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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 23 January 2020

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Global Free Trade

1. **Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote global free trade. [900346]

10. **Stuart Anderson** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote global free trade. [900356]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): As we leave the European Union, we have a huge opportunity to be a liberalising force for trade in the world. We aim to secure agreements with countries accounting for 80% of UK trade within three years of leaving the EU, and as we take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation we will be a champion of global free trade.

Anthony Browne: The farmers in my constituency of South Cambridgeshire are some of the most productive in the country and they are very keen to increase exports. They also want to make sure that they are not undermined in the marketplace by competing with farmers from countries that follow lower environmental standards or animal welfare standards. As my right hon. Friend starts the negotiations with other countries to increase trade, what is she doing to make sure that farmers from Britain can compete on a level playing field?

Elizabeth Truss: We remain absolutely committed to upholding our high environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards post Brexit. As my hon. Friend points out, there are huge opportunities for farmers for trade—for example, getting lamb into the US market. The US is the second biggest importer of lamb by value in the world. Currently, UK lamb cannot get into the US market, and that is a huge opportunity for our farmers.

Stuart Anderson: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I am keen to know whether these steps will make a visible difference to the businesses in Wolverhampton that trade globally.

Elizabeth Truss: Lowering barriers will mean lower costs for businesses and more choice for consumers. In Wolverhampton and the west midlands overall we send one in five of all exports to the United States. Getting a trade deal with the US would mean a removal of tariffs on products such as cars, textiles and steel, so there are huge opportunities there for those businesses to grow.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I am glad that the Secretary of State expects us to cut lots of free trade deals, but they do not happen by chance; they happen by detailed analysis and tough negotiations. How does she believe we can succeed in those negotiations when the number of expert trade negotiators she has is a fraction of the 600 the EU has? More importantly, is she not setting herself up for a fall by rather foolishly, in my opinion, embarking on parallel trade negotiations with such limited resources with both the European Union and the USA?

Elizabeth Truss: I am afraid I am not surprised to hear the SNP talking our country down. The fact is that we have scaled up our trade negotiation expertise. We now have approximately the same number as the US Trade Representative, which is one of the leading trade negotiators in the world. Our trade negotiators have already secured £110 billion of trade continuity deals, even though people such as the hon. Gentleman said it could not be done. Those negotiators have a wide experience in trade law from the private sector, and we have also recruited people from other Commonwealth nations with experience from the WTO. We have an excellent team at the Department for International Trade, and we have the staff in place ready to conduct the negotiations with the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The statement from the Trump Administration that we will be subject to retaliatory tariffs if we proceed with the digital services tax that is set to come in in April seems an early test of how we will fare in independent trade talks. Could the Secretary of State tell us whether the Government intend to concede to American pressure?

Elizabeth Truss: Let me be clear: UK tax policy is a matter for the UK Chancellor—it is not a matter for the US; it is not a matter for the EU; it is not a matter for anybody else—and we will make the decisions that are right for Britain whether they are on our regulatory standards, our tax policy or anything else.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Graham Harvey is a constituent of mine who runs an excellent little composites business on the Isle of Wight. He has just won a big order to sell to Taiwan. That is exactly the sort of business that I know the Secretary of State will want to cheer on, but he is finding it extremely difficult to get export finance and banking finance. I have written to the Secretary of State. Does she share my concern that our small and medium-sized businesses are not being given the support they need to export successfully?

Elizabeth Truss: I am very proud of the work that UK Export Finance does. It has just celebrated its 100th birthday of supplying export finance for British business. I am very keen, and I have laid this out to the

team, that we do more to support small and medium-sized enterprises. I would be very happy to look at the case for my hon. Friend's constituent, and make sure that he is getting the support that he needs. We do have additional available finance, and there is also an exporting toolkit for MPs to help them get in touch with export finance.

Industrial Strategy: Steel Industry

2. **Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the effectiveness of the Government's Industrial Strategy in attracting inward investment to the steel industry. [900347]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I thank the hon. Lady for her question and for her continued championing of the UK steel industry. We work closely with colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to promote steel. Since 2013, the Government have provided more than £600 million of support, including £300 million for energy cost relief, £250 million for innovation and £66 million for new technologies.

Stephanie Peacock: The Government claim to be supportive of British steel makers, yet only 50% of steel purchased by the Government comes from Britain. Is it not time that the Government actually backed our steel industry, bought British and introduced a sector deal for steel?

Graham Stuart: With our colleagues at UK Export Finance, we established a steel export taskforce and we are very keen to promote steel exports. The hon. Lady is right that we should do everything we can to ensure that British steel is used in the UK. I am happy to work, both here and abroad, to make sure we support the steel industry going forward.

Free Ports

3. **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential economic merits of free ports. [900348]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is championing the merits of free ports across the Government, in conjunction with Treasury Ministers, including the Exchequer Secretary, who is the constituency neighbour of my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill).

Mr Goodwill: On 12 December, a blue wave swept up the Yorkshire coast from the mouth of the Humber to the mouth of the Tees as coastal communities, some for the first time, put their trust in the Conservatives to deliver on their priorities. Does the Minister agree that the former SSI British Steel site on the south bank of the Tees would be an ideal site not only as a deep water terminal for the export of polyhalite fertiliser, but as Britain's first free port?

Graham Stuart: My right hon. Friend is right. That blue wave was also a cleansing wave that is allowing new thinking. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced our free port policy in Teesport in August. We recognise that more free ports, not least in the Teesport area, can create jobs, rejuvenate communities and boost local economies. We will continue the job creation miracle that has gone on under this Government and, with my right hon. Friend's help, free ports will be an important part of that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Could we rise above party politics on this? [*Laughter.*] Mr Speaker, they don't blame me, do they? I understand that free ports are fashionable at the moment. If the Minister can persuade me that there will be no disadvantage to businesses in Huddersfield and Yorkshire—I have a long history of co-chairing the Yorkshire group of MPs—we could be persuaded that free ports are a good thing. Will he give us a bit more detail?

Graham Stuart: A day when the hon. Gentleman rises above party politics is one when we know a significant shift has occurred in the body politic, but I will try to take the question in the spirit in which it was intended. We are consulting and engaging widely, including with devolved areas of the country, to ensure we come up with exactly the right package to be able to assure even the most sceptical, albeit now non-party political people like the hon. Member, that free ports really can galvanise further job development and prosperity.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is important that this policy does not lead to market distortions and displacement of activity around ports. Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to making this a success is to build on the unique competencies and excellence of individual ports, such as the port of Milford Haven in my constituency, with its unique energy expertise?

Graham Stuart: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is about tailoring the policy to the particular, ensuring we have something that does not lead to distortion but does lead to additional inward investment. We have gained more foreign direct investment in this country than any other European nation. That is one of the fundamental reasons why we have more people in work as a percentage of the population than the US, Germany or France, and why we have the lowest youth unemployment in our history. I am determined that the free port policy will be well-tailored to the individual circumstances of each area, while ensuring there is no distortion.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): As the Minister will know, free ports existed in this country until 2012, when they were abandoned under the coalition Government due to a lack of evidence for their economic benefits. Will the Minister guarantee that if new free ports are introduced, jobs and investment will not simply be displaced from elsewhere in the country, labour rights and standards will not be undermined, and the UK will still be able to meet the level playing field standards that may arise from any future trade deal with the EU?

Graham Stuart: It may come as news to Labour, or at least its Front Benchers, that we will not be a member of the customs union as we were in 2012. Leaving the EU provides the opportunity to do things differently. We are taking a new cross-Government approach to developing ambitious free ports to ensure that towns and cities across the UK can begin to benefit from the trade opportunities that Brexit brings. It is about time that Labour Front Benchers started to recognise the upside to Brexit instead of always talking this country down.

Most Favoured Nation Tariffs

4. **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that most favoured nation tariffs support UK manufacturing industries after the UK leaves the EU. [900349]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We are developing our own most favoured nation tariff schedule, ensuring that it is right for the UK. We want costs kept low for consumers and to ensure UK manufacturers are not disadvantaged against their competitors.

Aaron Bell: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer and for visiting me and my colleagues in Stoke-on-Trent last Friday. For industries such as ceramics and businesses such as Ibstock Brick in my constituency, which has two sites—at Chesterton and Parkhouse—does she agree that it is essential that we put in a robust regime of tariffs when countries do not respect the rules-based order and threaten to flood our market with dumped or subsidised products?

Elizabeth Truss: One of our aims in a US trade deal will be to bring down the tariffs on ceramics. When I was in Stoke-on-Trent, I heard that those producers face a tariff of 28% on their fantastic crockery. We want to bring that down so that we can have more jobs in Stoke-on-Trent. We will also establish the trade remedies authority, which will take a tough line on dumping from the anti-competitive activities of other nations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): These are changing times for all regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as we get towards 31 January. Will the Secretary of State further outline what discussions have taken place with the newly restored Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive with regard to trade and tariffs within Northern Ireland, and on its behalf?

Elizabeth Truss: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that there will be a ministerial forum this afternoon to talk about that issue. We will make sure that Northern Ireland is completely involved in our agenda, because we want our independent trade policy, our tariff policy and our trade remedies policy to follow the priorities across the United Kingdom.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) in thanking the Secretary of State for visiting Stoke-on-Trent last week. Does she agree that for industries such as ceramics it is essential that we have a robust regime of tariffs to make sure that we guard against countries who want to undermine the rules-based system?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right: we cannot allow dumping practices to go undealt with, and the trade remedies authority will take a tough line in areas such as ceramics. Because we are leaving the European Union, we have the opportunity to have a policy that reflects the needs of the UK and the priorities of UK consumers and UK manufacturers. I am determined to have that, but we must also seek to lower the tariffs on exports for our producers, because we want to see British ceramics, particularly from Stoke-on-Trent, on tables around the world.

EU Bilateral Trade

5. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the end of freedom of movement in the UK on bilateral trade with the EU in goods and services. [900351]

12. **Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the end of freedom of movement in the UK on bilateral trade with the EU in goods and services. [900359]

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): Leaving the European Union frees the United Kingdom to introduce a fairer immigration system. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the UK-Africa Investment Summit this week that

“our system is becoming fairer and more equal as between all our global friends and partners. Treating people the same regardless, wherever they come from and by putting people before passports, we will be able to attract the best talent from around the world, wherever they may be.”

We will also be able to reach out and strike new global trade agreements to the benefit of all our constituents and UK consumers.

Margaret Ferrier: I thank the Minister for that answer. The President of the EU Commission said:

“Without the free movement of people,”
the UK cannot expect to

“have the free movement of capital, goods and services”.

Is it not true that taking control of our borders comes with not only an unacceptable human cost, but a very serious economic one?

Conor Burns: I am sorry, but not surprised, that the SNP cannot see that there is talent beyond the shores of the European Union. Freedom of movement was discussed at length during the referendum. We on the Government Benches believe in respecting the results of referendums, including the one in Scotland.

Stephen Flynn: Scottish Financial Enterprise told the Scottish Affairs Committee that the success of Scotland's financial industry was based on its ability to access and service all customers in the European Union. Does that not once again highlight the vital importance of freedom of movement to Scotland and show that the UK Government simply do not care about Scotland's interests or, indeed, Scotland's votes?

Conor Burns: It shows the reverse. As the Government reach out to negotiate new comprehensive free trade agreements around the world, we will negotiate the best deals possible for every nation and every region of the United Kingdom. This Government will always have Scotland's interests close to their heart.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend as surprised as I am that so many Members of this House do not seem to have read and understood the political declaration on the future relationship? In particular, does he agree that we should expect that the various modes of supply in connection with services will go on around the world and that people will travel to deliver services?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend is right. It is sad that so many in this House, particularly on the Opposition side, including on the SNP Benches, appear stuck in June 2016. We on the Government Benches—*[Interruption.]* I say to the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) that we are not remotely touchy. While she is stuck in the past, we are focused on the future.

Trading Opportunities: North of England

6. **Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the extent of international trading opportunities for counties in the north of England. [900352]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Northern counties exported over £165 billion-worth of goods and services last year, and we want to increase this. New free trade agreements will remove costs for manufacturers and producers and enable those businesses to grow.

Mark Fletcher: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. As we exit the European Union, it is vital that businesses in Bolsover and elsewhere are encouraged to export to new markets. Does the Department have any plans to strengthen regional teams across the midlands and the north to help businesses take advantage of new trading opportunities?

Elizabeth Truss: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that we have 130 international trade advisers and 186 export champions—businesses that already export and that encourage their peers to export—across the north of England. We have just sent out an exporting toolkit to MPs on both sides of the House so that they can get in touch with those local trade advisers and help their businesses export. We estimate that there are 600 businesses in every constituency with the potential to export that do not currently do so. MPs have a really important role in helping those businesses to get the information and support they need.

North Africa

7. **Damien Moore (Southport) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to promote trade between the UK and North Africa. [900353]

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): North Africa is an important region for the United Kingdom. To advance trade in this area, I have in the last four months alone visited Morocco twice and Algeria once, and led trade discussions at the UK-Tunisia bilateral forum, and the Government have laid transition texts of the Morocco and Tunisian association agreements in Parliament. Taking advantage of the UK-Africa summit this week, I signed a memorandum of understanding to explore opportunities in more detail with Morocco and spoke to the Algeria British Business Council. My hon. Friend is right to see enormous opportunities in north Africa, and we will use the coming months to develop them.

Damien Moore: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. One of the countries he referred to was Tunisia. Will he join me in welcoming the new trade agreement between the United Kingdom and Tunisia, which was signed recently, and which will see 7,723 tonnes of Tunisian olive oil available to the British economy duty-free? Will he meet me and the respective UK and Tunisian ambassadors to explore further trading opportunities?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend is right to see the enormous opportunities. It was my pleasure to lead the trade discussions in the UK-Tunisia bilateral forum last September, and I would be absolutely delighted to meet the ambassadors with my hon. Friends to see what more trade we can do between our two countries.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): In its decision issued in March 2019, the High Court of England and Wales confirmed that the territory of Western Sahara is separate from Morocco under international law. It ruled that the UK Government were acting unlawfully by failing to distinguish between the territory of Morocco and the occupied territory of Western Sahara. Yet the trade agreement between the UK and the Kingdom of Morocco purports to apply to the territory of Western Sahara, despite the total lack of consent from the Sahrawi people. Will the Secretary of State explain why that is the case? Given that the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 process to ratify the agreement is now under way, is it her intention to hold a debate to discuss why the Government are proceeding to ratify a treaty that the High Court has ruled illegal?

Conor Burns: We had discussions about this subject with representatives of the Moroccan Government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, when I visited Morocco two weeks ago, and indeed it was raised by my hon. Friend the Minister for Africa when he was there with me last October. The United Kingdom has taken the consistent position that the matter needs to be resolved diplomatically and sensitively with ongoing discussions.

Topical Questions

T1. [900361] **Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We are a few days away from leaving the European Union, and, for the first time in 46 years, establishing the UK's independent trade policy. That gives us the

opportunity to take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation, to champion free trade, and to secure free trade deals with partners around the world. There is a huge opportunity for the UK, and we want to make the 2020s the decade of trade.

Eddie Hughes: There are many great British manufacturers, including Croft Architectural Hardware in my constituency. As well as making products for the Palace of Westminster, it exports them to the United States and China. What more can we do to support fine British manufacturing talent like that?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate Croft Architectural Hardware on its brilliant work. I understand that we have helped it to attend two trade fairs in the US through our trade show access programme. I also note that there is currently a 4% tariff on door knockers; I hope that in future trade agreements we shall be able to get that removed.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State point to any examples of intersecting customs unions anywhere else in the world? Will she confirm that under the EU customs code to be implemented in Northern Ireland, goods will have to be declared and products of animal origin will have to pass through a border inspection involving both documentary and physical checks, and does she accept that those will subsist completely irrespective of the tariff regime in any future free trade agreement with the EU?

Elizabeth Truss: As we have made very clear, we want to ensure that there is no hard border in Northern Ireland. That is a priority for the Government, and we have reached a new agreement with the EU that delivers on it. Of course, we need to work through the details of precisely how that arrangement will work.

The hon. Gentleman needs to recognise that the world is moving on: we are moving into an area in which trade is being digitised, and we are finding new ways of facilitating customs. Rather than being negative and a naysayer, why does he not contribute to the solution?

T3. [900363] **Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con):** Guildford is home to a growing computer gaming industry. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to encourage inward investment in that sector?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): The Department's high potential opportunities programme, which aims to identify and promote a range of foreign direct investment opportunities throughout the UK, is currently working with the Enterprise M3 local enterprise partnership and others in Guildford to highlight the commercial opportunities offered by the video game and 5G clusters in that region, which are world leading.

T2. [900362] **Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD):** Given President Trump's description of climate campaigners as prophets of doom, and given the revelations that he has banned all reference to a climate crisis in any US trade deal, what assurances can the Secretary of State

give the House that any UK-US trade deal will support the UK's own climate objectives, and, indeed, persuade the US to recommit itself to the Paris agreement?

