

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. You recently enjoyed a landslide victory of your own, so huge congratulations to you on your appointment.

We finally reach the end of the beginning stage of Brexit. It is a huge matter of regret to me that this Parliament and its predecessor have failed to compromise and the remain camp in the United Kingdom has learned the same lesson that the pro-Union camp did in Scotland: first past the post can be pretty brutal when only one party is on one side of a binary issue. Whereas Scotland, a country that voted against independence, keeps electing pro-independence MPs, at least in the UK there was a majority in favour—

Alan Brown *rose*—

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Mr Perkins: Let me make a little progress and then I will give way.

At least in the UK there was a majority, albeit a very narrow one, for leaving the EU.

It is a tremendous failure that the 2017-19 Parliament was unable to agree on a settlement that respected both the referendum and the 2017 general election result. I regret the decision the British public took, but I accept it. I also accept that the indecision and uncertainty that

dogged the 2017 Parliament was deeply damaging for businesses and for confidence in this institution. It is tremendously regrettable that the former Prime Minister, having held a general election that she did not need to, refused to negotiate with the Labour party leader and was then put under tremendous pressure by the Eurosceptics in her own party when she did attempt to negotiate. I also regret that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) decided to pursue a second general election rather than attempting to get the Brexit matter resolved. Ultimately we are weaker as a result of that.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman correctly said that the SNP have 80% of seats and we favour independence, but a key plank of our mandate was actually Scotland's right to choose, so it does not matter what our views are on independence. He clearly has a different view. Does he not agree that the mandate we have is for the people of Scotland to choose either independence or to reconfirm that they want to stay in the Union?

Mr Perkins: We had a referendum. I went up to Scotland, as many other people did, during that referendum. It was very interesting that a few moments ago one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues proudly said, "We got 45% of the vote." I thought, "45%—that sounds familiar", and of course that is because it is precisely how many people voted for independence back in 2016.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Perkins: That matter is settled and I am going to deal with the matter that we are dealing with today.

However, I would just say this on Scotland. When people hear Scottish National party MPs stand up and say that the SNP is representing the people of Scotland who all voted in favour of staying in the EU, they should remember that the SNP spent less than 10% of the money on the EU referendum that they spent on the independence referendum. The SNP got exactly the result it wanted, which was that Scotland voted to stay in the EU but the UK voted to leave. The biggest priority for the SNP has always been independence, and that is why it took the position it did.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Mr Perkins: No, I am going to make some progress.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) claimed that it was the uncertainty that we had in the last Parliament that undermined our negotiations. Well, now we will see, because now there are no excuses for Conservative Members. There is no sense that Parliament's position is unknown. It is clear that we are going to leave the EU, and now they have no one else to blame. It is entirely their responsibility, and the fishermen, the farmers and the car workers up at Nissan will see whether it was this Parliament that was preventing the Government from getting the deal that they promised during the referendum.

As we vote on this tonight—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) rightly said, this is only the first part of all this and we will get

[Mr Perkins]

on to the detail after that vote—I am minded to remember that Vote Leave promised us during the last referendum that

“we will negotiate the terms of a new deal before we start any legal process to leave”.

That was one of the central promises of the Vote Leave campaign. When we vote tonight, we will be voting against that promise made by Vote Leave—we will be leaving the EU and then deciding on what basis we leave. But let us see if the Government are able to negotiate this much better deal. I confess that I will feel a huge sense of relief when the Bill passes tonight, so that we can move on to the next stage, and we will see whether the Government are able to deliver in any way on the promises that they made.

The future relationship is not sorted, and it is now for the Conservative party and its MPs to decide what that future relationship will be. They may well do it without Parliament having much of a say. Opponents of the new Tory Eurosceptic consensus have been swept away, and the supine, obedient group of Europhobic robots that we see in front of us have taken their place. Like lambs, they will lead us in whichever direction is ordered by the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who will receive his orders from Dominic Cummings. We will see what direction they take us in.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On the UK’s future relationship with the EU, the hon. Gentleman is content to leave it to the Tory Government, but on Scotland’s future relationship, all we get is being patronised; we cannot decide ourselves. The reality is that, in 2014, we were promised a guarantee of our place in the European Union by staying in the United Kingdom. That promise is null and void. We cannot have any more non-Scottish MPs patronising the Scottish people. Their mandate must be respected. We must have a referendum, and the Scottish people must decide—not non-Scottish MPs, who think this is better for Scotland. Scotland needs to decide.

Mr Perkins: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. I have already responded to that, and it does not take us any further to go on now.

I voted for the amendments that my colleagues tabled, and we were right to seek to improve the Bill. I regret that the new orthodoxy recognises no value in the Erasmus programme, which enables young people without huge wealth to enjoy some of the opportunities that young people with wealth will continue to enjoy. It was triumphalist and not sensible to remove the assurances from the Bill that the Prime Minister put in place on its Second Reading in the last Parliament. It is ultimately for the victors to decide who they want to appeal to—it is for the Conservative party. It has got the Brexit it wants now, and it can decide, but a party that refuses to try to speak to those who voted against it will find itself in an ever diminishing pool. The next leader of the Labour party will also need to learn that lesson.

I will not oppose the Bill’s Third Reading today, because the desire to get beyond this stage is powerful and palpable. Businesses and communities wish for the Government to map out the future that we foresee for

our country after Brexit, but the Government are foolish to continue to pursue the very narrow Brexit that they have suggested.

Our country has a long history of being a global player. We have taken an active interest in global affairs and made a contribution that far outweighs the size of our nation throughout history. Leaving the European Union does not have to mean relinquishing or reducing that global role. It does not have to mean retreating into narrow nationalism, but many who support it want that future for our country. The Conservative party has ceased to be a broad church. Only rampant Europhobia is to be tolerated now. I have never seen a less broad church—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members are pointing at the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) to describe what a broad church they are; that is how desperate it has got.

It is now for my party to become a broad church again and recognise the reasons why communities who voted Labour for decades chose to seek a future outside the EU. We need to seek a co-operative and internationalist path for our country. The Labour party will not win votes in this Parliament, but we can, if we choose, lead the way to a different but still close relationship with our nearest neighbours—one that eschews a mean-spirited approach to the most vulnerable people and seeks still to offer the opportunities to the next generation of young people that so many of our generation enjoyed.

4.39 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, my congratulations on your election to your new post—a historic appointment—and welcome back.

First, I will say that we in Her Majesty’s official Opposition will be abstaining on the SNP amendment tonight, because while we are sympathetic to its aims, our objections to this Bill are far wider. We object to so much in this Bill that we cannot confine ourselves to voting just for the reasoned amendment. We will be focused entirely on voting against the entire Bill on Third Reading—and no, that is not voting against Brexit; it is voting against this Bill.

Hon. Members: Oh, yes it is!

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order.

Thangam Debbonaire: Some hon. Members appear to think we are still in the Christmas pantomime season; we are not. Just saying that does not make it clever and does not make it right. All the Conservative Members who think they are about to vote to get Brexit done must know what lies ahead. They know—they must know—that trade negotiations take time. They must know that even if we are in alignment now, the Government’s stated intention is to diverge. So be in no doubt: trade negotiations will take longer than the precious few months that the Government have allowed. Getting them done at historic speed does not look very likely when the EU itself has already warned that it will take longer than that.

Whoever’s responsibility this is, the Government with this Bill—clause 33—have boxed themselves in so there is absolutely no get-out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) has said, clause 33 is a gimmick, but it is a gimmick at the expense of the

people of the United Kingdom. At the end of this year, if we are just days away from agreeing a trade deal or a few weeks away from sorting out the arrangements for moving medical devices or airline parts between the EU and the United Kingdom, it will make no difference: this Bill has bound the Government's own hands. There will be no extension, and that is why we call it a cliff edge.

We did not need to be here. This Opposition have accepted that Brexit is happening on 31 January. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah!"] Triumphantism is not terribly seemly in this circumstance. We also did not need to be in a position where we are letting down child refugees. Let it be on record that the Opposition stood up for child refugees. We stood up for child refugees in trying to hold the Government to their own commitment to Lord Alf Dubs. They have no mandate for doing this. It is mean-spirited and morally as well as politically unjustified. I hope in the other place that their lordships will restore our amendment, which is actually about restoring the Government's own commitment that the Prime Minister himself agreed should be in the previous version of this withdrawal agreement Bill. I hope they will restore it, and that we will stand up for child refugees in that House and in this.

I come to the maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) showed the people of Putney that they made an excellent choice. She clearly already knows and loves her constituency and understands the lives and values of her constituents. She has already been a strong voice for them this afternoon. She covered an enormous amount in her first speech, and I salute her ability to do that with clarity and great voice. I am already delighted to have her as a colleague, and I look forward to working with her. The hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) also made his maiden speech, and I congratulate him as he also showed his care for his constituency and his clear commitment to represent his constituents and their values in this place.

To the Government and to the Prime Minister, the Opposition say: this is now on them. Despite the lack of provision for scrutiny in this Bill, we will still use every tool we can to scrutinise the progress of the negotiations on the future relationship. Obviously, Conservative Members believe this is a great future. If that is a great future, I will happily stand here and be corrected.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Thangam Debbonaire: No, I will not give way.

If, however, trade negotiations do not get concluded with record speed over the next few weeks and months, we will be holding this Government to account. We will expose the consequences to the people we were sent here to represent. We will expose the Government's actions. We will use every tool that we have in order to do that. We owe it to the people of the United Kingdom to show them that we stood up for them today and every day, so we will vote against this Bill tonight.

4.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): During the Committee stage this week and today on Third Reading we have had good debates

on the withdrawal agreement Bill. This Bill will implement in UK law the withdrawal agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union, ensuring that the UK departs the EU with a deal, getting Brexit done on 31 January, as we promised the British public we would. It will once and for all deliver on the mandate given to us not once but twice: in June 2016 and again in December 2019.

I would like to thank Members across the House who have contributed to the Committee stage over the last two years—two days. [*Interruption.*] Sometimes days can feel like years, but the new tone of this House obviously makes time seem to pass much quicker. I also add my thanks to the Clerks and officials in the Public Bill Office, who consistently provide invaluable support to Members in the House.

We have had three excellent maiden speeches in this debate, which also saw the very welcome return of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribbles Valley (Mr Evans) to the Chair, continuing the Lancashire theme that we had at departmental questions. There was also the welcome election of the first female Chair of Ways and Means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) gave an excellent maiden speech—although he does have the benefit of having done it before. He spoke with warmth and passion about his home seat. He rightly paid tribute to his much-loved predecessor, who has given 50 years so far of public service. Having worked closely with him as my special adviser in the Department, I know that he will champion Wales throughout his time in the House, and I look forward to resuming my conversations with him on agriculture, and I am sure on rugby as well.

The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) gave a very good maiden speech, showing her passion for her constituency, and for the community groups and the community spaces with which she has worked. She referenced Clement Attlee and gave a speech that I am sure he would have been very proud to hear. She is right to highlight the value of the European Union citizens in her constituency. That is one of the safeguards that this Bill delivers, because we value their contribution not just in Putney but across the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) gave a first-class maiden speech, which displayed his clear and detailed knowledge and experience of immigration issues, and indeed it was clear that he held the attention of the House. It signalled the valuable contribution that I know he will make to forthcoming debates.

We also had a number of very powerful speeches from some of the most experienced Members of the House. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) spoke of the importance of place and the people who have spoken within that place, and with his 30,000-plus majority they certainly have spoken very clearly on behalf of my right hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) spoke about the importance of democratic accountability and of restoring control over our fishing, an issue that he has championed throughout his time in this place. We will restore to this country the advantages of our spectacular marine wealth through this Bill.

[Steve Barclay]

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) spoke of this as a great moment in our democracy and it being a tribute to the British people. May I gently say to my hon. Friend that it is also a tribute to him, who, despite criticism over the years, has stuck fast to his principles, and that is reflected in this Bill.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I entirely endorse that tribute. Under the Bill, and specifically under article 50, we will leave the European Union at 11 pm GMT on 31 January. As we leave at a precise specified time, those who wish to celebrate will need to look to a clock to mark the moment. It seems inconceivable to me and many colleagues that that clock should not be the most iconic timepiece in the world, Big Ben. Will my right hon. Friend make representations to the House of Commons Commission, whose decision it is, that Big Ben should bong for Brexit?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend will know that my opposite number often talked of a clock ticking. He will also know that that decision is for the House authorities, but I am sure they will have heard the representations he makes. This is an important moment in our national story, and I am sure they will want to reflect that in the appropriate way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) gave a very insightful speech, reflecting her detailed commercial expertise. She is particularly right to draw the attention of the House to emerging technologies as one of the key opportunities unlocked by taking back control of our trade policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke with the experience of a former Chair of the European Parliament's agriculture committee. As a farming constituency MP myself, I know that when he talks about what the National Farmers Union calls the "utter madness" of the three crop rule, dictating to our farmers what they can and cannot grow, he speaks powerfully of the opportunities that the Bill will unlock.

This evening, the Bill will pass to the other place with a very clear mandate from this House that now is the time to move forwards. I anticipate constructive scrutiny, as we would expect of the other place, but I have no doubt that their lordships will have heard the resounding message from the British people on 12 December and that they will have seen the clear will of this House as expressed by the sizeable majorities in the Committee votes. The other place has, on more than one occasion, shown itself capable of acting at remarkable speed when it considers that it is in the interests of democracy and votes in this House. Given that, it is my sincere hope that their lordships will now give due regard to the clear majorities in Committee and establish their endorsement of the Bill in a similar timely fashion.