Elizabeth Truss: I believe that the UK has a huge opportunity to promote clean energy and our climate change agenda—our carbon reduction agenda—across the world. Yesterday I met the New Zealand Trade Minister to discuss how we can work together in the future to incorporate those into forward-leaning trade agreements. We will seek to do that with the US, the EU, and all the other partners with which we work.

T5. [900365] **Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con):** In the light of the very welcome UK-Africa Investment Summit, what assessment has the Minister made of the commercial opportunities for British firms across the whole of that great continent?

Graham Stuart: I spent months working with colleagues across Government to deliver the UK-Africa Investment Summit, which took place on Monday. I am delighted with the result and proud of the work of so many officials in making it happen. We have announced 27 commercial deals worth more than £6.5 billion from across African markets, but, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, there is enormous potential for more.

T4. [900364] **Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP):** Glenkinchie distillery in my constituency is threatened by the tariffs imposed on Scotch whisky by President Trump. Given the decision to leave the EU and seek a trade deal with the USA, and given threats about changes to the definition of Scotch whisky, what assurances can the Minister give that we will not be washing down chlorinated chicken with a glass of American rye?

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): I would gently say to the hon. Gentleman that if we are to de-escalate these tariff disputes, attacks on the US Administration and the President are unwise and unwelcome. We are working across Government to persuade the United States that these tariffs are damaging to the Scots whisky sector—*[Interruption.]* If Scottish National party Members would stop chuntering and get behind us, we might have more chance of removing these tariffs. We will seek to stand up for the Scots whisky sector and persuade the United States to remove these tariffs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been in touch with trade representative Lighthizer, and we will work for the Scots whisky industry. Get behind the Government!

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Employment: People with Disabilities

1. **Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on increasing the level of employment for people with disabilities. [900369]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): This Government are committed to reducing the disability employment gap and seeing a million more disabled people in work by 2027. We help disabled people to start, stay in and return to work through programmes including the Work and Health programme, a new Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme, Access to Work and Disability Confident.

Marion Fellows: Inclusion Scotland recommends that the Access to Work fund should be increased and the cap lifted, and Leonard Cheshire recommends a cut in application waiting times so as not to jeopardise job offers. Will the Minister agree to put these proposals to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and meet me to discuss further what concrete steps can be taken to reduce the disability employment gap?

Mims Davies: The Access to Work programme is a demand-led scheme that helps disabled people to get advice and a discretionary grant of up to £59,000 per annum. It is a flexible in-work support programme, and it will deliver reasonable adjustments, working with employers. I am sure that Ministers will be happy to hear from the hon. Lady.

EU Withdrawal Agreement

2. **Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): What recent equalities impact assessment she has made of the EU Withdrawal Agreement. [900370]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): Britain has long been a world leader in ensuring that everybody has equal opportunities, from race relations legislation to the Equal Pay Act 1970. As we leave the European Union, we will continue to forge ahead in these areas.

Return to Work

3. **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support women returning to work after a career break. [900371]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Encouraging women to return to work after a career break is key to our prosperity and to levelling up opportunities for all. The Government fund 25 programmes to support people to return to work after a career break, including careers in health, policing and legal services, and I am delighted to announce today the launch of the return to social work programme to support previously certified social workers to return to this vital profession.

Vicky Ford: Mr Speaker, you may think I am young, but as someone who was elected to this place just a few months before my 50th birthday may I say how fantastic it is to start a new career and be given a second chance? I often meet women in their 50s and 60s who have so much to offer but do not want to go back to the careers they had before. What more can we do to help those women get the skills and opportunities that they deserve?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend is an exemplar of the fantastic contribution that women in their 50s can make to a workplace. We know that there are 4.5 million women aged 50 to 64 in employment, and we are committed to supporting older workers to remain in the labour market through our work on the Fuller Working Lives strategy and through the appointment of a business champion for older workers to spearhead our work to support employers to retain, retrain and recruit older workers.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Can the Minister clarify whether the Government's commitment to investing in infrastructure will include support to improve social infrastructure, such as childcare?

Victoria Atkins: I am so glad that the hon. Lady has raised that subject. Childcare is, of course, a vital part of this Government's programme to level up opportunities across the country. I suspect we shall be hearing a little bit more on childcare from relevant Ministers in questions in due course, but we are clear that we want the workplace to be welcoming to everyone. We want to harness their talents and unleash their potential, and helping parents with childcare is vital to that.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee showed that some women experience unwanted career breaks, particularly when they are pregnant or they are new mums, and sometimes those are covered up by non-disclosure agreements. What action is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that non-disclosure agreements are not used to cover up unlawful behaviour, particularly pregnancy discrimination?

Victoria Atkins: My right hon. Friend has been an incredibly ardent campaigner on that important issue and I thank her for all her work on it. As I hope she knows, the Government have consulted on the use of non-disclosure agreements and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), is committed to legislating in due course in that vital area.

State Pension Age Increase: Transitional Arrangements

4. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on transitional arrangements for women born in the 1950s affected by the increase in the state pension age. [900372]

8. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of the increase in the state pension age on women born in the 1950s. [900377]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): State pension age entitlement is a matter that has been comprehensively debated on many occasions in Parliament over the decades. Meanwhile, there is a judicial review on the state pension age, which claimants have been given permission to appeal, meaning that there is still live litigation. We cannot comment on that litigation.

Justin Madders: Not so long ago, the Prime Minister said he would look at this issue with

“fresh vigour and new eyes”,

but as far as I can see nothing has been done. What will the Prime Minister and this Government actually do to help those women?

Mims Davies: We are here for Women and Equalities questions. Women retiring today can expect to receive state pension for an average of over 21 years—two years longer than men—and if state pension age had not been equalised, women reaching the age of 60 would be expecting to spend over 40% of their adult life in receipt of state pension. I believe in equality and opportunity for older women. There are great opportunities out in the workplace now, and our local jobcentres can give women really good advice on that next stage of their working career.

Patricia Gibson: As we have heard, the Prime Minister is on the record as saying that he is sympathetic to this cause. In fact, last summer he said:

“Let’s see what we can do”.

Very much in that spirit, and despite what the Minister just said, does she agree that if she really believes what she just said, at the very least she should commission an impact assessment on the effect of these changes for women, so that they can get the justice they need?

Mims Davies: By 2030, 3 million women will stand to gain, on average, £550 more per year as a result of the recent reforms. The DWP has produced an estimate for keeping the state pension age at 60 for women and 65 for men, and that estimate assumes that state pension continues to be uprated at least at around average earnings going forward. The reality is that the Government’s reform has been focused on maintaining a balance between sustainability of the state pension and fairness between the generations, in view of the demographic challenges. My retirement age is 67. The Government have already introduced concessions costing £1.1 billion.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): The appeal speaks for some of the groups of 1950s women, but certainly not all, and colleagues—both retreads and newbies—will by now have heard from women with different perspectives, all of whom will have a suggestion on how we resolve the issue. The appeal is silencing as many voices as it is speaking for, if not more. How can the silenced women be heard? They too are desperate, and they too need to be heard on this issue.

Mims Davies: The Government’s position on the changes to the state pension age has been clear and consistent, and there are substantial problems with the various practical alternatives offered by different voices.

I understand what the hon. Lady is saying. We have an older workers champion, who is working with employers, in both the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and that links into the industrial strategy. As Employment Minister, I am keen to tackle the stigma around older workers and the feeling that it is better to be retired than on benefits or not working. For me, this

is about equality and opportunity. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), people can have the best part of their career later in life.

Justice System: Causes of Racism

5. **Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP):** What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on (a) tackling the causes of racism and racial disparities in the justice system and (b) promoting equality of opportunity. [900373]

6. **Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP):** What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on (a) tackling the causes of racism and racial disparities in the justice system and (b) promoting equality of opportunity. [900374]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): We are working across Government and with partners to tackle the over-representation of black and Asian people and those from other ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system, which we know has deep-rooted causes. That work includes taking forward the recommendations of the extensive, independent review by the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and developing a number of interventions, and it is all aimed at reducing disproportionality.

Angela Crawley: The Home Office’s proposals to strengthen police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments have rightly been condemned for discriminating against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and for effectively criticising and criminalising their way of life. Those who have condemned the proposals include the Scottish Government Minister for Older People and Equalities; Friends, Families and Travellers; and Liberty. The Women and Equalities Committee has also looked at this issue. Given those concerns, will the Minister commit to conducting and publishing an equality impact assessment of the proposals?

Wendy Morton: My Home Office colleagues are aware of this, and it is something they are considering.

Kirsten Oswald: The Home Secretary was recently quoted as saying:

“I’m not in that category...where I believe there’s racism at all. I think we live in a great country, a great society, full of opportunity, where people of any background can get on in life.”

Does the Minister agree with the Home Secretary’s statement that there is no racism at all? If she does not, will she condemn those who deny that racism and inequality of opportunity exist?

Wendy Morton: That is not my understanding of what the Home Secretary said, but let me be absolutely clear that this Government have regard to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality of opportunity in all our work. This approach informs regular engagement between Cabinet Ministers in relation to the justice system. This is something we take incredibly seriously.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I pay tribute to the work of my predecessor in this role and a good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley).

It is not just the Home Secretary who is in denial about racism. The racism to which it is easiest for us all to turn a blind eye is the insidious type, where often even the perpetrator does not realise what lies behind it. Is the Minister open to working with people like me and, more particularly, with black, Asian and minority ethnic MPs to raise awareness of unconscious racial bias and the devastating impact it has on the day-to-day lives of many of our citizens?

Wendy Morton: I think it is deeply unfair to lecture the Home Secretary on discrimination. Let us be absolutely clear that this Government are committed to closing the opportunity gap in our society. We are determined to implement the policies needed for the UK to succeed as a nation. I work very closely with the right hon. Member for Tottenham, and the Ministry of Justice takes the issue of racial disparity very seriously.

LGBT+ Hate Crime

7. **Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions she has had with the Home Secretary on reducing hate crime directed at the LGBT+ community. [900375]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): We are proud to be hosting our international conference on global LGBT rights in May, a key theme of which will be the safety of LGBT people around the world. Hate crime is completely unacceptable and has no place in British society. We are committed to tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate crime, and we are working with the Law Commission on a review of current hate crime legislation, which is due to report early next year.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister will no doubt be aware of the serious rise in hate crimes against the LGBT+ community, and particularly the trans community. Hate crimes are up by 25% against the LGBT+ community and up by 37% against the trans community in the past year. Those are shocking rises, and it is not just due to the fivefold increase in reporting. They are shocking statistics. Does she agree that sex and relationships education in schools is crucial, as is responsible reporting, particularly on issues facing the trans community?

Victoria Atkins: I do agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I am grateful to him for his question. Sadly, he is right about the increase in hate crime against LGBT people, and he is right that educating children at school so that we change the culture that may exist among some people is one of the many ways we can tackle this.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): This is my first time at the Dispatch Box this year, so may I congratulate you on your re-election, Mr Speaker, and say happy new year to all the staff in the House?

I thank the Minister for her response. Now that the general election is over, there seems to be no need to prolong the decision making any further. She should have had plenty of time to study carefully the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and consider the Government's response. Will she take this opportunity to update the House?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that. She knows how complex this area is. We are working carefully and methodically through the results of the consultation. We are clear that we want to protect trans adults' rights and protect single-sex spaces for women. We do not want to rush into this; we want to get it right.

Shared Parental Leave

9. **Laura Trott** (Sevenoaks) (Con): What steps the Government Equalities Office is taking to help promote shared parental leave. [900378]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst): Since 2018, we have run annual communications campaigns to promote shared parental leave to parents and employers, to help employers who do not already have bespoke policies in place. We are developing models, policies and guidance to help employers understand how they might put shared parental leave into practice.

Laura Trott: One big barrier to the take-up of shared parental leave is that businesses often do not offer enhanced pay to fathers who are taking it up. What steps is the Minister's Department taking to encourage businesses to do this?

Kelly Tolhurst: First, I would like to welcome my hon. Friend to this place—it is great to have another female elected in my county of Kent. We are exploring options to improve the tools and guidance that can support parents and employers to make greater use of shared parental leave, including model policies for employers. We are also evaluating the scheme, looking at how it can be used in practice and at what we can do to support take-up. We will be reporting on the evaluation later in the year.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, if we are going to take this seriously, will we look at making this House an exemplar of shared parental leave? I understand that we can now have locums, but there are no funds to provide finance for them. Does the Minister think the House should be leading on this?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I would welcome any organisation that has the right policies in place to encourage all eligible employers to take up that offer; it is probably a matter for the House, but I would very much welcome this.

Business Start-ups: Women

10. **James Grundy** (Leigh) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support more women to start their own businesses. [900379]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): The number of self-employed women is at a record high of 1.7 million. We are cutting unnecessary red tape and reducing business rates, making it easier for more women to start their own businesses.

James Grundy: I am grateful for the Minister's response. What grants are available for young women to start their own businesses, particularly in northern constituencies such as mine?

Elizabeth Truss: Starting a business is a fantastic opportunity. It provides people with power and control over their life, and it helps contribute to the economy and their family. We are expanding the start-up loan scheme, which has a particularly high take-up rate among female entrepreneurs. I strongly encourage my hon. Friend to talk to his constituents about this excellent scheme and make them aware of it.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Young women with disabilities face double the barriers to becoming entrepreneurs. Will the Department work with my all-party-group on disability to look closely at this issue? We will be holding a series of sessions on it to ensure that we have a truly inclusive economy.

Elizabeth Truss: I know that the employment Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), has already agreed to meet the hon. Lady to talk about this issue. She is absolutely right that opportunities to start one's own business are particularly good for people who need additional freedom and flexibility. I commend the scheme that the hon. Lady is running.

Domestic Violence

11. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support women in (a) Bosworth constituency and (b) the UK who experience domestic violence. [900380]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): There are more than 2 million adult victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales, and last year in Leicestershire—my hon. Friend's county—there were 21,000 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes. The Government are determined to bring forward the landmark domestic abuse Bill and to enact that legislation as quickly as possible to protect and support the victims of domestic abuse and bring perpetrators to justice.

Dr Evans: As a GP, I find that domestic violence cases are one of the hardest types of cases: they are difficult both to identify and to deal with, and that is sad. What are the Minister and her Department doing to help to educate those who work in primary care not only on how to identify people who suffer with domestic violence but on how to signpost them to the correct services?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and welcome all the experience and expertise that he brings to the House. All staff who work in the NHS must undertake at least level 1 safeguarding training, which includes domestic abuse. We have published an online resource for health professionals, to improve awareness of domestic violence and abuse. NHS England is developing a four-year action plan specifically on domestic abuse to raise awareness among NHS staff to ensure that they have the skills to identify and refer

patients, where appropriate, and also, of course, to address the issue of NHS staff who are themselves victims.

County Lines: Women and Girls

12. **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of county lines exploitation on (a) women and (b) girls. [900381]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): County lines exploitation has a devastating impact on our communities, and we of course recognise the risks to girls and young women who are exploited by these ruthless gangs—including, often, for sexual exploitation. The National Crime Agency threat assessment published last year sets out the scale of the issue and the level of exploitation faced by women and girls, which is why we are investing £25 million to disrupt county lines gangs and put an end to this exploitation.

Sarah Jones: We think that at least one in 10 people involved in county lines are girls, and the number is probably a lot higher than that. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has just published a report on how the police and the NCA are dealing with county lines, and it has a number of really excellent recommendations, many of them about different agencies working together. One recommendation is that by the end of the year there should be a legal definition of child criminal exploitation, so that everybody understands what it is and what they should do about it. Does the Minister agree and will she be working to that goal?

Victoria Atkins: As the chair of the all-party group on knife crime, the hon. Lady will know that the Government are working on a public health approach to tackling serious violence. We are very much looking at the workings of agencies, including the police. The hon. Lady will welcome the fact that the National County Lines Coordination Centre has conducted more than 2,500 arrests and safeguarded more than 3,000 people. Of course, that work continues. One of the many ways in which we support those who are exploited is to fund young people's advocates in London, Manchester and the west midlands to work directly with gang-affected women and girls, particularly if they have been victims or are at risk of sexual violence.

Gender Pay Gap

13. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What steps she is taking to close the gender pay gap. [900382]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): I feel as though I am earning my salary this morning, Mr Speaker, which is why I am so pleased that I am about to talk about the gender pay gap.

We have conducted analysis of where women face disadvantages in the workplace and are finalising sector-specific action plans. I can announce that Government Departments are leading the way by publishing their data and action plans today. We want employers to go beyond reporting data on the gender pay gap and create genuinely inclusive workplaces for everyone.