The Bill will secure our departure from the European Union with a deal that gives certainty to businesses, protects the rights of our citizens and ensures that we regain control of our money, our borders, our laws and our trade policy. Once the Bill has been passed and the withdrawal agreement ratified, we will proceed swiftly to the completion of a free trade deal with the EU by the end of December 2020, as laid out in our manifesto, bringing the supremacy of EU law to an end and restoring permanently the sovereignty of this place.

The European Commission President yesterday gave what I thought was a very thoughtful speech at the London School of Economics, speaking of old friends and new beginnings. She expressed her desire to establish a future relationship that is "unprecedented in scope". In our later meeting with the Commission President, the Prime Minister made it clear that we share her desire for a relationship based on our shared history, interests and values. That is what we intend to build as a consequence of the Bill.

Three years ago, Parliament entrusted the decision of our relationship with the EU to the British people. By passing the Bill, we will send a clear message that we have listened and we have acted. In doing so, we will restore trust in this House and in our democracy. Once Brexit is delivered on 31 January, we can turn our eyes towards our other national priorities: education and skills; making our country safer; investing in the future of our much-loved NHS; and levelling up all parts of the United Kingdom. This is what people care about. It is what this people's Government cares about. Passing the Brexit Bill will unlock the time and energy to make those priorities a reality.

It is time to get Brexit done. The Bill does so. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 62, Noes 329.

Division No. 13]

[4.55 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah	Jardine, Christine
Black, Mhairi	Lake, Ben
Blackford, rh Ian	Law, Chris
Blackman, Kirsty	Linden, David
Bonnar, Steven	Lucas, Caroline
Brock, Deidre	MacAskill, Kenny
Brown, Alan	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Callaghan, Amy	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Cameron, Dr Lisa	McDonald, Stuart C.
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	McLaughlin, Anne
Chamberlain, Wendy	Monaghan, Carol
Chapman, Douglas	Moran, Layla
Cherry, Joanna	Newlands, Gavin
Cooper, Daisy	Nicolson, John
Cowan, Ronnie	O'Hara, Brendan
Crawley, Angela	Olney, Sarah
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Oswald, Kirsten
Day, Martyn	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Sheppard, Tommy
Doogan, Dave	Smith, Alyn
Dorans, Allan	Stephens, Chris
Eastwood, Colum	Stone, Jamie
Farron, Tim	Thewliss, Alison
Farry, Stephen	Thompson, Owen
Ferrier, Margaret	Thomson, Richard
Flynn, Stephen	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Gibson, Patricia	Williams, Hywel
Grady, Patrick	Wilson, Munira
Grant, Peter	Wishart, Pete
Gray, Neil	
Hendry, Drew	
Hobhouse, Wera	
Hosie, Stewart	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Claire Hanna and
Jonathan Edwards

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Aiken, Nickie
Afolami, Bim	Aldous, Peter
Afriyie, Adam	Allan, Lucy
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Amess, Sir David

Anderson, Lee	Davies, Dr James	Higginbotham, Antony	Millar, Robin
Anderson, Stuart	Davies, Mims	Hinds, rh Damian	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Philip	Hoare, Simon	Milling, Amanda
Ansell, Caroline	Davis, rh Mr David	Holden, Mr Richard	Mills, Nigel
Argar, Edward	Davison, Dehenna	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mohindra, Gagan
Atherton, Sarah	Dines, Miss Sarah	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Moore, Damien
Atkins, Victoria	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holloway, Adam	Moore, Robbie
Bacon, Mr Gareth	Docherty, Leo	Holmes, Paul	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Bacon, Mr Richard	Dorries, Ms Nadine	Howell, John	Morris, Anne Marie
Badenoch, Kemi (<i>Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty</i>)	Double, Steve	Howell, Paul	Morris, David
Bailey, Shaun	Dowden, rh Oliver	Huddleston, Nigel	Morrissey, Joy
Baillie, Siobhan	Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morton, Wendy
Baker, Duncan	Drax, Richard	Hughes, Eddie	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Baker, Mr Steve	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hunt, Jane	Mumby-Croft, Holly
Baldwin, Harriett	Duddridge, James	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Mundell, rh David
Barclay, rh Steve	Duguid, David	Hunt, Tom	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Baron, Mr John	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Bell, Aaron	Dunne, rh Philip	Javid, rh Sajid	Neill, Sir Robert
Benton, Scott	Eastwood, Mark	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Nici, Lia
Beresford, Sir Paul	Edwards, Ruth	Jenkinson, Mark	Nokes, rh Caroline
Bhatti, Saqib	Ellis, rh Michael	Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea	Norman, rh Jesse
Blackman, Bob	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenrick, rh Robert	O'Brien, Neil
Blunt, Crispin	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Johnson, rh Boris	Offord, Dr Matthew
Bone, Mr Peter	Eustice, George	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Opperman, Guy
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Evans, Dr Luke	Johnson, Gareth	Parish, Neil
Bowie, Andrew	Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnston, David	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Bradley, Ben	Everitt, Ben	Jones, Andrew	Pawsey, Mark
Bradley, rh Karen	Fabricant, Michael	Jones, rh Mr David	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Brady, Sir Graham	Farris, Laura	Jones, Fay	Penrose, John
Braverman, Suella	Fell, Simon	Jones, Mr Marcus	Percy, Andrew
Brereton, Jack	Fletcher, Katherine	Jupp, Simon	Philp, Chris
Bridgen, Andrew	Fletcher, Mark	Kawczynski, Daniel	Pincher, rh Christopher
Brine, Steve	Fletcher, Nick	Kearns, Alicia	Poulter, Dr Dan
Bristow, Paul	Ford, Vicky	Keegan, Gillian	Pow, Rebecca
Britcliffe, Sara	Foster, Kevin	Knight, Julian	Prentis, Victoria
Brokenshire, rh James	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kruger, Danny	Pritchard, Mark
Browne, Anthony	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Quin, Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona	Frazer, Lucy	Largan, Robert	Quince, Will
Buchan, Felicity	Freeman, George	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Randall, Tom
Buckland, rh Robert	Freer, Mike	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Redwood, rh John
Burghart, Alex	Fuller, Richard	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Butler, Rob	Garnier, Mark	Levy, Ian	Richards, Nicola
Carter, Andy	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Lewer, Andrew	Richardson, Angela
Cartlidge, James	Gibb, rh Nick	Lewis, rh Brandon	Roberts, Rob
Cash, Sir William	Gibson, Peter	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Cates, Miriam	Gideon, Jo	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Robinson, Mary
Caulfield, Maria	Glen, John	Loder, Chris	Rosindell, Andrew
Chalk, Alex	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Logan, Mark	Rowley, Lee
Chishti, Rehman	Gove, rh Michael	Longhi, Marco	Russell, Dean
Chope, Sir Christopher	Graham, Richard	Lopez, Julia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley</i>)	Rutley, David
Churchill, Jo	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopresti, Jack	Sambrook, Gary
Clark, rh Greg	Gray, James	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Saxby, Selaine
Clarke, Mr Simon	Grayling, rh Chris	Loughton, Tim	Scully, Paul
Clarke, Theo	Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig	Seely, Bob
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Griffith, Andrew	Mackrory, Cherylyn	Selous, Andrew
Clarkson, Chris	Griffiths, Kate	Macleane, Rachel	Sharma, rh Alok
Cleverly, rh James	Grundy, James	Mak, Alan	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Gullis, Jonathan	Malthouse, Kit	Skidmore, rh Chris
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Halfon, rh Robert	Mangnall, Anthony	Smith, Chloe
Colburn, Elliot	Hall, Luke	Mann, Scott	Smith, Greg
Collins, Damian	Hammond, Stephen	Marson, Julie	Smith, Henry
Costa, Alberto	Hancock, rh Matt	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Solloway, Amanda
Courts, Robert	Hands, rh Greg	Mayhew, Jerome	Spencer, Dr Ben
Coutinho, Claire	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Maynard, Paul	Spencer, rh Mark
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Harris, Rebecca	McCartney, Jason	Stevenson, Jane
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, Sally-Ann	McCartney, Karl	Stevenson, John
Crosbie, Virginia	Hart, rh Simon	McPartland, Stephen	Stewart, Iain
Crouch, Tracey	Hayes, rh Sir John	McVey, rh Esther	Stride, rh Mel
Daly, James	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Menzies, Mark	Sturdy, Julian
Davies, David T. C.	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Merriman, Huw	Sunak, rh Rishi
Davies, Gareth	Henderson, Gordon	Metcalfe, Stephen	Sunderland, James
	Henry, Darren		Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin

Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Tom Pursglove and
 James Morris**

Question accordingly negated.

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),
 That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 231.

Division No. 14]**[5.10 pm****AYES**

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote
 cast y Leo Docherty*)
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve

Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David

Davison, Dehenna
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard

Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Mrs Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
 by Lee Rowley*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda

Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec

Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Pursglove and
James Morris

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard

Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lillian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Haight, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobbouse, Wera
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Law, Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 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
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate

Oswald, Kirsten	Starmer, rh Keir
Owatemi, Taiwo	Stephens, Chris
Owen, Sarah	Stevens, Jo
Pennycook, Matthew	Stone, Jamie
Phillips, Jess	Streeting, Wes
Phillipson, Bridget	Sultana, Zarah
Pollard, Luke	Tami, rh Mark
Powell, Lucy	Tarry, Sam
Qureshi, Yasmin	Thewliss, Alison
Rayner, Angela	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Reed, Mr Steve	Thompson, Owen
Reeves, Ellie (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous</i>)	Thomson, Richard
Reeves, Rachel	Thornberry, rh Emily
Reynolds, Jonathan	Timms, rh Stephen
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Twist, Liz
Rimmer, Ms Marie	Vaz, rh Valerie
Rodda, Matt	Webbe, Claudia
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	West, Catherine
Saville Roberts, rh Liz	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Shah, Naz	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Sharma, Mr Virendra	Whitley, Mick
Sheerman, Mr Barry	Whittome, Nadia
Sheppard, Tommy	Williams, Hywel
Siddiq, Tulip	Wilson, Munira
Slaughter, Andy	Winter, Beth
Smith, Alyn	Wishart, Pete
Smith, Cat	Yasin, Mohammad
Smith, Nick	Zeichner, Daniel
Smyth, Karin	Tellers for the Noes:
Sobel, Alex	Jeff Smith and
	Matt Western

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is a historic moment for all of us. We must reflect on the fact that this is the first time that a part of the Union—a country of the Union—is having something done to it that it resents. The Scottish Government and the Scottish National party made it clear over the past three and a half years that we were seeking to compromise and to ensure that what the people of Scotland voted for—staying in the European Union and our rights as EU citizens—was respected.

It was interesting that when the Secretary of State summed up the debate today, he made no reference to my colleagues' powerful speeches about that desire for our rights to be respected and the fact that we do not consent, under any circumstances, to the people of Scotland and our country being taken out of the European Union against our will. Let us make no mistake: that is exactly what is happening. Yesterday, the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly not to give its consent.

This is a constitutional crisis. We will not and cannot accept what has been done to us. I say to the Prime Minister and the Government—

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. That was not me saying “Sit down.” The right hon. Member can finish his point briefly.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an important point. In the election in December, the people of Scotland stood by the Scottish National party on the basis of our right to choose. We will not accept being taken out of the European Union, and I say to the Prime Minister, “Respect democracy. Respect the election result. Respect the right of the people of Scotland to choose our future.” We will have our referendum, Prime Minister, and Scotland will remain an independent European country.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, but he knows and the House knows that that was not a point of order but a point of debate. In the circumstances, I allowed him to make his point. I am quite sure that he will find a way to continue the debate, and that the Prime Minister will find a way to continue to answer the points he raises.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may not be aware that Hitachi at Newton Aycliffe, which employs many of my constituents, has today announced that it is making a third of the workforce redundant, meaning that 250 jobs are to be lost. The company says that the restructuring is not being taken lightly, but reflects the need to remain competitive and put the factory on a more sustainable footing for the long term by winning more manufacturing orders in the future. The lost jobs could be the thin end of the wedge, as the announcement could have a knock-on effect on jobs in the supply chain. Do you know whether the Government intend to make a statement on the job losses and on the action they plan to assist the company at this difficult time?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have heard the hon. Gentleman's point of order. I deduce that what he is really saying is that he wishes to bring a Minister to the Dispatch Box to answer his eloquently made point. I suggest that, at the beginning of next week, perhaps by way of an urgent question or some other means, he will find a way to ensure that this important issue, which I am sure the House appreciates matters enormously in his constituency, is discussed properly in the Chamber.

Hospital Improvement Plans: VAT Rules

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

5.33 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair for this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased to have been granted this debate at a significant time in Parliament, following this evening's votes. I hope to shed some light on how complicated VAT rules, which have evolved over time in the NHS, are now creating incentives for trusts to behave contrary to the Government's objectives, in particular those relating to capital investment and the implementation of the long-term plan.

I am pleased to see the Minister for Health here to answer the debate. My expertise in the finer aspects of taxation policy and its operation is fairly limited, and I do not believe that he is a tax expert either, but before I came to this place I spent most of my professional life as an NHS manager so I know a lot about planning and delivering health services, including new hospitals. The Minister has clear policy objectives as the Government work to implement the NHS plan, which is predicated on place-based commissioning and improved capital infrastructure. I believe that, as the Minister for Health, he has an obligation to support NHS leaders by providing greater clarity on how the rules operate. Indeed, the Office of Tax Simplification agrees with me that this is a problem, with its 2017 report recording frustration

“about a number of cases where the VAT position was unclear...with HMRC and government tendering departments having differing interpretations.”

It noted that

“VAT liabilities should be clearly outlined during the tendering process for public services and contracts.”

The Government also appear to agree, and the spring statement announced a policy paper, although it was vague on details. The announcement was for:

“A policy paper exploring a potential reform to VAT refund rules for central government, with the aim of reducing administrative burdens and improving public sector productivity.”

The 2019 OTS update noted that that spring statement had involved a commitment to

“a policy paper on VAT Simplification and the public sector”.

It is essential to raise this issue now, because as we move towards implementing the NHS Plan we all need to understand exactly how the Government will allocate the necessary funding for hospital improvements and other infrastructure projects. The potential of VAT savings will increasingly become a major consideration for trusts up and down the country. Capital investment is always to be welcomed and it is long overdue. Whether we think we will have 40 or six new hospitals, my sympathies are with the finance directors and managers in trusts who are faced with the task of maximising these investments, and managing the competing interests of recruiting and retaining staff, developing integrated local health systems and securing local public trust in their plans. It is my belief that the underlying problem here is that the priorities of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department of Health and Social Care are not in alignment.

The problem manifests itself in a number of ways. First, a decade of underinvestment in our health service has led to NHS trusts desperately trying to recover whatever finances might be possible. Some of the VAT rules and debates go back decades. I hope the Minister does not rise to say that the last Labour Government used rules to involve the private sector and are responsible for some of this, and I respond by saying that it all started under Margaret Thatcher's outsourcing, and we simply do not help anyone. I hope we can be more helpful than that. That was the last comment I had back, so I am just stemming that off at the pass.

The real explosion in this issue came from the direction of the coalition Government and the creation of contracted-out services regulations. The HMRC manual “VAT Government and Public Bodies”, from 2012, states:

“Government departments and health authorities have been encouraged to contract out services to the private sector which would have traditionally been performed in-house”—

over many decades.—

“It is recognised that many of these services would be subject to VAT and where they were acquired for ‘non-business’ purposes, the non-reclaimable VAT could act as a disincentive to contracting-out.”

That was then the policy of the Government. The manual continues:

“It was therefore decided to compensate government departments and health authorities by a direct refund mechanism, which is provided for in section 41(3) of the VAT Act 1994. Under this provision, the Treasury issues a Direction, commonly known as the ‘Contracting Out Direction’ which lists both the government departments and health authorities that are eligible to claim refunds of VAT, and the services on which VAT can be refunded.”

For lay people, myself included, that in essence means that under these regulations full VAT could be recovered on the cost of a managed service which provided premises that could be used for delivering healthcare. Of course, the private sector was pleased, as it meant it could now, as it saw it, compete on a level playing field with the public sector. But really we should view any tax breaks or loopholes with extreme suspicion, as they lead to reduced revenue for the Exchequer. There should always be a compelling public interest for any tax breaks or loopholes. After this direction and as austerity has bitten, more and more complex arrangements have been set up.

Following the OTS 2017 report, I am sure many in the accounting departments across the public sector were relieved to hear last year's spring statement, when the then Chancellor announced a consultation on VAT in the public sector. This could mean a potential reform to VAT refund rules to reduce administration and improve public sector productivity. However, concerning, the language of the spring statement, and the background to it, appear to suggest a widening of VAT refunds for those engaged in services—that, again, is reducing the amount of VAT paid by public sector contractors back to the Treasury. I am worried that the Treasury are going to make the situation worse.

My good colleague in the other place, Lord Hunt, followed up on the whereabouts of the review in October, when he asked for an update on the review's progress. He was told by the Earl of Courtown to expect a policy paper for public consultation “in the coming months”. I know we have all been busy, but the world awaits and it

[Karin Smyth]

would be helpful if the Minister provided the House with an update on that review, either tonight or in writing afterwards.

The area of VAT avoidance that has attracted a great deal of attention, and that myself and many colleagues—including my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist)—visited the Treasury to talk about last year, is the establishment of wholly owned companies in NHS trusts. Such companies can be seen up and down the country, from Northumberland to Yeovil. They vary greatly between those that try to remain part of the NHS and those that position themselves as separate corporate businesses only loosely connected to patients and the public. Most are set up to deliver a full range of facilities management services—including cleaning, catering, porters and security—and then charge the parent trust for this managed service on a private finance initiative-style unitary fee basis.

We have heard that, to avoid charges of tax avoidance, which created a degree of media discussion, the new arrangements are supposed to be better from a service-delivery point of view. Ostensibly, they are solving problems with estates and facilities management and how staff are managed, but there is no evidence of that. In every case, almost all the benefits, some of which are considerable financial benefits for the trust, appear to come from tax changes, not service improvements. Many of the schemes have resulted in thousands of NHS staff being taken out of the NHS and transferred against their will into wholly owned subsidiaries. This increases fragmentation, and there are examples of companies falling out with their parent trust. There are also arguments about which organisation is responsible for what and who pays.

Far worse is that in some cases the use of a separate company is used to undermine national agreements on terms and conditions. Around 50 such proposals have been progressed or are in the pipeline, and it is highly worrying that they were advanced in secret, without consultation with patients or the workforce involved. When freedom of information requests were made for access to the business cases that sought to justify the changes, trade unions and others were denied access, with claims that the information was commercial and confidential.

Just this week, *The Pharmaceutical Journal* reported that 34% of trusts had outsourced their pharmacy service to a commercial firm and 16% have created wholly owned subsidiaries. The practice is now widespread. Despite that, the recent examples at the Bradford Trust and the Frimley Health Trust have been vigorously opposed, particularly by Unison, and it appears that both proposed schemes have been stopped. That is good news for thousands of low-paid staff who wish to remain NHS employees.

Thanks to the considerable pressure put on NHS Improvement, trusts must now in effect ask for permission before they create a subsidiary company, although far from being a device to prevent the practice, the seeking of permission appears more like a scheme to embellish some badly written business cases so that the changes can go ahead with a veneer of justification. Under some pressure, that process is being reviewed.

Although in the short term it appears that individual trusts will gain through tax advantages offered by the wholly owned companies, other trusts will not, and it means less VAT for the Treasury. But the Treasury seems unconcerned about the lost income. The practice is not a strategic, collaborative or positive solution to the problems that trusts face, and it is not about better employment. The NHS has agreed national terms and conditions for a good reason: because overall it works. All these schemes try to undermine the national agreements and offer staff less favourable terms to save money.