Helen Hayes: Samira Ahmed's successful pay discrimination claim against the BBC will have far-reaching implications for other women working at the BBC who will now see their gender pay gap addressed. Samira Ahmed was able to bring her claim only because she knew what male colleagues were earning. What are the Government going to do to assist women employees of the 1.3 million small and medium-sized enterprises who are currently reliant on chance to discover whether they are subject to pay discrimination, because there is no gender pay reporting requirement?

Victoria Atkins: I hope the hon. Member will understand that I cannot comment on individual cases, but I met BBC executives this week to discuss their overall approach to equal pay and the gender pay gap. I take the point about smaller businesses. We have been very clear that we need to gather data over several years to see how the approach is working—whether we are asking the right questions and whether there are other questions to be asked. We very much hope and expect that the approach to larger businesses will trickle down to smaller businesses, particularly with regard to action plans.

Topical Questions

T1. [900384] **Kenny MacAskill** (East Lothian) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): As we leave the European Union, this great country has a huge opportunity to make the case for freedom and equal rights across the globe. We will be a driving force in the rights for women, including every girl having at least 12 years of education, and we will also push forward LGBT rights, including hosting a major international conference in May.

In Britain, we will continue to ensure that, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or where people live in the country, they are able to live the lives they want.

Kenny MacAskill: Torness power station in my constituency is protected by the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. Female officers are now expected to work until 67. Does the Minister accept that, as well as the injustice of women losing their state pension entitlements, there is an injustice to women officers in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary who are expected, at an inappropriate age, to do a job that is physically arduous and demanding? Should the maxim not be dignity in retirement, rather than work until you drop?

Elizabeth Truss: On the subject of women working, one of the great things that this Government did early in the 2010 Session was to make sure that we do not have compulsory retirement and that we do take advantage of the skills of older people into their 60s and 70s. I am very happy to take up the specific issue with the relevant Department, but in general it is right that we have more flexibility and more opportunity for older people.

T2. [900385] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): Last year, the women and enterprise all-party group launched its first report, "Pathways to Progress", which drew on the experiences of a large number of female

business owners and gave recommendations to Government, financial institutions and businesses on how we can encourage more female entrepreneurs to start or skill a business. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can best unlock that opportunity, which has the potential to add an extra £250 billion to the UK economy?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: there is a huge opportunity to get more people, particularly more women, starting their own businesses. I would be delighted to meet him and work with the all-party group to make it happen.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary's response to a question on race relations was actually quite damaging. I am really pleased that the Minister is listening to Labour MPs, but can she clarify what is happening with the Government's race and disparity unit, and outline steps that she is taking to address the fact that there are no women of colour in top civil service jobs?

Elizabeth Truss: The Home Secretary was absolutely reflecting the fact that Britain is a great country in which to live and that we have very low levels of discrimination compared with the rest of the world. Of course, there is always more that we can do, but that is what this Department is about: removing the barriers that are based on race, gender or disability and making sure that people can thrive. I am proud of the fact that our Home Secretary is from an ethnic minority and that our Chancellor is from an ethnic minority. We have also had two female Prime Ministers. How is that going for the Labour party?

T4. [900387] **Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Constituents in Runnymede and Weybridge struggled last year to access Weybridge station because there was a broken lift. Thankfully this is now fixed, but can the Minister reassure my constituents that ensuring accessibility for all is a priority for this Government when franchises and contracts are awarded?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): Far too often, I see people not able to get around on our rail network and make their connections because of exactly the issues that my new hon. Friend has raised. As employment Minister, that is a matter of real concern. I will take on that issue of access of opportunity, getting on in life and getting out and about. A broken lift that affects people is just plain wrong. I will take up that matter with transport Ministers on his behalf.

T3. [900386] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate recently linked a steep and alarming decline in rape convictions with cuts to the criminal justice system, which have left it close to breaking point. What representations is the Minister making to the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury to ensure that rape victims are able to access justice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. She will know that the report was part of the Government's review of rape and

how the criminal justice system is dealing with it. The review is ongoing and we are looking at other aspects, including the conduct of the police in rape investigations and how the criminal justice system is treating victims, given the rates of attrition. Regarding discussions with

the Ministry of Justice, the Lord Chancellor is as committed to the review as the Home Secretary and I are. We expect at the end of the review to come up with meaty proposals to ensure that victims of rape and sexual assault get the justice they deserve.

Business of the House

10.30 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for next week will include:

MONDAY 27 JANUARY—Second Reading of the NHS Funding Bill.

TUESDAY 28 JANUARY—Committee and remaining stages of the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Bill followed by, motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Release of Prisoners (Alteration of Relevant Proportion Of Sentence) Order 2019 followed by, motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (Consequential Amendment) Regulations 2019.

WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY—Opposition day (1st allotted day). There will be a debate on home affairs followed by a debate on homelessness. Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the official Opposition.

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY—General debate on global Britain.

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Second reading of the Agriculture Bill.

TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Committee and remaining stages of the NHS Funding Bill followed by, motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Non-Domestic Rating Multipliers) (England) Order 2019.

WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition.

THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Business to be determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for giving the business for the coming two weeks and for the second Opposition day.

I do not know if the right hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber when the shadow Secretary of State for International Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), mentioned that the Government might be acting illegally by including Western Sahara in their agreement with Morocco. Under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, that agreement will be ratified automatically in 21 days' time, giving a time limit of 11 February. Could the Leader of the House find Government time—not on an Opposition day—to debate the treaty?

Will the Leader of the House update the House on possible machinery of government changes? We have heard that some Departments may be merged with or immersed in others. I do not know whether it is just another missive from the self-defined “weirdos and misfits” at No. 10, but could he give us some clarity? I assume that Select Committees will continue to parallel Government Departments, but we need some clarity, especially regarding 31 January.

Just as the other place started to debate the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, the Government threatened to send it to York—I think they might actually have meant Coventry, but that would have been too obvious—but the Opposition accepted the Lords amendments. The noble Lord Dubs of Battersea, who came here on a Kindertransport and who grew up and made an important contribution, wants to secure the same future for vulnerable children today. Like him, we know that children who have family here can make that contribution, so will the Leader of the House explain why, despite important Government initiatives that protect vulnerable children, such as those on human trafficking, they are leaving those children exposed to violence, overcrowding and danger in camps? The Government are facing two ways: laying a policy before Parliament is not the same as an automatic right. I ask the Government to think again. We are a compassionate country.

Yesterday the Prime Minister said that the Oakervee report will be published in due course. HS2 is about capacity, connectivity and therefore productivity. The Oakervee report has already been leaked, so when will the Government have a debate in their time? Could it be sooner rather than later? Hon. Members want to table amendments and express their views about which part of HS2 needs to be done first.

The Prime Minister banned everyone bar the Chancellor from going to Davos, but even the Chancellor is not clear about Government policy. He said that the Government's first priority was to get a trade deal with the EU, despite already having started work on an agreement with the United States—so which is it? The Chancellor also said that

“Britain is better off in”,

and that the single market is a

“a great invention, one that even Lady Thatcher campaigned enthusiastically to create...with no barriers, no tariffs and no local legislation to worry about.”

Now he has said that there will be no alignment. The Food and Drink Federation has said that this sounds like the “death knell” for frictionless trade and that the industry's margins are very tight, so which is it—frictionless or not?

The Government have signed up to the Paris agreement, so perhaps we could have a debate on how to negotiate with the Government of the United States, who have not signed up to it. Would the Leader of the House schedule a debate or a statement so that we can get some clarity on that?

We have heard that the Prime Minister will be meeting Richard Ratcliffe and other families. The Leader of the House will be aware that the British-Australian hostage Kylie Moore-Gilbert has been asked to be a spy by the Iranian Government in return for her release. She is in the same prison as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anousheh Ashouri, among others. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Prime Minister will be meeting those families, and that he will be leaving the negotiations to the diplomatic service? We want these innocent people released as soon as possible.

On a happier note, 20 January was the 755th anniversary of the de Montfort Parliament, where representatives of towns and shires got together here to discuss matters of national importance. We first sat in 1265, and hopefully will continue to sit and will not be abolished.

Sadly, we lost Terry Jones. For some of us, he provided the soundtrack to our lives in those wonderful “Monty Python’s Flying Circus” sketches, some of which I used to repeat in the playground. It was one of those great programmes that the BBC does so well, and we hope it will have the freedom to produce such programmes again. Terry Jones may have had a message for both sides of this House. For the Government, “He’s not the messiah. He’s a very naughty boy!” And for the Opposition, “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life”.

Mr Speaker: He’s not a naughty boy now—Leader of the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the right hon. Lady for that last point; I think we should all look on the bright side of life. It is a positive thing to do and good for British politics.

The right hon. Lady mentions having a debate under CRAG on the Western Sahara. The Government will always listen to representations in relation to CRAG. The question is whether it is a suitable use of time. If the Opposition want to make a more formal representation, it will be listened to. However, Opposition days are coming thick and fast, and any such issues could be brought forward under those circumstances.

On machinery of government changes, the tradition of this House is that Select Committees follow what ministries there are, and I imagine that the House would want to follow that precedent, but it is ultimately a matter for the House.

The right hon. Lady also mentioned the stories about their lordships going to York and what fun that might be for them. It occurs to me that when Royal Ascot moved to York, their lordships found it great fun to go up to York. If they could do it for pleasure, I am sure they might have a jolly time going there for business as well.

More seriously, the right hon. Lady mentions the amendment of the noble Lord Dubs. Lord Dubs is one of the most respected figures in British politics, and the campaign that he has continued to wage for vulnerable children is admired across the House and the country. I would just point out that the reason for not accepting the amendment is that it is not the right place for it. Government policy to look after vulnerable children from overseas remains absolutely in place. Some 41,000 children have come into this country since 2010, and 18,000 Syrian refugees—not necessarily children—have already come here, of the 20,000 that the Government promised. The Government are committed to protecting vulnerable children. This is really important. There is no change in policy; it is simply that the Bill was not the right place for it.

The right hon. Lady asks for a debate on HS2. I think we have to wait for the report to come out. I know we are getting leaks and tidbits and excitement in the newspapers, but the House of Commons needs to debate once the facts and the papers are brought together rather than doing so prematurely.

On Davos, I am not sure whether the right hon. Lady wished to be there rather than here, if it is still continuing, but the Chancellor was indeed there. British people voted to leave the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor the Exchequer is a democrat; he recognises the result. To hold people to lines they used when supporting remaining in the European Union

before the referendum fails to recognise that democratic politicians tend to accept the results of referendums—certainly those on the Government Benches. Our relationship with the US is one of our most important relationships, and therefore what agreements the US has signed up to, or not, does not change the importance of that relationship.

I can confirm that there is a plan for the Prime Minister to meet Mr Ratcliffe. I reiterate that I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising this every week. The behaviour of the Iranian Government is unforgivable, and we need to keep on pressing them to release people who are improperly held.

I am absolutely delighted that the right hon. Lady referred to the anniversary of 1265. It was, of course, a continuation of, not the creation of, Parliament. Prior to those times, the representatives of the shires came—people like me representing their counties—and from 1265, in our generosity, we allowed people from the boroughs to come in too, and so borough Members came in and the towns received their proper representation.

While we continue to look on the bright side of life, I think that answers all the questions for the time being.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Government are keen to move public sector jobs out of London and the south-east, and northern Lincolnshire is ideal. May I suggest that the public sector workers connected with, say, the renewable energy sector would be ideally located in the Humber region; and that since Grimsby has labelled itself as Europe’s food town for many years, perhaps the Food Standards Agency ought to pay a visit?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend, who represents Cleethorpes with such panache, is quite right to advocate for his part of the country. I am sure that what he says will have been heard and that the Food Standards Agency could probably think of nothing nicer than moving to Grimsby, but that will probably be a matter for it rather than for me.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): May I start by asking when Heather Anderson will be appointed to the European Parliament in order to fill the position left vacant by the election of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) to this House? We regard it as being of the utmost importance that our country is fully represented, albeit in its dying days of representation in the European Parliament, in order to oppose the direction that the Government have taken in that body. It would be wrong if either through administrative oversight or a lack of political enthusiasm we were not to be fully represented. Yesterday in the House, the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave a rather lacklustre response to my colleague on this matter. I hope that the Leader of the House can do better today.

Secondly, I note that the Labour Opposition are to have two full Opposition days two weeks in a row. Will the Leader of the House confirm when the third party will be given an Opposition day?

Finally, I want to return to the matter I raised last week—the claim of right for Scotland. Despite a rather awkward moment when the Leader of the House compared the constitutional aspirations of the nation of Scotland to those of the county of Somerset—a move that I

[Tommy Sheppard]

thought was rather foolish—he did acknowledge last week that the claim of Scotland is something he agrees with. He seemed to indicate that it was in some way discharged at the Scottish referendum in 2014. Will he confirm whether he believes that the claim of right existed on 19 September 2014 and every day thereafter, or is it the case that a right can be invalidated and extinguished by its exercise?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman forgot, absent-mindedly, to ask for a debate on the claim of right, but I am the servant of this House, because there is a claim of right debate on Monday 27 January in Westminster Hall. I am even able to deliver on that which has not been asked for, which is the type of superior service that those on the Government Benches like to offer. The best I can do is to quote his esteemed leader in this House, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who said, “Scotland said no”. Scotland did indeed say no—it said no to separation in 2014. It decided in its claim of right to claim the right to be a part of the United Kingdom, and thank heavens for that.

With regard to an Opposition day debate, I am doing my best to ensure that some time will be made available to the SNP prior to the February recess. It is not an absolute promise, but that is what I hope we will be able to do. As regards the European Parliament, I cannot think why anyone would want to go there for eight days.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): The Conservative party, I have absolutely no doubt, is the party of jobs, employment and opportunities. But it is the high street that provides hundreds of thousands of jobs, and it is under enormous challenge from the internet. I worked in business in North Norfolk. Will the Leader of the House grant time for a debate, so that we can level up the competitiveness of traditional bricks-and-mortar stores against this ongoing challenge? Those hundreds of thousands of jobs that are dependent on the high street’s success up and down the land are incredibly important to all of us.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being a champion for the high streets of North Norfolk and ensuring that they are well represented in the House. The Government take that issue very seriously. The £3.6 billion towns fund will support towns to build prosperous futures. There will be a £280 million tax cut for small businesses, because our manifesto commits us to cut taxes for small retailers and ensure that business rates are manageable. The Government are doing everything they can, but the Government cannot stop the natural evolution of the economy, so it is a question of ensuring that there are advantages for high streets.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I noted with interest the Leader of the House’s announcement that there will, provisionally, be business determined by the Backbench Business Committee in a fortnight. As he knows, I am not the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, as it does not exist at the moment, but I would be interested to know how the logistics of such a debate would be sorted out. The Chair will not be elected until next Wednesday, then we must wait for Committee membership

nominations from the various parties, and that needs to be sorted out in time for a debate to be granted and for Members to prepare for it. I am wondering about the logistics of that.

May we have a debate or statement in Government time about the conditions in which refugees and asylum seekers are meant to sustain themselves while waiting for determinations by the Home Office? I am afraid to say that my case load in Gateshead is very heavy, with a huge backlog of cases that are taking many months to sort out—well beyond the six-month and 10-month targets that the Home Office set itself, which have since been abandoned.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is just possible that the logistics for the Backbench Business Committee may be 24 hours better than the hon. Gentleman suggests. It depends whether this hotly contested post is as hotly contested as it was last time. If it is unopposed, the announcement will be on Tuesday, as I understand it, rather than Wednesday, and then it is a matter for the parties to get their nominations in. I think it is manageable. I can assure him that we have discussed it. The point he makes about determinations from the Home Office for refugees and asylum seekers is one that the new Backbench Business Committee, under whoever’s leadership, may want to consider seriously.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: There are 35 Members wishing to speak. I want to get everybody in, but some may miss out if we do not shorten the questions. Let’s help each other.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Rutland and Melton is home to not one, not two, but three geographically protected foods. Indeed, Somerset boasts its own Somerset cider brandy. Will my right hon. Friend be so kind as to agree to holding a debate in Government time on how the UK Government can best protect geographically protected foods post Brexit?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention anything from Somerset, because she knows that that wins me over to the side of the questioner straightaway. This important issue will be considered in negotiations with the European Union, and I am sure that it will come to the House at some time.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My constituent Allan Russell applied for a three-year renewal to his Access to Work support in October, but despite having chased it up several times himself, it took my office getting involved for his case to be allocated. He is still waiting without funding for transport to work and without Access to Work support. There are many other issues with Access to Work, so may we have a debate in Government time to allow Members to discuss them more widely?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is a very important issue. Access to Work is there to help people. If the system is not providing speedy answers, the hon. Gentleman is right to raise it here and with Ministers. If he wishes me to ensure that any follow-up answers are received from Ministers, I will be more than happy to do what I can.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend values the work of local charities in his constituency, as I do in mine, but they often struggle to succeed, which is why I have organised a training session with the Charities Aid Foundation for those local charities next week. Can the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on the role of local charities in all our constituencies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I commend my right hon. Friend for her work. This is absolutely the sort of thing that we need to do to help local charities to understand how other charities make a success of things. I cannot promise her Government time for a debate, but I think that the matter is ideally suited for a Backbench Business Committee debate, perhaps in Westminster Hall, after that Committee is re-established.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Later today, the Prime Minister will meet my constituent Richard Ratcliffe. At the same time, representatives from the Iranian authorities are in London to observe the International Military Services Ltd court case in the Court of Appeal. That case relates to the £400 million that we as a country owe Iran, and anyone with a passing interest in my constituent's case will know that the debt is linked to her imprisonment. The Leader of the House said that the behaviour of the Iranian Government is unforgivable. I agree, but the behaviour of our Government is also unforgivable because we have not paid the money that we owe. I make this plea: please may we have a debate in Government time to discuss how we pay this money back to Iran so that my constituent Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe can be returned safely to West Hampstead, where she belongs, after four long years?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank the hon. Lady for standing up for her constituent, which she is obviously right to be doing. She has the support of both sides of the House in doing so. However, the issue that she raises is extraordinarily difficult. The British Government cannot and must not pay, or appear to pay, either in fact or in reality, money to allow people who have been illegally detained to be released. The risk that would cause to other Britons travelling abroad would be very considerable. The law must take its course in relation to the money that was deposited here, but it would be absolutely wrong to connect the two issues.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Following the reformation of the all-party group on Iran, and in the light of recent events in the middle east—and domestically, as we have just heard—will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on relations between the United Kingdom and the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is obviously a matter of interest to many Members, as it is raised every week. The Government hear that, and I am sure the Backbench Business Committee hears it, too. As an immediate stopgap, I would point my hon. Friend to Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions on Tuesday 4 February.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): P&O Ferries in Hull is continuing to exploit foreign seafarers, which is risking lives and costing British jobs. It proposes

to replace all crews with Filipinos. A British rating works two weeks on, two weeks off and is paid fairly; a Filipino will be required to work six months on, doing 12-hour shifts and being paid £60 per day. May we have Government time to debate this really important issue? People might die.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I accept the importance of the issue and its importance for British seafarers employed by P&O. I actually think that the matter is more suitable for an Adjournment debate in the first instance, and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to get in touch with your good offices, Mr Speaker, to see if one is available.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Will the Leader of the House kindly find time for a debate on the Wylfa Newydd nuclear project on Ynys Môn? The project is important for our balanced energy policy and approach to climate change, and for jobs, skilled employment and investment in Anglesey.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of investing in technologies that will allow us to meet our obligations on reducing emissions, and I understand her and her constituents' disappointment that the project is not going ahead at the moment. However, the Government cannot support something that is not right for UK consumers and taxpayers. There has to be a value for money consideration as well, and suspending the project was a commercial decision for Hitachi. I think that this issue is, again, suitable for an Adjournment debate, because it is very much a constituency-level issue that has broader implications. I commend my hon. Friend for what she is doing to champion her constituents.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): In view of yesterday's shocking news that Jaguar Land Rover is to shed 500 jobs at its Halewood manufacturing plant in my constituency, may we have an early debate in Government time about what the Government are doing to support the automotive sector in the north-west and what they will do to assist my constituents who are set to lose their jobs?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Many issues are facing the car industry. Demand issues—because of changes with decarbonisation, issues involving diesel and so on—are affecting the car industry globally. This is an issue of great importance, and I think the Backbench Business Committee, when reformed, would be the ideal place to apply for a debate.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The loss of a child, as you know, Mr Speaker, brings untold pain of a kind that inspired the work that I did, led by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), on the children's funeral fund. Last week she raised the issue of stillborn children and their fate. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to make a statement so that we can know that the parents of stillborn babies will understand what happens to those babies once they have died?

I will end with this, if you will allow me, Mr Speaker. Speaking of death, C.S. Lewis said:

“No one told me that grief felt so like fear.”

Our job is to bring hope and love, for hope and love can trump fear.

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I commend both my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for their campaign on children's funerals, which received such widespread support across the House and was successful? The issue he raises, as I said last week, is one of importance, and historical issues need to be looked at. I will take it up with my ministerial colleagues and see whether there is any appetite or ability to provide a statement that would be helpful and bring people new information. If there is, I would encourage that to happen.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In the last Parliament, I approached the Backbench Business Committee to request a debate on the persecution of Christians to tie in with a date in November. Of course, that did not happen. May I ask the Leader of the House whether it is possible to have that debate brought forward? Some 260 million people across the world are suffering persecution, which is an important issue for many Members of the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I know that a couple of Members in the last Parliament were keen to ensure that the plight of persecuted Christians was raised at this slot every week, so that it was not simply forgotten about. I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman had secured a debate through the Backbench Business Committee in the last Parliament, and I encourage him to take that up with the new Backbench Business Committee, perhaps even prior to its reformation.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I congratulate the Government on an excellent start—it is great to see the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip. The reason I am trying to sound ingratiating is that I have a question of caution about 5G, and on Chinese hi-tech involvement in our critical national infrastructure and Huawei. Despite very considerable public debate outside the House, there has been almost no parliamentary debate in Government time on one of the most critical issues that will define the coming decades. How does the Leader of the House feel about this issue?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is a matter, as my hon. Friend says, of the greatest importance to our national infrastructure and national security. The Government are deliberating extremely carefully. I suggest to my hon. Friend that next Thursday's debate on global Britain would be an ideal time to raise the issue, as it clearly affects our place in the world. There should be some time to discuss it then.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): When will the Government bring back the domestic abuse Bill? Further to questions raised in the previous Parliament by the then Member for Ashfield, will they make provision for banning people convicted of the attempted murder of their spouses from recovering any joint assets in probate and family court hearings?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The point about family assets and people who have been convicted of crimes in relation to them is very important. I hope that I can give a helpful answer on the domestic abuse Bill: I would be surprised if it were not brought back before Easter. That is not an absolute guarantee, as the hon. Lady will understand,

but the Bill is very much at the forefront of the Government's thinking and something to which they attach great importance.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): May we have a debate on the role of the Council of Europe, a body that becomes much more important now that we are leaving the EU? My right hon. Friend's predecessor as Leader of the House was very kind in saying that she would arrange a debate, but I have not yet seen one.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Council of Europe is indeed important in its relationship to this country. May I again suggest that next week's debate on global Britain would be a very good opportunity to raise issues relating to the Council of Europe?

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): One of my constituents is a childhood sexual abuse survivor. She suffers mental health problems, including agoraphobia. She was awarded the higher rate mobility component for PIP—personal independence payment—and a paper-based assessment due to the issues she has with face-to-face assessments. Her car is a lifeline that allows her to see a counsellor to help her. Since then, however, the Department for Work and Pensions tried to force a face-to-face assessment. She could not undergo that and so lost her award and her car. Can the Leader of the House advise what I can do to help her to get her a paper-based assessment and give her a wee bit of stability in life?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think that all right hon. and hon. Members will feel that some of the issues relating to PIP that we hear about in our constituency surgeries are the hardest we have to deal with. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman—if he has not already—writes to DWP Ministers to get an answer and to see if there is any help and guidance that can come from there. If he finds that the answer is not forthcoming, I will do whatever I can to facilitate an answer. I commend him for the fight that he is putting up for his constituent, which is really the lifeblood of what all of us do as MPs.

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): When residents first moved into their homes in the newly built housing estate of Gamesley, they were told, "Yes, the transport links are poor, but don't worry, a new train station will be built shortly so that you can easily get into Manchester." Over 50 years later, Gamesley still does not have its train station. May we have a debate about improving transport links for new-build estates in rural communities so that we can finally get a train station for Gamesley?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Fifty years really is a long time, and the case that my hon. Friend brings forward should be seen as hopeless in terms of administrative efficiency. I congratulate him on leading this campaign and putting it at the forefront of what he is doing. I am not sure that, after 50 years, this will be a great comfort to him, but I understand that Transport for Greater Manchester is undertaking a further study of the feasibility of opening new stations in the Greater Manchester area. The Department for Transport is ready to discuss the business case with Transport for Greater Manchester, should it wish to seek Government funding for those projects. I have a nasty feeling that that answer was

written by Sir Humphrey Appleby, so I encourage my hon. Friend to continue campaigning in the hope that in the next few years something will happen.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be more aware than most that the situation on the perimeter of the Estate becomes extremely threatening at times, with abuse and threats to Members, and particularly women Members in my experience. Has he given any thought to the reintroduction of Sessional Orders?

Mr Speaker: They don't work.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Thank you, Mr Speaker—it is such a pleasure to be heckled from the Chair. I thought that that had stopped with the last Parliament, but never mind.

I completely understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I happen to think that the situation is much, much better in this new Parliament than it was in the last. I have noticed that coming and going is much less shouty, which is a very good thing. I have an historic affection for Sessional Orders, but noises off are right that their legal enforceability is, regrettably, questionable. We have to think about whether that could be given a legislative basis, but possibly Government time does not allow for that.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Redditch stands ready to benefit from the 5G revolution, and Amazon is poised to bring highly skilled digital and tech jobs to our fantastic town. Unfortunately, the 5G roll-out seems to have hit an “administrative inefficiency”, as the Leader of the House said, so may we please have a debate about 5G roll-out so that it can benefit towns such as Redditch?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We have one piece of very good news: our current Prime Minister is a great cutter of Gordian knots, and where there is administrative inefficiency, the Alexander the Great of our time will be cutting these Gordian knots to ensure that 5G roll-out, which is a high priority of Government policy, will in fact happen. I hope that it will happen in Redditch within 50 years, unlike the railway station.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): May we have a debate on my early-day motion 87, which pays tribute to my late constituent, the author, artist and prophet, Alasdair Gray, who passed away on 29 December and who will be very sorely missed by the artistic community across Scotland and around the world?

[That this House is deeply saddened at the passing of Glasgow-born artist, author and creative genius, Alasdair Gray, who died on 29 December 2019 aged 85, and sends its condolences and best wishes to all knew him; notes that Alasdair studied at the Glasgow School of Art, and became famous for his murals across the city, including Arcadia Theme, the stairwell mural in the Ubiquitous Chip restaurant on Ashton Lane, the ceiling of the Oran Mor auditorium, considered to be the largest public work of art in Scotland, and his most recent, the 40 foot mural for the entrance hall of Hillhead subway station in the West End of Glasgow, which includes local landmarks and, in Alasdair's own words, a section devoted to “all kinds of folk” and “folk of all kinds”; further notes that

his body of work included the novels Lanark, and 1982, Janine, plays including The Fall of Kelvin Walker, and many works of poetry, short stories and polemic including Why Scots Should Rule Scotland, first published in 1992; believes that Alasdair's works have influenced, engaged, inspired and entertained many generations of artists and society at large, and that these works will continue to do so, representing a fitting legacy for a cultural giant.]

Will the Government pay tribute to this genius of a man whose work enhanced so many public spaces in Glasgow and whose plea,

“Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation” has inspired so many around the world?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot promise a debate on Mr Gray, but I will pray for his soul.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Given the discussions on the whereabouts of the House of Lords, may we have a statement about moving the House of Lords to Harlow in Essex? We have strong transport links to the north; we are a sculpture town; we invented fibre optics; we have an enterprise zone; we have Public Health England moving to Harlow; and we have a new hospital being built soon, in case their lordships feel poorly.

Mr Rees-Mogg: What an excellent idea. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that Parliament does not have to be in Westminster and that in the middle ages Parliament dived around all over the country—it met in Leicester and Shrewsbury, and the last Parliament to meet outside London met in Oxford. Therefore, if we were to become a peripatetic Parliament, we would be able to meet in Harlow and all sorts of exciting places. My hon. Friend's pitch for Harlow has fallen on ripe soil and will be very well received, particularly in the other place—I think they could think of nothing finer.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Luton station in my constituency is falling apart, the roof has leaked for years and it is not fit for purpose. Many Members have raised their unhappiness with poor rail services, but I would like to ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the level of investment in railway stations in large towns such as Luton.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is a very important point. I have noticed that many questions are raised on the general railway provision in this country. In relation to specific constituency issues, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), is holding meetings with all Members—any Members who want to go—and I suggest to the hon. Lady that it would be a good idea to seek one of those meetings to persuade him of the necessity of what she is recommending.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The House, and indeed the nation, was misled about the true cost of HS2, so perhaps the Leader of the House could tell us when the Government actually intend to publish the full costs, when there will be a debate on them, whether that debate will be in Government time, whether there will be a vote at the end of it and what the purpose of such a vote will be.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think “mised” is a harsh word. The costs have risen, but I do not think there was any deliberate intention to hide the rise in the costs. Inevitably, these issues will come back to the House. A review is going on at the moment, and once that is completed I am sure the Secretary of State for Transport will want to come to the House and explain what has happened.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): With a majority Tory Government now in place, it seems highly likely that most over-75s will lose their free TV licences come June. Could we have a debate or a statement to highlight what discussions have been held with the BBC, what the current position is and whether there is any glimmer of hope that this popular policy might be protected?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is indeed a popular policy, and the BBC should think carefully about whether it really wants to penalise some of its most loyal supporters and place this extra burden on them from later in the year. I seem to remember that the BBC agreed to take it on, and it has now decided that it is not going to continue with that. That is a great shame.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): It has come to light in recent weeks that the new hon. Member for Bridgend (Dr Wallis) has a back story that is not necessarily fitting for an elected representative. Where checks and other measures in the Tory party have proven wilfully inadequate, especially in Wales, who is responsible? The chair of the UK Conservatives washed his hands of the matter on Sky last Sunday. May we have a statement from the Government to clarify to the electorate where the buck stops? Is it with the chair of the Welsh Conservatives or the Prime Minister?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We may debate the conduct of Members only on a specific motion.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Leader of the House will appreciate that our prison officers work in dangerous conditions, dealing with some of the most violent offenders in our society. However, prison officers are now expected to work until they are approaching the age of 70, despite the serious health and safety implications. Will the Leader of the House make time for a statement setting out why the Government believe that prison officers should not be afforded the same consideration as uniformed emergency workers such as police officers and firefighters, who can retire at 60?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The work of prison officers deserves particular commendation, in that it must be some of the hardest public service work to carry out. The question of retirement needs to be looked into carefully, depending on the work that people do, but with an increase in life expectancy it has been completely reasonable to raise the retirement age generally.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Leader of the House aware of just how many people around the world cannot fulfil their potential because they have no access to education? Could we have an

early debate on women’s right to education worldwide, and could we, as legislators, use our parliamentary groups worldwide to work together to secure that right?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, because it is important. It is an important part of Government policy and, indeed, of the work being done by the Department for International Development to ensure that a basic standard of education is available for all girls, and taxpayers’ money is being used to promote that. His suggestion that all parties in this House get together to contribute energy to ensure that that happens is absolutely right. If there is anything I can do to facilitate that, I hope he will let me know.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Over here on the SNP Benches, we are oxtter-deep in Burns season. Will the Leader of the House congratulate the Bridgeton Burns Club on its 150th anniversary and the work it does with young people, particularly in its schools competition, which inspires a love of Burns in children from the age of five right up to the end of secondary school, and can we have a debate on the contribution of Robert Burns to society?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Let me indeed congratulate the society on its 150th anniversary, and what a fantastic opportunity to celebrate it is. I wish all Scottish Members of the House, and other Members who participate, a very jolly Burns night—or a succession of jolly Burns nights, because it seems to be more than one particular night. I commend that vast quantities of haggis be eaten, because—you may be surprised to hear this, Mr Speaker—I have always thought it rather delicious.

Mr Speaker: I think so as well.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I recently had occasion to try to navigate the procedures of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and the House’s Human Resources Department to establish what should be done when a member of staff in a constituency office is unwell. It was very difficult and very complicated. That was not the fault of any one individual, but systems do not talk to each other and this system does not work very well. Apparently, there is no HR function relating to staff who work in constituencies, and there is a huge gap where they are not getting the support that they need.