Having two-tier workforces is not a good way to progress. A few years ago, I made that point successfully in my own area of Bristol. The North Bristol NHS Trust, which was at the time under considerable financial pressure, was considering adopting a wholly owned company but, following local discussions, including with Unison, it recognised that in the local, highly competitive market for staff, at a time when the trust needed to start to collaborate on service development, it needed not to outsource. The creation of a second and third-tier workforce made no sense operationally and gave the wrong messages to staff and the public about valuing the all-important workforce across the entire Bristol health economy, so the trust did not do it.

As I touched on in my opening remarks, the controversy over VAT and how it applies in the NHS is relevant to infrastructure investment, because the temptation for the trusts set to benefit from the new capital—I accept that there is new capital, and that is good—will be to avoid paying VAT to reduce significantly the direct ongoing costs. That is why it is so important that the Government give careful consideration to how the investment is going to be made.

I believe the choices made by the Government on this issue will reflect how well they understand both the importance of the NHS estate itself, as part of the health ecosystem, and the direction of the long-term plan. I cannot emphasise enough—and I do think hon. Members understand this—that capital is not a technical, dry subject, but is crucial to the delivery of quality health care. It is not a burden on the system. It is time for us all to show we understand that we need a joined-up strategy and proper investment.

The thing I kept at the forefront of my mind as an NHS manager, and do so now as a local representative, is that the health service is wholly funded by the taxpayer, and the public have a great attachment to people and place when engaging with healthcare. Buildings are so much more than a pile of bricks of which to sweat the assets, or empty vessels to lease for maximum return. Buildings really are a physical manifestation of local people's love for and connection to their local health service. Local people are not over-concerned with how services are developed, but they do not expect their health service to behave in such a way as to constantly try to exploit tax loopholes or penalise staff.

For 15 years or so I have been a supporter of the concept of place-based commissioning, by which I mean local collaboration across the public sector, making good use of the publicly owned estate to deliver quality health services and maximising the value of the taxpayer's pound. Place-based commissioning has been the direction of travel for some time. It was knocked off course by

the Health and Social Care Act 2012, but there is hope of getting it back on track once the long-term plan is in place.

I understand that the setting up of a subsidiary might make sense in the short term for individual trusts, but it makes no sense for the wider health economy or the whole NHS. We must move from a competitive, short-term, market-driven approach at a micro level to a collaborative approach focused on overall gains. The logic of the VAT exploitation and WOCs practice is based on the old idea of trusts having autonomy, behaving like businesses and competing, but this is out of date and directly at odds with the NHS plan, which is built around place-based solutions like sustainability and transformation partnerships and integrated care schemes. On the contrary, the fundamental principle underpinning these initiatives and the Government's own strategy is much greater collaboration across the system, which absolutely includes the use of buildings and any capital investment.

Another example of what those running the health service are trying to grapple with is GP commissioning and the new primary care networks. One of my last jobs before coming to this place was running a GP commissioning group, so I understand how difficult it is to get practices to work together and align their businesses. Last summer the NHS published a document called "The Primary Care Network Contract DES and VAT", referring to the way in which the health service funds these proposals. The document sought to give guidance about VAT in the new primary care networks. The author goes to some pains to set out over several pages what NHS England "expects" will be the best approach—and then comes the following caveat:

"Although we anticipate the VAT treatment to follow the above analysis it is not straightforward. Practices should note that HM Revenue & Customs has not agreed the position described in this document and that they are the authority responsible for agreeing, administering and collecting VAT."

If the Government and NHS England are publishing guidance on how to set up these new organisations without really knowing how HMRC is going to treat them, how on earth can we expect people in the frontline to develop good services?

Let me mention another issue, which is local to my constituents and which I have been working on for some time: GP employment status. For the last five years, HMRC has been reviewing the employment status of GPs who provide NHS out-of-hours services, which are now called integrated urgent care services. During this period, demand for GP services has risen and the need identified by NHS England for a substantial—that is, 5,000-plus—increase in the number of GPs has not yet been met with whole-time equivalent resourcing. Based on arrangements in place since the formation of the NHS, GPs have continued to work on a self-employed basis, and this remains the desired option for many of them. This has been the subject of some political debate over a number of years, but it is the position as people understand it.

BrisDoc is a local GP organisation based in my constituency that provides urgent care services to the NHS. It has been faced with five years of uncertainty regarding its workforce because HMRC does not accept the legitimacy of independent GPs working on a self-employed basis, even though this correctly reflects the way services are contracted based on professional and

legal advice. How they are funded is a separate debate, but if HMRC changed GPs' status, it would increase the risk that GPs would not be willing to work and would increase the cost to the NHS. Both of these have a negative impact on NHS services, reducing GP capacity at a time when we need more, and costing more, which will ultimately lead to a greater cost for the Treasury.

The priority has to be on patient safety and care, and the provider, BrisDoc, has continued to fight for this focus in order to maintain the best possible level of GP availability. However, HMRC states that its focus is simply on "employment status" and not any wider implications of any change, whereas NHS England indicates that it cannot get involved with determining employment status for GPs, who are an essential part of the NHS workforce. This leaves BrisDoc vulnerable to financial and workforce loss while doing everything possible to maintain the service. Its plea, and my plea on behalf of my constituents, is this: can the overall strategy for the GP workforce be reviewed to ensure that the key priorities and objectives are aligned with regard to any change in employment status? It is unacceptable nonsense for it to spend five years between the two Government Departments. Will the Minister be willing to meet me and BrisDoc to better understand the problem?

I hope that I have impressed on the Minister not only the preposterous nature of this VAT problem but how critical it is that we sort this loophole out now through proper consultation with the NHS and an urgent publication of the VAT review. Finance directors in particular need the support to make decisions that align with the strategic vision of the long-term plan, not that are at odds with it. To do this, the guidance from HMRC and the policies of the Department of Health and Social Care must be joined up. If the Government are, as they have indicated, supportive of the strategic direction of the NHS plan, then this must mean supporting local health economies to flourish through the collaborative partnerships integral to STPs and integrated care systems. They simply cannot work if trusts, and other delivery partners, are in competition with each other.

After a decade of fairly imprudent underinvestment and failing policy, we really are at a crossroads, and we need to get this right. If we can level the playing field for all trusts through proper funding, and consistent, sensible VAT rules that do not divert time and effort from the objectives of the trusts to serve their local patient population, we could have every reason to be positive about the potential of local place-based commissioning for success.

5.51 pm

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair in your new role as Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Ways and Means.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) on securing this debate. I know this is an important subject for her, as she has raised it on many occasions, but she is right that capital—the buildings our NHS operates out of—is actually an important subject for all of us. While it is a shame that there are not many Members in the Chamber, I hope that quality makes up for a lack of quantity. That is certainly the

[Edward Argar]

case with her speech, but it is a pleasure to see the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist)—who, if I recall correctly, held a debate on this subject almost a year ago—here as well.