Will the Leader of the House do all that he can to ensure that a good HR system is set up for members of staff who work in constituencies? There are several thousand of them. Will he also do all that he can, when looking into the cost of IPSA and what we spend our money on, to ensure that we have enough resources to protect people who are unwell and need our support?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Let me make two points. First, will any Member who is experiencing such issues please get in touch with the House authorities to see whether we are able to help? Whether the relevant authority is my office, Mr Speaker’s office or the office of the Clerk of the House, everyone will try to help if there are disconnects between the various bodies that serve us as Members. Secondly, I hope that I am not giving too much away by saying that the issue of the HR service is being considered by the Commission, and it is on our schedule of work at the moment.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): One of the major issues in my constituency, which particularly affects residents of Blantyre, is the alleged mis-selling of energy efficiency products by the now defunct company HELMS— Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd—which was approved under the Government’s green deal scheme. May we have a statement from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on how it intends to accelerate its complaints process to ensure that affected customers can secure a fair and speedy resolution?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Obviously, mis-selling scandals are extremely serious. I suggest that in the first instance the hon. Lady should raise the matter at the next BEIS questions session to get an answer out of Ministers, or should table a series of written questions. That is a more suitable way of dealing with it than a debate at this stage.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): When my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) rightly raised the issue of job losses in Halewood, the Leader of the House suggested that a Westminster Hall debate might be a good thing. Two years ago I held such a debate, raising the issue of those fears and threats. May I suggest that we should have a debate in the Chamber, recognising the threats posed by future trade deals and the comments made by the Chancellor at the weekend and again yesterday?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said earlier. This is a really important issue, and one that is part of an international change in economics and demand. The Backbench Business Committee is given time in the Chamber, and I think that if the hon. Gentleman feels that a debate in the Chamber would be more suitable, that is a route worth considering.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) raised the issue of the scandal of mis-selling of green deal products by companies approved by the UK Government. I have been working on this for the last three and a half years. There has been question after question in this place, there has been a Westminster Hall debate, there is an all-party parliamentary group on green deal mis-selling, and numerous formal complaints have been sent to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, but there is no consistency in the responses. I think it is time for a proper debate in Government time—or a statement, as my hon. Friend suggested—because we really need to find a solution that works for everyone.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady has made a valid point, but all of us, as right hon. and hon. Members, recognise that one has to keep on using the procedures of the House that to hold the Government to account, and it is my job to facilitate the use of those procedures.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): My question relates to that very point about holding the Government to account. As the Leader of the House will know, the public inquiry relating to infected blood is likely to report in 2022, but in the light

of continuing concerns about the financial support that is offered and the disparity between the nations in that regard, the fact that on average one person is dying every 96 hours and the lack of compensation, may we please have a statement from a Minister to update us on progress on those specific issues, and on the inquiry and the emotional counselling support that should be made available to those affected?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady cleverly ensured that she was called when the Health Secretary was sitting next to me. The message has therefore been heard by an authority that is greater than mine when it comes to dealing with this issue, and health questions will take place next Tuesday. Let me add, however, that the inquiry is an absolute priority for the Government, recognising the dreadful, desperate scandal of infected blood, and also recognising the hon. Lady’s formidable and right campaign to make sure that people are aware of it. The Department of Health and Social Care has increased financial support to beneficiaries of the infected blood support scheme in England, and it is looking as a matter of urgency at the issue that she mentioned in relation to the differences between the schemes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The Secretary of State is here and has heard her point.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Constituents of mine who are leaseholders recently received a letter from a firm of solicitors called JB Leitch about some outstanding ground rent. What was particularly outrageous about the letter was that it included additional fees for late payment equivalent to 222% of the original ground rent charge, despite this being the first correspondence that my constituents had received on the matter. That is typical of the way in which leaseholders are being exploited in this country. May we please have a debate on how we can stamp out these terrible practices?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government are well aware of that issue, and I think that it might well be covered by legislation that is in the pipeline. I think that that would be the occasion on which to debate it.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Two weeks ago at business questions, the Leader of the House told me that I was under “a misapprehension” when I said that his Government were

“shamefully backsliding on commitments to child refugees”.—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2020; Vol. 669, c. 632.]

They are the most vulnerable children. However, it has become plain this week that the Government are backsliding, so will he give me a statement explaining—which he failed to do when I asked him previously—what assessment his Government have made of the impact of their turning their back on the wellbeing of these children?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is under a misapprehension—first of all that it is my Government. It is Her Majesty’s Government, and it is worth remembering that. I have not risen to such giddy heights. The fundamental point is that Government policy has not changed. Government policy is determined to look after child refugees. The point of not having this in the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill is that the Bill is about leaving the European Union, not about

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

child refugees. We are going to continue with the policy, and as I have said, 40,000 child refugees have come to this country since 2010. This is a matter of high priority for the Government, and the commitment is absolutely there, so I am sorry to say that the misapprehension remains.

Mr Speaker: Last but certainly never least, Judith Cummins.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will the Leader of the House, and indeed the whole House, join me in paying tribute to the rugby league legend Rob Burrow, who was recently diagnosed with motor neurone disease? The moving testimonial at Headingley showed the true spirit of the sport.

Continuing on the rugby league theme, and following on from the prestigious award to our very own Mr Speaker by the all-party parliamentary rugby league group for his outstanding service to the game, may we have a debate in Government time on the opportunities that the 2021 world cup being held in England will bring?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I join the hon. Lady in her tribute? Motor neurone disease is a terrible and frightening disease, and coping with it, and coping with it in public, must be a great burden. The debate that she has suggested would, to my mind, be a wise suggestion for the Backbench Business Committee.

Mr Speaker: I am absolutely with Rob Burrow, and I am sure that the whole House would like to send him their best wishes and support.

Wuhan Coronavirus

11.23 am

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to inform the House about the outbreak of a new coronavirus in China and the UK's response to protect the British public. As of this morning, 571 cases have been confirmed by the Chinese Government, and 17 people are reported to have died of this new strain of respiratory illness. All the fatalities have so far been contained to mainland China. However, this is a rapidly developing situation and the number of cases, and deaths, is likely to be higher than those that have been confirmed so far. I expect them to rise further. It has been reported that the Chinese authorities have placed further transport restrictions on the epicentre of the outbreak, Wuhan city, including on international flights. A small number of cases of the new coronavirus have now been detected in other countries, including Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the United States. Experts at the World Health Organisation are meeting again today to determine whether this new outbreak now constitutes a "public health emergency of international concern".

Most cases of the new coronavirus so far have been non-fatal. In these cases, most people experience cold and flu-like symptoms and then recover. However, there have been a small number of cases so far where it has proven more serious and fatal.

There are no confirmed cases of this new infection in the UK so far. We have been closely monitoring the situation in Wuhan and have put in place proportionate precautionary measures. Our approach has at all times been guided by the advice of the chief medical officer, Professor Chris Whitty. Since yesterday, Public Health England officials have been carrying out enhanced monitoring of direct flights from Wuhan city, and all passengers on direct flights from China will receive information on what to do if they fall ill. Professor Whitty and Public Health England, aided by independent experts, are in close contact with their international counterparts, and are continually monitoring the scientific evidence as it emerges.

The chief medical officer has revised the risk to the UK population from "very low" to "low", and has concluded that while there is an increased likelihood that cases may arise in this country, we are well prepared and well equipped to deal with them. The UK is one of the first countries to have developed a world-leading test for the new coronavirus. The NHS is ready to respond appropriately to any cases that emerge. Clinicians in both primary and secondary care have already received advice, covering initial detection and investigation of possible cases, infection prevention and control, and clinical diagnostics. Acting on the advice of Professor Whitty, we have updated our travel guidance to British citizens to advise against all but essential travel to Wuhan city.

We are working closely with our counterparts in the devolved Administrations. The public can be assured that the whole of the UK is always well prepared for these types of outbreaks, and we will remain vigilant and keep our response under constant review in the light of emerging scientific evidence.

I commend this statement to the House.

11.26 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement, and for updating the House this morning.

The coronavirus is indeed very concerning, and I am grateful for the work of Public Health England and the Department on it so far, especially in screening passengers on direct flights from Wuhan. However, a passenger arriving from Wuhan yesterday said that he had gone through virtually no screening, but was given a leaflet. Does the Secretary of State have any response to that?

Will flights from other Chinese cities, not just Wuhan, be monitored, and when does the Minister think monitoring might begin? Will there be specific traveller advice for UK citizens travelling into China who have existing conditions that may mean they need to take more care?

As the Minister said, Public Health England has assessed the risk of the coronavirus being spread to the UK as “low”. In the event of the virus spreading to the UK, are there contingency plans and funds to prevent further spreading, to deal with the scale of the problem?

As the Minister knows, we are in the middle of flu season, so I do not want to cause any undue anxiety, especially as—as we have heard—there are no cases in the UK at the moment, but can he please advise people watching who may be concerned about their own symptoms of what they should do?

We all know that the NHS has a tremendous record in responding to similar incidents, such as Ebola and monkeypox. We can certainly be proud of our public health record in these areas and can be confident in how public health bodies will respond to this incident. There is a chance that a global pandemic can be avoided if Governments across the world take the right measures in a timely fashion.

I thank the Minister for his update today, and would be grateful if he provided some further clarity on all the points I have raised.

Matt Hancock: I appreciate the cross-party approach that is being taken to this outbreak, as reflected in the shadow Minister’s remarks. I shall address the specific points that she raised. On the reports from the flight that arrived yesterday, it is important that we get the enhanced monitoring right. The challenge is that symptoms for the Wuhan novel coronavirus do not usually appear until five to seven days, and sometimes up to 14 days, after a person has been infected, and therefore the advice is that the most important part of the monitoring is to ensure that everybody knows what to do if the symptoms arise, because often the symptoms will not be there for somebody on the flight. Having said that, we do not expect further flights from Wuhan, because the Chinese authorities have taken steps to stop travel out of the city.

The hon. Lady asked whether we will be monitoring flights from other Chinese cities or, indeed, from anywhere else. The current evidence suggests that the vast majority of cases are in Wuhan. Obviously we keep that under constant review, and we will not hesitate to take further steps, if necessary, to protect the British public.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): We have a big and vibrant Chinese community and a very large Chinese community centre in Harlow. What information is being

sent to such Chinese community centres? Many members of the Chinese community have relatives in Hong Kong, so what will be done if this disease reaches Hong Kong?

Matt Hancock: There is evidence of potential cases of the coronavirus in Hong Kong, although the vast majority of cases are in Wuhan city. We will keep that under review.

The advice to my right hon. Friend’s Chinese residents is exactly the same as the advice to all, which is to avoid anything but essential travel to Wuhan city and that direct flights from Wuhan city appear to have ceased. An awful lot of people who work for Public Health England are already in Harlow, with more to come. I am sure he would want to join me in thanking them for the vigilant work they are undertaking.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): It is obvious that the scale of this operation should not be underestimated. Shutting down a city the size of London as it prepares to celebrate Chinese new year is an extraordinary undertaking. What support has the international community offered to the Chinese authorities, particularly the health services, as they cope with this unprecedented strain on resources?

Some of my questions have already been asked, so I will just ask about the World Health Organisation, which is meeting today. What communication have the UK Government had with the WHO? Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the Government will remain updated, in real time, on developments and on what steps, if any, are required in the UK?

Finally, I have a number of Chinese constituents, as we probably all have, and English is difficult for many of them. When we give information to Chinese communities in the UK, is it provided in different languages?

Matt Hancock: Yes, the advice will be available today in Mandarin and Cantonese. The UK is heavily engaged in the WHO response and, of course, we are engaging with the Chinese Government. That engagement principally happens through the WHO, which has well-established procedures to make sure we understand the nature of the outbreak so that scientists can investigate the epidemiology and come to an evolving scientific analysis of what is happening. We then base our decisions, as much as possible, on the scientific advice that flows from that. The chief medical officer, who is an expert on these issues, is co-ordinating the work here in the UK.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Many UK universities, not least my local Huddersfield University, have strong links with the Wuhan University of Science and Technology. What particular advice is the Secretary of State’s Department giving to UK universities, particularly those with a large Chinese student population?

Matt Hancock: We are not giving them specific advice. We are giving the same advice to everybody, which is to avoid all non-essential travel to Wuhan, but I am happy to take away the point that we should communicate, through Universities UK, with all UK universities to make sure the message gets to students directly so that they hear the advice that is there for everybody, which is to avoid all but essential travel.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): My thoughts go out to all the residents of Wuhan, Manchester's sister city. Sadly, the news of this outbreak could not have come at a worse time, as residents are preparing to celebrate the lunar new year. What more can the Secretary of State do, in light of our expertise in coronaviruses, to support the Chinese Government? We have a sizeable Chinese community in Manchester, so we should raise awareness in this country.

Matt Hancock: I will ensure that the authorities in Manchester are fully apprised of, and keep up to date with, our advice, which, as I say, is based on the best scientific evidence, to make sure that Manchester and its sister city deal with this as well and as appropriately as they can.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the comprehensive update and, in particular, for the detail on the test the UK has developed for the coronavirus. What consular assistance is being provided to British nationals caught up in affected areas in China and elsewhere?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend raises an important question. There are approximately 11 million people in Wuhan city, including British nationals. As far as we know, we have two UK staff in our consulate in Wuhan and 15 locally employed staff. Of course we are ensuring that they get all the support they need, and they are available to provide consular assistance to British nationals in Wuhan city.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The House appreciates the fact that the Secretary of State has come here so promptly to make this statement. Of course we all hope that an outbreak here does not happen, but what is the current advice to members of the public about the use of face masks if it does? One thing about these outbreaks is that people look at what measures are being taken and what people are doing in countries where the disease has taken hold, and then ask the authorities here, "Why aren't we doing the same?" It would be helpful to know this in anticipation; presumably it will come from guidance given by the chief medical officer.

Matt Hancock: That is right. We have well-established procedures for dealing with a potential outbreak such as this, be it of flu or a coronavirus. Our advice at the moment to the UK public is that the risk is low—of course we will keep that under review. We try very much only to put forward proposals that are clinically appropriate. The wearing of face masks is not deemed clinically necessary now. Of course we keep that under review, and we will be guided by the science.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for the comprehensive update. We know that scientists are already working hard to find a vaccine for this newly identified strain of coronavirus. Given the importance of vaccines in combating serious diseases such as this, does he agree that education about vaccines

is more important than ever in this age of disinformation? What conversations has he had with colleagues to combat fake news on vaccines?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Lady makes an incredibly important point, on which I wholly concur in the round: vaccines are incredibly important and valuable. We have a long-established process for working out where we should vaccinate. In this case, because of the nature of the virus, it is unlikely that a vaccine is going to be available—there is not one now—so that is not the route we should be looking at, but of course we will keep that under review. On her general point, when advised to take a vaccine, such as the flu vaccine for the winter or the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine for children, people should vaccinate, because it is both good for them and good for their neighbour.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the statement. In Hull, including in my constituency, we have a lot of Chinese students. I just want to be clear about the advice being given to anyone worried about symptoms that might develop, as he said that that might happen up to 14 days after arriving in the UK. What advice should those students be given about what to do and who to contact?

Matt Hancock: Anybody with concerns, be they a student in Hull or elsewhere, should contact their doctor. As the first port of call, 24 hours a day, they can call NHS 111, which has clinical advice available around the clock. All the 111 contact centres have been updated and will be kept updated with the most appropriate advice.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, may I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and his clear commitment? Throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, people like you and me, Mr Speaker—you are a type 1 diabetic and I am a type 2 diabetic—have a chronic disease. Those who are diabetic and many others across the United Kingdom worry about the killer impact of this virus.

I note that the United States of America has diverted flights to specific screening areas. I am sure that the Minister and many others in the House saw the news this morning, as I did. On the flight that arrived this morning, there were three different opinions among those coming off the plane: one said that they had had no advice or discussion whatsoever; the second one got a leaflet; and the third one said that they had some tests done before they left China. So it seems that mixed messages are coming out. It is important that we have a clear policy and that everyone flying here and every person here feels assured.

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We had a divert in place for that flight to ensure that it went to a part of Heathrow where there are the procedures and processes to be able to deal with this issue. There was enhanced monitoring of that flight—not all of that is immediately obvious to the passengers themselves. Crucially, we understand that the Chinese Government have stopped future flights. We will of course keep all that under review.

Holocaust Memorial Day

11.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Luke Hall): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day.

This debate is taking place on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe, which brought an end to the murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children by Nazi Germany. But, as we know, it did not bring an end to the scourge of antisemitism. Today, sadly, we see antisemitism on the rise once more in this country and across Europe and the Americas. It is a mark of a civilised society that people of different faiths, different cultures and different traditions can live together in harmony. If we are truly to value Holocaust Memorial Day, we will do it by remembering this lesson: that we must show tolerance and respect for other people in order to live in peace. That is why it is vital that we all rise to the challenge and rid our society of this age-old hatred.

On Holocaust Memorial Day, we remember all those murdered by the Nazis: the 6 million Jews; the thousands of Roma and Sinti; the political prisoners; those with physical disabilities and mental illness; and those persecuted for their sexuality. It is a day when we remember the 2 million victims of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the almost 1 million victims of the Rwandan genocide. It is a day when we remember the 8,000 Muslim men and boys murdered in Srebrenica 25 years ago. On Holocaust Memorial Day, we remember them all.

The enormity of the numbers can make it seem almost impossible to relate to individual victims. That is made even harder because the names of many Holocaust victims have been lost to us. In Nazi Germany, Jewish men and women were forced to change any name believed to be Aryan to Israel for men and Sara for women. Others, in the camps, had their names stripped from them and replaced by a tattooed number. Personal names that had been handed down from father to son and from mother to daughter were lost or replaced.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has launched a social media commemorative project that will generate the name of an individual who was murdered by the Nazis, allowing us to honour those victims by giving them back their name. Today I will be honouring Johannes Degen. He was born in Germany on 8 July 1900 and was murdered by the Nazis for being a Jehovah's Witness. I hope that all Members will take the time to take part and visit the trust's website.