The hon. Member for Bristol South was perhaps being unduly modest in her opening remarks about her knowledge of this subject and expertise in this area. While it is always a pleasure to see her speak about it, I always watch with a certain degree of trepidation, because she does know her subject extremely well. My knowledge of VAT and tax rules is rather more limited. Although I spent a period of time as a member of a primary care trust board many years ago, I suspect that my knowledge base will not be as deep as hers. However, I will endeavour to respond to all the points she has made. I recognise that the article she wrote that was published this morning on PoliticsHome highlights a number of these issues as well.

I will start by addressing the capital investment programme that the Government have set out and the impact of VAT on that, and then move on to the hon. Lady's points about wholly owned subsidiaries and some of her subsequent points. In respect of the VAT position with the new health infrastructure plan hospitals—the new 40 hospitals we will be building—under the tax code VAT will be payable by hospital trusts involved in construction, reflecting that these are new builds and we would expect the appropriate HMRC regulations to be adhered to. However, as the hon. Lady touched on in setting out the background to the VAT rules, VAT chargeable on supplies of goods and services in the UK is collected by HMRC on behalf of the Government, so all moneys received in that way are reinvested in public services.

In addition, the funding provided for the 40 new hospital build projects and other capital schemes includes provision for the VAT charged by the suppliers involved in the developments. There may also be scope for an element of VAT reclaim on aspects of those projects, which will be determined and calculated on a case-by-case basis and in line with VAT regulations and rules. The overall funding allocation for the HIP has been built up by overall cost estimates of the schemes, inclusive of VAT. However, the final amount of VAT payable will be determined once the individual schemes have been fully scoped and costed. Current VAT rules will apply, and VAT recovery will be assessed for each scheme in line with the rules set out in section 41 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 and the Treasury's "Contracting Out Direction". In broad terms, we have made allowance for VAT within the estimated costs of those schemes.

As the hon. Lady noted, it was outlined in the spring statement of 2019 that longer-term plans are currently being considered by Her Majesty's Treasury to review the section 41 VAT rules, to potentially either allow for full VAT reclaim for NHS bodies on all their purchases of goods and services or remove VAT reclaims entirely from them. The VAT review or policy paper will publish a call for evidence in due course. While I know she would like me to give an exact date, I hope she will forgive me for not making announcements that are possibly more appropriate for Treasury Ministers to make. I will ensure that her request to know that date is conveyed to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and I hope that he will be able to respond to her swiftly

with further information. In the context of the forthcoming call for evidence, I encourage her and others to contribute. She has a lot of knowledge and expertise in this area, and I suspect that in encouraging her to contribute I am pushing at an open door, because she will certainly do that. I know that the Financial Secretary will be pleased to hear from her.

The hon. Lady focused in both her article and speech on wholly owned subsidiaries, as did the hon. Member for Blaydon in her debate a year ago. While there can be VAT advantages of forming wholly owned subsidiary companies, we are clear that they cannot and should not be set up for the purposes of VAT avoidance, and we wrote to all provider trusts in September 2017 to remind them of their clear tax responsibilities. I may provoke the hon. Member for Bristol South, given her plea earlier, by saying that the origins of this position date back to 2004, subsequently consolidated in the National Health Service Act 2006, but she is right to highlight the changes in the 2012 Act. The position has evolved under Governments of both parties, but she is right to look at the future rather than where we have come from.

We expect all NHS providers to follow the guidance when considering any new arrangements or different ways of going down the wholly owned subsidiary route. There can be advantages in that route, as my predecessor, who is now the Brexit Secretary, set out, for employees in terms of flexibility and choice. There can also be commercial advantages for the NHS bodies setting them up, including things such as enabling providers to employ staff on more flexible and, in some cases, more generous terms and conditions—I emphasise the words "in some"; I see the hon. Member for Blaydon watching me carefully—as well as providing more efficient services in some cases to other trusts, being able to attract staff from the local employment market and giving greater flexibility to the operation of that organisation.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): The Minister said carefully that "some" staff may be advantaged. Does he accept that the vast majority of staff in low-paid jobs—often women—are not benefiting from this and are in fact losing out in pension contributions? When we met Treasury Ministers last year, we were told that it was for the Department of Health and Social Care to decide what its policy is. Will he now commit to redressing that?

Edward Argar: I thought I was going to provoke the hon. Lady to intervene, but it is none the less a pleasure that she has done so. She does highlight disparities, but I would say that it is wrong to suggest—even taking out wholly owned subsidiary companies within the NHS more broadly—that there is an exact commonality of terms and conditions, pension arrangements and so on; there are differences already.

What I will commit to do—I was going to mention this at the end, but I will say it now—is that I am very happy to meet both the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Bristol South to discuss this more broadly in the context of Department of Health and Social Care responsibilities in the NHS, as well as the point the hon. Lady made about self-employed GPs and independent GPs. I am very happy to have that meeting with them. We may have to revert to the Treasury at some time on technical points, but I am very happy to have that

meeting. I am very conscious that, in the two minutes or so I have left, there is a limit to how much I will be able to say, but I am happy to pick up other points in that subsequent meeting.

The hon. Lady is right about buildings. It is right that we are building 40 new hospitals and that we are investing capital in our NHS infrastructure, but she is also right to say that, yes, we shape those buildings, but in talking about place-based approaches, they shape us too and they shape our communities, so it is absolutely right that we get this right. On place-based commissioning, I was a cabinet member on Westminster City Council for many years—in the dim and distant past, when I had more hair and it was not grey—and I sat on the PCT at the same time, and where it works for local circumstances, there are clearly opportunities there as well. However, I do think that autonomy remains important, because while consistency and clarity are vital, so too is enabling local autonomy to address local needs and specific local circumstances, and I think we need to be a little bit careful about that.

I will conclude—with about a minute to go before you stop me, Madam Deputy Speaker—by saying I am sorry that we do not have more time for this debate, because it is an important debate. I am sorry there are not more Members here because it is something that would benefit all Members to be involved in. I look forward to any future such debates. I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this forward. She is right to highlight this issue, and I hope she will take an active part in putting forward her views to the Treasury review and call for evidence when that comes forward. As I say, I very much look forward to continuing this discussion—if not on the Floor of the House, in a meeting subsequently—and I hope and believe that we will be debating this at some point across the Floor of the House in the near future.

Question put and agreed to.

6.2 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 9 January 2020

TREASURY

Direct Payments Funding

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Rishi Sunak): The Treasury has confirmed £2,852 million of funding across financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22 to replace funding from the European Union and allow delivery of direct payments 2020 for farmers at the same level as the 2019 scheme.

The 2020 direct payment scheme across the EU is funded from the next multiannual financial framework, which means that in the UK, the 2020 scheme will be funded domestically by the UK Government. To provide certainty for farmers, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved Administrations, the Treasury has announced that the following funding will be allocated:

£1,751 million in 2020/21 and £92 million in 2021/22 for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

£449 million in 2020/21 and £24 million in 2021/22 for the Scottish Government;

£231 million in 2020/21 and £12 million in 2021/22 for the Welsh Government; and

£279 million in 2020/21 and £15 million in 2021/22 for the Northern Ireland Administration.

This funding will be ring-fenced for direct payments and is based on an exchange rate of €1=£0.89092, the same rate as used for direct payments 2019.

[HCWS25]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media Matters: iNewspaper

The Minister for Sport, Media and Creative Industries (Nigel Adams): The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has today written to Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT) and JPI Media Publications Limited, the current and former owners of the *i* newspaper, to inform them that the Secretary of State for DCMS is “minded to” issue an intervention notice. This relates to concerns the Secretary of State has that there may be public interest considerations—as set out in section 58 of Enterprise Act 2002—that are relevant to the recent acquisition of the *i* newspaper by DMGT and that these concerns warrant further investigation.

A “minded to” letter has therefore been issued to the parties on one public interest ground specified in section 58 of the Enterprise Act 2002:

(2B) The need for, to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable, a sufficient plurality of views in newspapers in each market for newspapers in the United Kingdom or a part of the United Kingdom

It is important to note that the Secretary of State has not taken a final decision on intervention at this stage. In line with the statutory guidance on media mergers, the “minded to” letter invites further representations in writing from the parties and gives them until 13 January to respond. The Secretary of State plans to make her final decision, which needs to be made on a quasi-judicial basis, on whether to issue an intervention notice no later than week commencing 20 January.

If the Secretary of State decides to issue an intervention notice, the next stage would be for Ofcom to assess and report to the Secretary of State on the public interest concerns and for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to assess and report to her on whether a relevant merger situation has been created and any impact this may have on competition. Following these reports, the Secretary of State would need to decide whether to refer the matter for a more detailed investigation by the CMA under section 45 of the Enterprise Act 2002.

DCMS will keep Parliament updated on progress with this media merger case.

[HCWS27]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Children outside the UK

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Today the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse has published its latest report, which can be found at www.iicsa.org.uk.

This report relates to its investigation into children outside the UK. I pay tribute to the strength and courage of the victims and survivors who have shared their experiences to ensure the inquiry can deliver its vital work.

The Government will review this report and consider how to respond to its content in due course.

I would like to thank Professor Jay and her panel for their continued work to uncover the truth, expose what went wrong in the past and to learn the lessons for the future.

[HCWS26]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Town of the Year Competition

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Today I am announcing the opportunity for towns across England to compete in a new town of the year competition. The competition aims to celebrate towns’ achievements in areas such as entrepreneurship, technology, community, enterprise, and integration. This will help deliver on the Prime Minister’s bold agenda for the future, making this decade a time of renewal for towns and communities.

In the months ahead, I will complete a countrywide tour of all the 100 areas receiving funding under the £3.6 billion towns fund. This will ensure these places are

receiving the practical support and investment they need on the ground so we can help local communities to deliver real change.

Some £16 million of funding has now been delivered to local authorities to help develop new innovative proposals in the 100 areas across England, as part of the towns fund. Each place will have the opportunity to bid for funding of up to £25 million.

To assist with this, I will establish a new towns hub within my Department, which will work to develop each town's investment proposals. The hubs, based across the country will have a named representative from the Department, supporting local people on the development of their plan. They will also evaluate the emerging town investment plans, share best practice across towns and build on the towns fund investments for potential future support to towns from across Government.

Finally, today I am also announcing a new expert-led advisory panel, which will be convened to advise on how we can revitalise our towns over the next year. The specialists, including entrepreneurs and people who have delivered real change, will help shape this Government's policy to support the growth agenda.

These announcements reaffirms out the Government's ambition to level up the country. It sets out how we will help restore the fabric of our towns and cities and give local people far more control in how they are invested in, and to hear directly from people in these communities on the specific support and investment they need.

[HCWS28]

TRANSPORT

Contingency Fund Advance

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

I hereby give notice of the Department for Transport's intention to seek an advance from the Contingencies Fund. The Department requires an advance to meet its cash requirements pending parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimate 2019-20.

The Department is operating within the budget agreed in the Main Estimate, however, we will be seeking an increase in our net cash requirement in the Supplementary Estimate. Accessing the contingency fund is to allow the Department to move cash around the group to support existing expenditure consistent with existing Parliamentary Estimates and does not represent additional spending.

When the Main Estimate was submitted for approval, part of Network Rail's (NR) grant-in-aid was excluded. The grant funding for NR in control period 6 was agreed shortly before the Main Estimate was finalised and in the transition from loan funding to grant funding the full value of the required grant was not captured in the Department's net cash requirement. It was the Department's intention that the final classification and cash requirement would be covered by the Supplementary Estimates process.

The advance will be repaid immediately following approval of the Supplementary Estimate. We have taken steps to review our processes and capture lessons learned, to prevent any similar issues from happening again.

Parliamentary approval for additional cash of £3.6 billion will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Department for Transport. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at up to £3.6 billion will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS23]

Northern Rail

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

Passengers in the north have had to put up with unacceptable services for too long. We understand how frustrating this has been for people and we are taking action to make sure that performance improves.

On 16 October 2019 I informed the House, through the Transport Committee, that I had issued a request for a proposal to the current Northern franchisee, Arriva Rail North (ARN) and to the operator of Last Resort as the first phase of securing options for the continuation of passenger services on the Northern franchise. This was triggered by concern over the financial position of ARN.

It has now been confirmed to me from the most recent available financial information that the franchise will only be able to continue for a number of months. The proposal I requested from ARN is being evaluated. Following completion of this process I will consider whether to award ARN a short-term management contract or whether to ask the Department of Transport's own operator of Last Resort to step in and deliver passenger services. Longer-term decisions on the franchise will be made in the light of the recommendations of the Williams Rail Review.

My decision on which short-term option to choose will be made in accordance with the key principles set out in the statement on how I use my rail franchising powers. This includes:

- protecting the interests of passengers
- ensuring business and service continuity
- preserving the interests of taxpayers by ensuring value for money
- the continued quality of the franchise proposition;

In order to inform this decision, the Department will assess the extent to which each option performs against these principles. Our value for money assessment will be based on a number of criteria, including which option returns most money to the taxpayer, the risks attached to each, and the value of any improvements in passenger services. I intend to announce my decision before the end of January 2020.

To clarify, the current financial position of the Northern franchise will not impact on the railway's day-to-day operations. Services will continue to run and there will be no impact on staff.

[HCWS24]

ORAL ANSWERS

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