Survivors are at the heart of Holocaust commemorations. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to sit before a survivor and listen to them describe their experience can be in no doubt about the terrible truth of what happened. Sadly, to this day there are still people who insist that the Holocaust never happened.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is absolutely right that as these wonderful survivors come to the end of their lives, we need to have a record of their testimony. The exhibition at the Huddersfield Holocaust Memorial Centre, which was

opened by Lord Pickles, is a wonderful resource. We have those recordings, and children and other people can learn and remember.

Luke Hall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for putting that on record, and I completely agree with what he said. Survivors are the ultimate rebuke to such thoughts, and the testimonies that we hear are a reminder of our duty to confront those who would tell lies about our history.

I wish to take the time to share a little of the story of Auschwitz survivor Lily Eberts. In 1944, when she was just 14 years old, the Nazis deported her and her family from her Hungarian home town to Auschwitz. She was with her mother, brother and three sisters. On their arrival, they were split up, either directed left or right. Lily's mother, brother and sister were told to go right and they were taken to the gas chambers and crematorium. Lily and her two sisters were directed the other way. They never saw the others again. The only possession that Lily was able to keep with her on her journey was her gold pendant, given to her by her mother, which, remarkably, survived the camp with her, hidden in the heel of her shoe.

Seventy five years have passed since liberation. Lily is now a proud great grandmother. She still wears the tiny gold pendant and shares its remarkable story with all those who will listen. Any gold arriving in Auschwitz was stolen by the Nazis, so Lily believes that her pendant is unique in that it was the only gold to enter and leave the camp with its rightful owner. Like Lily herself, it survived against the odds.

Many Members of this House and many millions of people from around the world have visited Auschwitz-Birkenau and have seen the thousands upon thousands of shoes, of all shapes and sizes, piled on top of one another. Many of those shoes, like Lily's, hold the memories of those last murdered in Auschwitz. Hidden in the soles of those shoes are notes and photos—the last possessions of men, women and children murdered by the Nazis.

I pay tribute to the eye witnesses for their resilience and their bravery. They are still, even in their 80s and 90s, sharing their testimony in schools across the country with the Holocaust Educational Trust. We are also hugely grateful to the next generation of Holocaust Educational Trust ambassadors—thousands of young people who have heard testimony from survivors and who have visited Auschwitz and returned to share what they have learned. They are doing incredible work, taking on that responsibility and commitment to carry the legacy and stand up to hate today.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Further to that point and, indeed, to the intervention of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), will the Government play their part in working with schools to bring the life of the work of the trust to every part of our kingdom? It is vital that the next generation understand that the future is, in part, shaped by what we learn from the past.

Luke Hall: I absolutely give that commitment, and I thank my right hon. Friend for the opportunity to put it on the record. That is why we should pay particular tribute to the next generation of volunteers who are really taking on that legacy and serious responsibility.

[*Luke Hall*]

Although Auschwitz is synonymous with the holocaust, few people are aware of the Arolsen archive, the world's most comprehensive archive on the victims and survivors of Nazi persecution. The collection has information on around 17.5 million people and belongs to UNESCO's memory of the world. Apart from the paper records, the archive has 3,000 personal possessions belonging to former inmates of concentration camps. Thanks to the #StolenMemory campaign, the archive has returned precious recovered items to family members. Members can imagine the immeasurable value that these items have to their families—they are often the last remaining traces of parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

Decades after the Nazis had confiscated a watch from his father, Jean-Pierre Lopez held it in his hands and wound it up again. He reported that it was extraordinary. He said that it seems to still work perfectly even after 74 years. In 1944, the Gestapo had arrested his father, José Lopez, as an anti-fascist and deported him as a forced labourer. He managed only just to survive, ending up with typhus and a body weight of just 40 kg.

The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is "stand together". It is a reminder for us to stand together, with each other and with our communities, to remember the holocaust. It is also a reminder that during the holocaust and subsequent genocides, communities themselves were deliberately divided, with individuals persecuted because of their identity, and that, despite the dangers of doing so, some people chose to stand together with those targeted, to challenge the divisive actions of genocidal regimes. We must remember their bravery and sacrifice and be inspired by it. We also must make sure that we stand together to challenge hatred and prejudice wherever we find them today, which is why this Government are so proud of the support that they give to holocaust education remembrance.

The incredible work of the Holocaust Educational Trust is of massive value. Every year, the trust takes thousands of young people to Auschwitz-Birkenau and trains hundreds of teachers across the country. The Government have provided £2.2 million to the trust's "Lessons from Auschwitz" project and £1.7 million for visits to Bergen-Belsen, the camp liberated by British troops. We also provide £1 million a year to the Holocaust Memorial Day trust to deliver the annual memorial day and thousands of local events across the country. We have been funding the charity Remembering Srebrenica since 2013, including with a further £400,000 this year. The charity uses the funding to raise public awareness of the 1995 genocide, with the aim of creating a diverse movement of people coming together to challenge hatred and intolerance.

Despite that education and the support of successive Governments and people in the United Kingdom, it is a sad fact that antisemitism has spread like a virus far into UK politics in recent years—even into the very building in which we stand. When the Chief Rabbi unprecedentedly feels the need to speak about his fears during the general election campaign, when Jewish councillors and Members of Parliament are subjected to such campaigns of hatred that they feel they have no alternative but to stand down, when dangerous conspiracy theories become so widespread on social media that the

public start to believe them and write in to our offices with the most offensive lies, we must shake ourselves and remember that this is not normal; this is wrong. I urge all Members to play their part in turning the tide of antisemitism.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The sad truth is that there are people elected to this place in the recent general election who have shared antisemitic conspiracy theories and breached the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. It is all very well people apologising, but the real evidence that they have changed is their taking some action over what they have said—owning it and showing that their apologies are more than just words.

Luke Hall: First, I thank my hon. Friend for his work as vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism. I agree that people should take action. We are proud to support the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which unites experts and 34 member states behind the need for holocaust education, remembrance and research. In 2016, the IHRA created a working definition of antisemitism, which is now internationally accepted. The alliance seeks to ensure that no one can shirk responsibility for their words by playing with semantics, but it will succeed only if organisations sign up to the definition and support it. The IHRA definition is already used in guidance for the police and Crown Prosecution Service, to help them to identify hate crime. I urge public organisations in the UK to sign up to the IHRA definition.

I will finish by saying a few words about the holocaust memorial and learning centre we plan to build in Victoria Tower gardens next to Parliament. We are fortunate that the foundation delivering the memorial is headed up by the right hon. Eric Pickles and the right hon. Ed Balls. By placing the memorial and learning centre next to Parliament, we ensure that it will serve as a permanent reminder that political decisions have far-reaching consequences.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The main purpose of today's debate is to highlight the importance of people remembering, not forgetting, and of making sure that future generations know what the survivors knew and what the outside world knew and did not stop. May I suggest that today is not the day to go into too much detail of proposals that do not fulfil the specification of September 2015 for a national memorial? We might do better on another day.

James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)
rose—

Luke Hall: I am happy to give way to my right hon. Friend.

James Brokenshire: I thank my hon. Friend for the powerful and moving speech he is giving and for underlining that on Holocaust Memorial Day and in this debate we must continue to challenge all forms of hatred, bigotry, division and antisemitism. We must reassure British Jews that they are and always will be a special part of what Britain is all about. In that spirit, does he agree that having a holocaust memorial and learning centre is essential to underline both that commitment to them and our duty to ensure that law and practice can never take us down a dark path like the holocaust?

Luke Hall: I thank both my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) for their interventions. I completely agree that the memorial will stand as a reminder that a central role of democracy is to encourage tolerance for ethnic, religious and racial differences that will foster religious freedom, individual rights and civic responsibility. It will prompt a sincere commitment to mourn and to remember, and absolutely for us to act.

All of us gathered here today are united in our stand for a tolerant and respectful country where everybody from every background is equally valued. I look forward to the debate.

11.55 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): This year we mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. I thank the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for everything it does to ensure that the whole country remembers the 6 million Jews murdered during the holocaust, as well as the millions of other people killed under Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), who joins me on the Front Bench, is a trustee of that trust.

I also pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the work that it does to ensure that the UK plays a leading role internationally on holocaust education, remembrance and research. One of its earliest achievements was ensuring that the holocaust was included in the national curriculum for history, and it continues to play an important role, working with teachers, students and policymakers to ensure that we are equipped to speak out against intolerance. Its “Lessons from Auschwitz” programme is not only about taking young people to see with their own eyes the evidence of the lives that were taken at Auschwitz; it is also about ensuring that the human stories of the holocaust are not forgotten.

Finally, I pay tribute to the survivors and the many who lost loved ones. Although it is now 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the physical and mental scars of the horrors that holocaust survivors have had to endure have not necessarily faded with time. It is therefore all the more incredible that so many survivors dedicate their lives to sharing their experiences and educating young people about the horrors of that era, and the need to oppose antisemitism and any form of racial or religious hatred. These survivors—now of a generation who were just young children when they went through some of the most awful experiences that any of us can imagine—have collectively helped to educate millions of schoolchildren against the hatreds that are tragically still too prevalent in society. I want to put on record my gratitude for their work, the benefits of which I am confident will endure for many decades as today’s schoolchildren become the adults of the future.

I highlight the words of one survivor, Mindu Hornick, who was recently awarded an MBE for her holocaust education work. She was just 13 when she was taken with her family from Prague to Auschwitz. After living through tragedy, she made a home here in the UK, in Birmingham, where she married and raised her daughters. In December she said,

“with everything that is going on in the world today—with Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other unacceptable things that are happening—I think it is important to educate young people... it is very important to educate young people to love each other and to appreciate each other’s faith and beliefs.”

Holocaust Memorial Day is a reminder that we all have a duty to ensure that such an event can never happen again, but also that the hatred that culminated in the genocide did not start with the biggest of crimes. It emerged from a climate of scapegoating and victimisation of minorities—primarily Jews, but also Roma, Sinti and others—which is much closer to the racism that we know still scars our society today. Words never seem able to capture it, so I need to borrow from Primo Levi. As he recalled his time in Auschwitz, he set out why we must always fight the evils of racism, because far from being an aberration totally set apart from the rest of history, the holocaust is most tragically something that could happen again. I share his words with the House:

“it is the duty of everyone to meditate on what happened. Everybody must know, or remember, that Hitler and Mussolini, when they spoke in public, were believed, applauded, admired, adored like gods... And we must remember that their faithful followers, among them the diligent executors of inhuman orders, were not born torturers, were not (with a few exceptions) monsters: they were ordinary men.”

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very eloquent speech. Is she aware that, 75 years on, Germany still refuses to pay victims of its atrocities in Poland—Poles and Polish Jews—while hiding behind an agreement that it signed with the illegitimate communist-era Government imposed on Poland by Stalin? Does she agree that the time has come for Germany to make war reparations to Poland and those who suffered at the hands of the brutal German oppressors from ’39 to ’45?

Cat Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and I hope that it is one of the points that is explored during the debate, but if he will forgive me, I would like to get on with my speech.

As Primo Levi said, monsters do exist in our world, but they are too few to be truly dangerous; more dangerous are those who are willing to follow their evil without asking questions. It is our job in this place to ensure that those questions are asked, and clearly we need to do more.

Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust has suggested that the recent rises in antisemitism are not just about attitudes to Jewish people but are the results of our society weakening as a whole. Extremist movements in the UK and abroad have given confidence to those that previously hid in the shadows. Antisemitism always flourishes when extremism takes hold, and our current times are no different. This is a problem that all British society must confront, and it demands leadership that is prepared to turn its back on inequality and division. Prejudice and hatred of Jewish people has no place whatsoever in society, and every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that it is never allowed to fester again.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I want to raise an issue around social media and the way that it has been exploited by, I am afraid, the hard left in what I would call almost holocaust weaponisation. The hard

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

left are trying to close down any constructive debate that we can have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are trying to fuel modern antisemitism and trying to silence many Jews in public life. I regularly receive images which, for example, have piles of dead bodies from Nazi death camps, and swastikas alongside Israeli flags. I am likened to SS guards, and I have seen online remarks calling for a final solution to my sort of politics. Does my hon. Friend agree that the internet remains an under-regulated and unchecked medium in which these attitudes can grow? Does she agree that we should be taking action both to regulate better and check better what is allowed on social media?

Cat Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that incredibly valid and painful point with regard to social media companies. I pay tribute to her work on always challenging antisemitism wherever it raises its head, even when it can be very uncomfortable to do so. She raises topics around the way in which social media companies seem to be given a free rein and how it is so hard to remove these pieces of hate from many platforms. That is worthy of a debate in this House in its own right as a single issue.

Members of the Jewish community are on the receiving end of this hate, but today's debate is a chance for us to acknowledge that they cannot be left to tackle this problem alone. We need to be vigilant, because the events that led to the holocaust appeared, not as a single grotesque event, but through the normalisation and mainstreaming of hatred, inequality and intolerance.

Mr Sheerman: I am privileged enough to have been in this place so long that, when I arrived, I knew Harold Wilson and Denis Healey. We could not find better champions against antisemitism and the ghastly things that happened during the war. They were true champions. They were great travellers, and they had a network across the world working against these wicked people and those who made apologies for them. I think we can be quite proud of our heritage in the Labour party, and I wish we could restore that reputation now.

Cat Smith: Absolutely; I want nothing more.

As Primo Levi said,

"we too are so dazzled by power and prestige as to forget our essential fragility. Willingly or not we come to terms with power, forgetting that we are all in the ghetto, that the ghetto is walled in, that outside the ghetto reign the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting."

I regret that I am not able to stay for the duration of today's important debate, because I have committed to taking part in Holocaust Memorial Day events in my constituency this evening, as I have done for many years. But I will be catching up on the contributions made by all Members in what I know will be a powerful and essential debate.

12.6 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I want to thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for their approach to today's debate and what they said.

I consider it an honour and privilege to take part in this debate every single year. It is sad that we have to continue to have it, but we absolutely must continue to do so.

I am delighted to stand here as the newly elected co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism and to continue with I did before I came here, when I served as a history teacher, which is the necessary education on the holocaust and the hate that drove seemingly developed nations to do what they did. The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day this year is "stand together", and our all-party parliamentary group plans to do exactly that, to ensure that our Parliament is a leader in tackling anti-Jewish racism and hate, as it has been in previous years.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the former Member for Bassetlaw, now Lord Mann, who helped to establish this Parliament's reputation as a leader in the fight against antisemitism and all forms of hate. He used to go the extra mile in fighting against antisemitism, including the famous incident when he chased Ken Livingstone into a lavatory. As amusing as that incident was for many watching it, antisemitism is no laughing matter. Despite the reputation that John helped to establish for our Parliament, there are, sadly, a few former and current Members of this House who have, on occasion, brought us into disrepute.

Before I say more about that, I want to reflect on the title that John chose to take in the other place: Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor. He picked that because Holbeck Moor was the site in Leeds that Oswald Mosley turned up in, where he was roughly dealt with by the working-class people of Leeds. It has always been working-class people who have been at the centre of the fight against antisemitism. The same happened in my city—when Oswald Mosley came to Hull, it was working-class people who came out and kicked him out and made his experience in our city a short and unpleasant one.

I am sad in one way, but proud in another, that when I knocked on the doors of working-class communities in my area at the election, people referenced the current rise in antisemitism as a concern. We do not have a big Jewish community. I think that I am one of three Jewish constituents. We may be heading for a minyan, but there are certainly not many of us. It was sad but also reassuring to hear people in my area reference the need to do more on this at the recent election. I am very proud of the people in my area for standing as resolutely as they have.

While I am on this subject, I want to pay tribute to Brigg Town Council in my constituency, which last year instituted a new holocaust memorial in the town, and to North Lincolnshire Council, which is creating a new holocaust memorial in Scunthorpe. As I have said, we do not have a big Jewish community in our region, but we are absolutely steadfast in standing with the Jewish community in this country.

The principle we have set out for the all-party group is that we are going to take on the problems of antisemitism wherever it is found in this country—or indeed in this Chamber, in whichever party it exists. Some of the most successful cases are the quiet successes where we work with Members and candidates to put proper education in place to ensure that colleagues who have erred and said things that are silly, or in some cases offensive, are educated.

To those on my own side I want to say—I am sure that this does not apply to anybody present—that I have no truck with anybody engaging in Soros conspiracy

theories, as some regrettably have done, including at the recent election. The Nazis treated Jews as vermin but also alleged that they had a plan for world domination. Sadly, the Soros conspiracy theories, which are prevalent on the far-right of politics, are simply an updated version of that disgusting ideology. Using George Soros's Jewish heritage and puppet-master imagery is antisemitic, and if anyone shares any of these images—if anybody on any side of politics in this Chamber engages in that again—they will most certainly be hearing from me and our group.

Daniel Kawczynski: My hon. Friend uses the term “Nazis”. The problem with that term is that it is a firewall for the real perpetrators, the Germans. We are now seeing a revisionism as to who was to blame for the start of the second world war; we heard President Putin last week claim that Poland was somehow partly responsible for starting it. It is very important not to use third-term expressions such as “Nazis”, but to say exactly who started this and who is responsible, which is Germany and the German people.

Andrew Percy: I am not going to get into the debate that has been raging in Poland following what President Putin said. All I will say is that wherever the Germans occupied in world war two, there were very brave people who stood against them, and sadly, people who facilitated and aided their evil and vicious aims. That is true across every single country of Europe. There were people in this country in the 1930s who, as we know and as I have just referenced, gave succour to fascism and to that hateful ideology.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful speech, which I agree with. He touched on the conspiracy theories around George Soros, and I am glad he did. Will he join me in condemning parts of the Hungarian Government who are pushing this and call on Prime Minister Orbán not to allow this anti-Soros propaganda to continue?

Andrew Percy: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The indulgence of this Soros conspiracy theory—which I have heard from people in my own area, it has to be said—is completely unacceptable wherever it is found. It is racism, it is antisemitism, and it is an updated version of the tropes we saw in the 1930s. There are people who stood at the recent election who engaged in some of those theories. We must take people at their word when they apologise for that, and I would encourage anybody who has been guilty of that to work with us through the all-party group.

While there have been problems on both sides of politics, I do fear, sadly, that on the Labour Benches—some 30 of the party's candidates at the recent election were accused of antisemitism—there is more work to be done to counter anti-Jewish racism. It is a real pleasure to co-chair the APPG with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who has made it absolutely clear that she will be steadfast in calling out antisemitism and racism on her own Benches and within her own party, and that she will have no truck with those who talk about foreign Governments being inspired by Zionist masters, any kind of relativisation of the holocaust in respect of the wars in Afghanistan

and Iraq or, indeed, pathetic antisemitic Beatles singalongs, which we have seen. As I have said previously, it brings shame on this country's whole body politic that, sadly, this disgusting ideology has been at the heart of British politics and mainstreamed in recent years. When I was the Minister responding to such a debate a couple of years ago, I spoke about the Israelification of antisemitism, which we have seen in recent years.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech and will do fantastic work as co-chair of the all-party group against antisemitism. Does he agree that the whole House must condemn the terrible actions of individuals during the election who put through my door my own election leaflets with swastikas drawn over the part where I mentioned that my gran had escaped from Germany during the war? We must educate people across the United Kingdom, but we must also have particular cognisance of the impact of such issues during election periods and the damage that is done to Jewish communities and others across the United Kingdom.

Andrew Percy: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady—I would say my hon. Friend—who has been incredibly brave in calling out antisemitism herself, and has been the subject of antisemitism. I pay tribute to her work as vice-chair of our APPG and entirely agree with her. There might be an opportunity to address some of this through the online harms Bill, but it is time that we updated our electoral law to ensure that tougher measures are in place. It has been a very long time since there was a full root-and-branch review of this country's electoral law, and we should absolutely carry that out.

I want to move on from the party political problems by saying that I agree entirely with the Jewish Labour Movement that it is wholly inappropriate that somebody has been nominated by the Labour party—it was, at least, reported this weekend that they had been nominated—to serve in the House of Lords when they are at the centre of allegations of covering up antisemitism and intervening in antisemitism inquiries within that party. I know that many Labour Members share that view, principally because the Labour party has a proud history of fighting all forms of racism.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his newly acquired position as chair of the APPG and look forward to working with him on it. I share his feelings about the nomination to the House of Lords. Does he agree that we will totally abolish antisemitism from the mainstream of all political parties only if the collective leadership of those parties really shows a zero-tolerance approach in not just their words but their actions?

Andrew Percy: I cannot disagree with a word that the right hon. Lady says. As she has powerfully outlined in previous debates, she has been on the receiving end of vile antisemitic abuse. This does come from the leadership down. Leadership is needed from all of us, but there should be no doubt about the position of our political leaders.

That is why I agree with the Minister's comments and urge colleagues to sign up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition. The APPG sat in

[Andrew Percy]

Portcullis House for a very long time yesterday to encourage colleagues to sign up. Many still have not done so, but I ask them please to sign up to the IHRA definition, because that is one way in which all of us can demonstrate leadership and show our commitment to zero tolerance of antisemitism.

Of course, antisemitism and antisemitic tropes were the beating heart of Nazism, yet in the past few years there has been a resurgence of holocaust denial, and the holocaust has been distorted and denigrated. Sadly, the context is worsening, particularly online. An American study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that fake news is 70% more likely to be shared on social media than a true story. The Antisemitism Policy Trust and the Community Security Trust have found that the number of searches for “holocaust hoax” on Holocaust Memorial Day is 30% above the average for the rest of the year. If someone types the words “Jew joke” into Google, they will find some of the most shocking and disgusting antisemitic, holocaust-minimising and racist bile they can find. This all occurs in an online space that impacts on our real world, and a particular concern at the moment is seen in the use of gaming, with gamers targeted as a route into antisemitism. That surprised me, but perhaps it does make sense, and we have to do a lot about that.

As the Institute for Jewish Policy Research has shown, the chances are that while only 2.5% of the public may be what we would understand as antisemites, one antisemitic opinion is likely to be held by some 30% of the public. Therefore, the chances of encountering antisemitism in this country are relatively high. That is not to say that 30% of people in this country are antisemitic—of course not—but it is certainly the case that we hear casual things such as, “But of course the Jews do seem to be very wealthy.” The people who say such things would not consider themselves antisemitic, but they will use such a trope. They casually throw it in without, as I say, considering themselves to be antisemitic.

James Brokenshire: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to his new role on the all-party group. He makes a very important point about education. I have had the privilege, I would say, of going to Auschwitz and Buchenwald and actually seeing the reality. I know the power of taking such an education to a new generation. Will he comment on the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust to see a new generation really appreciating such an education and the power of young ambassadors taking forward a message to ensure that we really do never forget?

Andrew Percy: Absolutely.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The hon. Member talks about people being unaware that what they are saying is offensive and of why it is offensive. Earlier, in Women and Equalities questions, I asked if hon. Members could work together to tackle unconscious racial bias. I absolutely agree with what he is saying—lots of people do not understand that their responses to others arise because of their unconscious bias. Would he be interested in working with a number of us across the House on such unconscious bias, whoever it affects?

Andrew Percy: Absolutely. I was not in the Chamber for Question Time—I apologise for that—but certainly that is exactly the kind of thing I mean. It links to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) about the need for better education in this whole space. Yes, 100%—I would be more than happy to work with the hon. Lady. I would, of course, say to my right hon. Friend—I was coming to this later in my speech, but I shall say it now—that the Holocaust Educational Trust does a fantastic job. No Holocaust Memorial Day debate is complete without a shout-out to Karen Pollock and all of her fantastic team for everything that they do.

I do hope that the Government will continue to enable the HET funding to be used in a way that allows the trust to take students, teachers, local journalists and even the local MP on its visits. While I had visited concentration camps in Germany before, I had never visited the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz until I went on a HET visit. Doing so is an incredibly powerful thing, and I would encourage colleagues to try to undertake a visit. Every colleague who has been on one knows the power of it. The sad reality, of course, is that we cannot take every school student on such visits.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important to fund as many young people as possible to visit the western front and the battlefields of world wars one and two, as well as Auschwitz and Birkenau? I visited the battlefields as a young teenager in my second year at high school, and it left an indelible mark on me—I went to the grave of my grandmother’s uncle, who died there. When I left university, I visited Auschwitz and Birkenau. I know the importance of being able to see the magnitude and understand the impact so that our young leaders of the future will make sure that mistakes made back then are never made again.

Andrew Percy: Again, I could not disagree with a word that the hon. Lady says. Visits are important, but it is not always possible to take every student, as I have said. One of the lessons I enjoyed teaching, which I found to be one of the most powerful about the battlefields—we could not take every child—was to make my students put their own name or a family name into the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. They would very often find somebody, and we would then do a piece of creative writing on what that person’s experience must have been like. Visits to the battlefields and, of course, to Auschwitz are very important.

One of the real challenges of teaching the holocaust is that, because of the scale of the horror and the outrage, it is often very difficult for young people to understand the machinery and the scale of what actually happened. However, a visit reinforces something that it is much more difficult to get across in the classroom. We have to continue holocaust education, and we have to continue to fund the Holocaust Educational Trust properly.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about young people’s understanding of the totality of the suffering and darkness that they witness when they go on these visits. Does he agree that a lot of the Holocaust Educational Trust’s work is in follow-up activities to help young people to make sense of their visit and really internalise the lessons they have learned?

Andrew Percy: Absolutely. Again, I could not disagree—this is a wonderful debate in which we all do agree, and it really does show Parliament at its best.

There is also the young ambassadors programme because, sadly, young people who perhaps cannot visit Auschwitz are losing the ability to hear from a survivor. Every year, sadly, fewer and fewer survivors are available to speak to young people. The ambassadors programme for those who cannot visit, with young people going back and advocating to their compatriots in school, is really important. The Holocaust Educational Trust's work on that is absolutely spot-on.

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con) *rose*—

Andrew Percy: My hon. Friend will absolutely know about this and has played an important role, so I give way to her.

Nicola Richards: Throughout the year, holocaust survivors share their testimony with students across the country. As survivors grow older, as we have heard, the next generation becomes really important witnesses. That is why I am so pleased that pupils at the Phoenix Collegiate in West Bromwich East heard just last summer from Mala Tribich. The George Salter Academy, Q3 and Phoenix have all taken part in the Holocaust Educational Trust's "Lessons from Auschwitz" project.

I would like to add a message of congratulations to Mindu Hornick MBE, who was recognised in the Queen's new year honours this year for her services to holocaust education. Mindu, just like so many other survivors, is a true hero to all of us who are fighting antisemitism. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Mindu, and does he agree that marking Holocaust Memorial Day is more important than ever to help us in our fight against antisemitism, which is still on the rise?

Andrew Percy: I absolutely agree, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her work in the important area of holocaust education. Of course, I am sure the whole House will want warmly to congratulate her constituent—as I believe she is; perhaps she is not—who was awarded the MBE in the recent honours list. We would all 100% agree with that.

As I have said, this is important for young people, not least because they are a group that is most vulnerable to some of the hate that exists online. Yes, we have a huge challenge in this country, but we are also making progress—we should never underestimate that. Nearly 400 Members of this place have now signed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. It is still available to sign, so I ask those who have not signed to do so. We want every Member to sign. We cannot fight antisemitism until we fully understand what it is and how it manifests itself. I am proud that this Government—our Government—were one of the first in the world to adopt the definition. I commend a number of football clubs, such as Chelsea and West Ham, that have done the same. They are starting to take this definition into civic life, using it as a tool for understanding what antisemitism is, and promoting a positive culture of tolerance and mutual respect.

I think the Minister referenced the fact that putting our names to something is very easy—we can all do it. We all do it often in this place: we turn up to things and

get our picture taken with whichever good cause, and it ends up in the local newspaper. That is absolutely part of the life of a Member of Parliament. However, issues such as this are not just about signing bits of paper, or indeed signing the very important remembrance book this week, but about action. That is why I invite colleagues to take part in, and to support the work of, the all-party group.

The all-party group has some interesting visits and trips planned in the coming year, and such things can be really powerful. I have referred previously to our trip to Brussels to look at antisemitism in Belgium. It was really sad. We were sitting with a group of young Belgian Jewish students, and when I asked them, "How many of you would be prepared to wear your kippah out and about in Brussels?", they laughed at me, because the question was so ridiculous. Because of the rise of antisemitism across the continent of Europe—particularly, it has to be said, in some of what we would imagine to be the most liberal, progressive cities in Europe—they felt afraid and frightened to show even any sign of their Jewish heritage or culture in public. Similarly, there was a really powerful trip to Amsterdam. When we asked students how many of them saw a future for themselves in Europe, the number of hands that went up was very depressing.

We have important cross-party work to do in this Chamber to tackle all forms of intolerance, but particularly antisemitism. I encourage colleagues to come along and support the all-party group's work so that we can remove this stain which, as I said, has sadly been mainstreamed in this country and in our politics in recent years. We all need to own that; it does not exist solely on one side of the House.

12.31 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate today on behalf of my party, and to have the opportunity to stop and reflect, as we all must do. The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is "stand together". Those of us in this House who have been a part of these debates in the past are particularly aware of why that is so important. I think hon. Members also agree that we owe a debt of gratitude to Karen Pollock and her team at the Holocaust Educational Trust for their excellent work, which influences so many people and does so much to increase awareness and an understanding of why we need to stand together.

I am very fortunate to represent East Renfrewshire, which is home to the majority of the Jewish population in Scotland. We, as an area and as a country, are so much the better for the rich diversity of communities like mine. Our Scotland is, and must be, a Scotland for people of all faiths and none—a home for all of us. The theme of the debate today has to be a stark reminder to us all that we must all challenge antisemitism wherever we see it—standing together, standing up against hate and speaking out.

That made me reflect on some of the people I know in my own community who are known and admired for the immense work they have done on holocaust education to ensure the next generations, those coming after them, understand exactly what happened and what can happen when we do not stand together against hate. I was fortunate to meet Ingrid and Henry Wuga when they visited a local school to talk to the young folk about

[Kirsten Oswald]

their experiences of the holocaust. They are amazing—I am sure the House will join me in congratulating Ingrid Wuga, who was recently awarded the British Empire Medal—and a huge influence on everyone they come across. These are the voices we need to listen to.

It is so important for our young people in particular to hear that kind of testimony, so that they know what went on. A holocaust does not just suddenly happen: it builds up gradually and bit by bit. Intolerance and hatred become the norm, and they grow. So our language and our actions matter. We need to be very clear about that and about the responsibilities we have in this place. We must stand together. We must influence others to do so and we must call out hatred wherever it exists. It cannot be allowed to grow and fester unchallenged.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a very powerful speech. Does she agree that those who fan the flames of hate and antisemitism, who engage in conspiracy theories and who deny the greatest crime in human history, which was the holocaust, are themselves a disgrace to humanity?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I will come on to talk about education, which is really important in making sure that people are aware. That is why education and an understanding of history matter so much. It is why projects that allow us to capture the testimony and the voices of survivors are so important, too. I visited the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre at Garnethill a while back, and was struck by the huge value of that facility. I encourage anyone who can to visit and increase their own knowledge and understanding. It is a remarkable place.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad my hon. Friend has been to visit the Jewish Archives Centre in my constituency. I encourage everybody to go and visit. Was she as struck as I was, when looking at some of the personal effects of Jewish people—their passports and their personal belongings—at just how quickly things can change and how quickly hate can rise? There is still so much we have to learn about how to stop and prevent that.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. We all need to reflect on that. We have a responsibility to recognise hate when we see it. We have that responsibility to call it out, because things can change very quickly.

That point connects to education, which the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) also spoke about. Educational visits are very important. Many young Scottish people now visit Auschwitz, including the group accompanied by Nicola Sturgeon, our First Minister. Such visits are vital in making sure that there is no doubt, no denial, and no loss of the focus on what happened.

There are others, too, working on that and making a great impression on those around them with their focus and their drive to ensure we have a full understanding of the horror of the holocaust and how it came about. The work of impressive young Scottish women like Danielle Bett and Kirsty Robson mean those coming after us will know and will remember.

When I was in this place in a previous parliamentary Session, I was very fortunate to visit Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Memorial Centre. I will never forget that and I am sure that nobody who visits ever does. It was the little things that stood out and affected me profoundly. Seeing the photos and the names, the people who were killed were not just numbers—although they amount to more than the entire population of Scotland—but people just like you and me. They were ordinary people torn from their everyday lives into unimaginable horror.

It was the everyday things. I lost my own mum just before I visited Yad Vashem. I was utterly shattered to see on display a pair of glasses that someone had kept, which had belonged to their mum who had died in a concentration camp. She had kept her mum's old broken glasses with her, and had kept them on her person until the end of her own life, because they were all she had of her. These wee things are the big thing, in a way, because they remind us that this is about all those individual people wiped away by the holocaust. All those people.

It is worth remembering that Holocaust Remembrance Day and Burns night fall just about together. I think Burns could speak for all of us here today when he said:

“Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!”

Burns was very big on solidarity, too:

“Man to Man, the world o’er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that.”

That is all about standing together. That focus on standing together and standing up for what is right is very important in my local community, and our public representatives of all political colours recognise that.

Today, if this debate had not been taking place, I would have been at the funeral of a woman very focused on standing up for everyone in our local community. I am sure that hon. Members will join me in remembering the life of Liz Carmichael, the wife of former East Renfrewshire provost, Alastair Carmichael, who worked very hard on holocaust memorial during his time in office.

That focus on others was also a guiding light in the life of Jane Haining, who hailed from Dunscore but died in Auschwitz when she refused to allow the pupils that she taught at a school in Budapest to be sent there alone—she insisted on going with them. Her dedication to those children—her commitment to standing together—is a lesson for all of us. When she wrote of her decision to be with the children, she said:

“If these children need me in days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in days of darkness?”

There is an increasing need now for us to recognise that darkness and to live our lives with Jane Haining’s spirit of compassion and solidarity. We need to stand together and be relentless in our commitment to doing so.

12.40 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I start by picking up where the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) left off: like her, I have been to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, many times over the past few years. It was a very moving experience, which I shall never forget, no matter how many times I

go back. Two things stand out in my memory. The first is the objectivity of the displays—they do not try to dress up the holocaust; they explain it as it is. The second is the timeline there—it illustrates not just what happened when the second world war started, but the timeline before that and the sort of words and feelings that started the whole process that led to the holocaust. The purpose of Yad Vashem is a noble one: to keep alive the memory of what happened and to remember the individuals who died and were murdered in the holocaust. In other words, it links history and memory.

We have also mentioned that this is the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. I have been to Auschwitz on a number of occasions, too, and its grim state provides a very good reminder of the terrible atrocities that took place there. For me, however, the most important concentration camp that I have been to is outside Lublin, in eastern Poland. Why was it so memorable? Because when I went there on a glorious spring day, there were lots of flowers around in the concentration camp. Those flowers were growing because they were built on the bodies of people who had been cremated and murdered in that concentration camp. It was an irony that we still had the glory and beauty of those flowers against such a terrible atrocity.

I am a trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which is responsible for running the event, and we have heard that this year it has a theme—“stand together”. The trust asked us to identify an individual that we could mention during the debate, but I am not going to do that. Instead, I am going to put on this yarmulke in order to remember the 6 million Jews who were killed during the second world war. It is important that we do that, but it is important, too, that we recognise that other genocides have occurred, apart from the holocaust. There have been genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Dame Margaret Hodge: The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful statement and I congratulate him on it. Today is the day when the issue of the Rohingya Muslims and whether there is a genocide is being considered by the International Court of Justice. It is a sobering thought that that judgment is happening on the day that we are debating the holocaust. Does he agree that lessons are not always learnt? I hope that the ICJ comes to a sensible judgment and that that influences what happens in Myanmar and the treatment of the Rohingya Muslims.

John Howell: I completely agree. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust uses the definition that genocides are those that have been declared by the United Nations, so the quicker that that moves on—so we can see what happened there—and the judgment is made, the sooner we can include Burma in the list of places where genocides have occurred.

In addition to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, it is also the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia, and we should remember that as we go through Holocaust Memorial Day. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust sets out to bring together thousands of people across the UK, who participate in different programmes, many of which are originated by communities and schools. They all participate in remembering, and tens of thousands of activities take place during the

day. It also organises the UK ceremony that takes place next week, to which I hope a number of Members here have been invited, because it is a great thing to do. Sadly, I will be away at the Council of Europe, where I expect we will have our memorial to those who were killed in the concentration camp near Strasbourg, which we went to see last year.

Finally, the words of Sir Nicholas Winton, who rescued almost 700 children from Nazi-occupied Europe, should be taken to heart when we think back to the holocaust:

“Don’t be content in your life just to do no wrong, be prepared every day to try and do some good.”

12.47 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I rise, of course, to support the motion on Holocaust Memorial Day and to tell the House how proud I am to represent one of the largest Jewish communities in the United Kingdom, who have done so much over so many years—indeed, almost centuries—to enhance our city, benefit its people, and to work above and beyond just their community. There are about 8,500 Jewish people in Leeds, almost all of whom live in north-east Leeds.

In 2014, I did one of my charity bike rides—many Members may remember that I do one every year to raise funds for a good cause—to raise money for Donisthorpe Hall, which is a Jewish elderly persons’ nursing home in the constituency, and very wonderful it is, too. It depends very much on voluntary donations, so the purpose of my ride was to do a kind of Jewish pilgrimage, going from Donisthorpe to Drancy in Paris. Many Members may have heard of Drancy—it was the place from which the French Jews were deported to the concentration camps. Shortly before my epic ride to Paris from Leeds, I learned that my great-grandmother, Reina Sevilla, was deported from the Vél d’Hiv via Drancy to Birkenau concentration camp, where she was murdered in the gas chambers—a direct personal connection to the holocaust.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. My great-grandmother, Rosa Simonson, came to Manchester, originally, having fled an earlier manifestation of antisemitism—the anti-Jewish pogroms in eastern Europe in the 1880s. Most of the Jewish population of the area she came from in what is now Poland perished in the holocaust, and I often think about what happened to her family. Does he agree that the fact that antisemitism can keep emerging again and again makes Holocaust Memorial Day so important, and that we have to be always mindful of that danger?

Fabian Hamilton: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Every day in this place—I have been here 22 and a half years—we learn of colleagues who have a connection to a Jewish past, and my hon. Friend has just told us about his.

While I was in Paris, I went to Drancy and met the maire adjoint—the deputy mayor—of that small township. We went to the holocaust memorial centre on the housing estate that had become a concentration camp in 1940. While we were there, there were demonstrations in the small town of Sarcelles on the outskirts of Paris—the very town my great-grandmother, Raina Sevilla, came from. The demonstrations were against the Jewish people

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

there. People were calling on the community to burn the synagogue down. This was in 2014, at the very time I was going to commemorate the death of my great-grandmother in the holocaust.

In 1985, I received a surprise phone call from my father, who sadly passed away in 1988. He was doing some research into his family history, and had discovered something quite extraordinary: his family, who he assumed had been murdered in the holocaust—while he was at school here in England and then volunteering for the British Army—had actually survived their incarceration in Bergen-Belsen.

My grandfather was born in Salonica—Thessaloniki in modern Greece. It is important to know that the Nazis invaded Salonica somewhat later than many parts of Europe. That meant that many of the Sephardic community of that great city survived. My grandfather's brother's wife, Bella Ouziel, not only survived, but, in 1985, was alive and well at the age of 93. My father asked whether I was free at the weekend, and we flew via Athens to Salonica. We met this magnificent old woman of 93, with her painted fingernails, her Jaeger dress and her coiffured hair. We sat down with her in her apartment, and we discussed the war experience.

My father had not seen Bella since 1934, when he was 12. However, he had kept photographs—Bella's had been destroyed when she had been arrested with her daughter and her granddaughter and taken to Bergen-Belsen. We discussed at great length. Luckily, we had a shared language, French, which was my father's first language and the language of many of the educated Sephardic Jews of Salonica—indeed, I speak it fluently as well—so we had a very good conversation. We laid out on the coffee table the photographs she thought she would never see again, but which my dad had kept, and which I have had electronically scanned. At the age of 30, for the first time in my life, I heard a first-hand account of life in a concentration camp. That is something I shall never forget, nor should any of us ever forget it.

The Holocaust Survivors' Friendship Association was set up in Leeds and covers most of the north of England; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) drew attention to its work in establishing the Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre at the University of Huddersfield. It did that by gaining grants from the national lottery heritage fund, the Pears Foundation and the Association of Jewish Refugees, as well as many personal donations. It set up an exhibition called "Through Our Eyes", for which it interviewed 20 holocaust survivors over several days, many of whom have since died. The idea is that, once their physical presence has left us, their presence will still be felt through a series of interactive holographic videos. Visitors can go to the centre and actually interview some of the people in those videos—many of whom are not with us any more—and ask them about their life. What a great tribute to the people who survived, and survived for so many years. What a wonderful thing for our children and grandchildren to have when the physical presence of those individuals is no longer with us.

I have to pay tribute to the wonderful Lilian Black. Her father, Eugene, was a survivor from Auschwitz-Birkenau. He was 16 years old when he was there. He died a few years ago, and I remember him well. Lilian

has taken the memory of her father and the experience he had, and she has worked with the HSFA and the survivors to create this fantastic centre. If hon. Members have not been there, they should please go—it is absolutely brilliant, as my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield said.

I also want to pay tribute to the survivors who still live and, indeed, to those who are no longer with us. My constituent Arek Hersh, who lives in the village of Harewood, has a wonderful mix of Polish and Yorkshire when he speaks English—it is a great accent. A room at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem has been named after him. He wrote a wonderful book about his experience, which I recommend. He is 91 now; he was an 11-year-old boy when he was taken off the streets of the Lodz ghetto in Poland. He was then taken to a number of different camps. When I met him at Yad Vashem, he was with his friend Jacob. Jacob and Arek had shared a bunk in every camp they were in from the age of 11 until they were liberated at the age of 16. How they survived is quite a miracle.

Daniel Kawczynski: The hon. Gentleman is making an eloquent and powerful speech. He has referenced Poland on several occasions. I hope he will join me in remembering the millions of Poles who were killed during the holocaust, many of whom, like a member of my family, Jan Kawczynski, were shot by the Germans for hiding their Jewish friends and neighbours. The hon. Gentleman will know that Poland was the only occupied country with the death penalty for helping and protecting Jewish citizens. I would be grateful if he acknowledged the suffering of the Poles in helping their Jewish friends.

Fabian Hamilton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that powerful intervention. I have always believed that the Poles played the most extraordinary role, and paid a high price for it, in the second world war. My heart goes out to all my Polish friends; I have many, and one of my best friends at school was Polish. He could not go back to Poland until after the end of communism, because his parents had fled the communist regime there. The Poles are a wonderful, brave people. They did so much to resist the Nazis and so much to protect their Jewish population—the largest in the whole of Europe before the second world war. My heart goes out to all Poles who played a vital part in protecting their Jewish citizens as well as their own, who suffered so much.

Iby Knill was born in Bratislava. Later, she was smuggled across the border to Hungary, where she spent the first part of the war fighting the oppression of the Nazis, until she was eventually arrested as a communist and taken to Auschwitz No. 2 camp. While she was there, she teamed up with all the other women nurses, doctors and dentists—medically qualified people. She did that because, as she says in her book "The woman without a number"—again, I recommend it to all Members here—if people stayed together in solidarity, it was very hard for the Nazis to pick them off individually. She saw Dr Mengele every single day, but because she went to the camps in 1944, she survived.

Iby married a British Army colonel after the war. After his death, she began to talk about her experiences. She had come to Leeds in the early 1960s, and she taught at universities and worked for the local authority.

Now, at the age of 96, my constituent Iby writes, lectures and gives talks. Indeed, eight or nine years ago, she did a talk for Members in Speaker's House, with the blessing of the former Speaker, John Bercow. Some may remember it; it was a very moving occasion.

Iby has written another book, "The Woman with Nine Lives". In her books, she talks about the fact that she never had the tattoo. When people ask her about that, she says, "I do not know why I was not tattooed. Maybe it was because they ran out of ink, or maybe the officer concerned simply had to go to the toilet." Iby's first-hand accounts are well worth reading, and it is extraordinary that, at 96, she is still able to go around our schools and educational institutions.

Trude Silman is another survivor. She came from Bratislava during the war, on the Kindertransport. She is 91 now. She is a very close friend of mine and my wife's: we see her every other week if we possibly can, and I was with her at the weekend. She is a contributor to the exhibition at Huddersfield University, and figures large in it. Eugene Black I have mentioned. John Chillag, who died recently as well, was another holocaust survivor in the city of Leeds. But the person I want to end my contribution by describing is someone who was born on 14 February 1920—two years before my own father was born—and died on 1 January this year, six weeks before his 100th birthday. His name was Heinz Skyte.

Heinz was absolutely extraordinary. He was the founding director of the Leeds Jewish Welfare Board and the Leeds Jewish Housing Association, organisations that have done so much for so many Jewish people who have been so underprivileged and have had so many problems in their own lives in the city of Leeds. He made an incredible contribution. He was also a great supporter of Leeds United football club. But the one thing I remember him for—I will finish with this short anecdote—is that in 1998, a year after I was elected to this place to represent my constituency, he gave a talk on the 60th anniversary of Kristallnacht. We are talking about a number of anniversaries today, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Heinz was a student of the University of Hamburg. He was born in Munich, but he went to Hamburg to study. One evening, he received a phone call on his landlady's telephone. "You need to get out of there," said his mother. "They are going to ransack the synagogues. They are going to arrest and beat the Jewish people of Hamburg. Go to the park, and stay there all night." It was four o'clock in the afternoon. So Heinz stayed there all night. He saw the fires. He saw Jews being arrested, being beaten, being brutally attacked. He saw the Torah scrolls being removed from the synagogues and burnt in the streets. He saw the destruction of Jewish businesses. He told us this from his first-hand experience. It is the kind of thing that you never forget hearing.

After the night of destruction and horror was over, Heinz managed to get through to his mother, and his mother said, "Go and see our family doctor. He has retired from Munich, and he now lives in Hamburg with his daughter. Go to his flat. This is the address." So he turned up, at six or seven in the morning. He walked through the front door to find the old man sitting on the sofa in his full Wehrmacht uniform from the first world war. If you had been a serving officer in the German army, you were allowed, above a certain rank,

to keep your uniform, and there was the old doctor with his pointed helmet with the spike on it, and his Iron Cross First Class.

The Gestapo had broken down the door—they did not knock on the doors, they broke the doors down—to arrest this filthy Jew, and they had found a man with an Iron Cross, in an army uniform, with the rank of major. They did not know what to do. As Heinz said at the time, "Zey didn't have ze mobile phones." They could not ring headquarters to get instructions, so they left. The doctor gathered his belongings in shock, with his daughter and with Heinz, and they took the train out of Hamburg. This was in 1938. They went to Denmark, they crossed the sea to England, and they came to Leeds. The doctor lived until the 1960s. I do not know what became of the daughter.

That is a story that I wanted to share with the House because it is a story that Heinz told us from his first-hand experience. Here was one of the last living witnesses of the horrors of the holocaust, someone who himself made a recording, and—I am very proud to hear this—at his funeral on 5 or 6 January at the Jewish cemetery in Leeds, his son Peter said that until his dying day Heinz was a member of the Labour party. He never lost those values. He was never prepared to give them up, in spite of what he did not like in our party.

So it is with that tribute to Heinz Skyte that I finish my remarks. I thank Members for all the contributions that are being made today, and I thank them for indulging me in talking about my own family's history.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Brendan Clarke-Smith to make his maiden speech.

1.5 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): It is an honour for me to be here in the House making my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for Bassetlaw, and to follow such a powerful and emotional speech from the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton).

It has been a long and winding road to my becoming an MP. When I started nursery school, my teacher told my mother, "Brendan is a little bit different. I can't decide whether he is going to end up in Parliament or in prison!" Of course, I now know that it is perfectly possible to achieve both.

My parents grew up in two of the poorest areas of Nottingham, and I was raised on what was once the largest council estate in Europe. We pursued the dream of owning our own home, and I was the first member of my family to go to university. It is this sense of aspiration that has shaped my beliefs, and still does. I am delighted to be joined by so many new friends on these Benches who share those aspirations, along with a Government who are now committed to driving forward a blue-collar Conservative agenda.

My first few weeks as an MP have been challenging. Finding my way around the building and remembering how to address people properly have been difficult. However, that was nothing compared to the challenge of explaining to my wife why a national newspaper had referred to me as the "biggest swinger in town".

[*Brendan Clarke-Smith*]

Like this modern-day House, my constituency of Bassetlaw is brilliantly diverse. We are fortunate to have some beautiful countryside, and we are, in many ways, a rural constituency. At the same time, we boast a proud mining heritage in places such as Worksop—the gateway to the Dukeries—in the west, and Harworth and Bircotes in the north. On the other side of the A1 we have the market town of Retford, and the constituency also boasts numerous village communities. Many areas recently suffered from flooding, and I am committed to ensuring that we tackle that, as well as rejuvenating our high streets and supporting our local NHS services.

It will soon be the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower's setting sail for the United States and the establishment of the Plymouth Colony. Many of those passengers originated from my constituency. After two long months, they reached the New World. That is a commute that many of my constituents will be able to relate to if they have been using Northern Rail recently.

The legacy of the Mayflower is widespread, be it the Thanksgiving tradition or the estimated up to 35 million individuals living today who are said to be direct descendants of its passengers. They set off in search of the right to practise their beliefs without persecution. In Bassetlaw, anniversary celebrations are already under way, and in 2020 the Bassetlaw Museum in Retford will be joining more than 100 other museums across the UK, the US and the Netherlands in those celebrations, as well as Illuminate 2020 events throughout the year. Post Brexit, I look forward to even greater co-operation with our friends in the United States. Why is this relevant? Because the story of the Mayflower is one of religious freedom and tolerance.

Let me, at this point, echo the remarks of my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and thank my predecessor, Baron Mann of Holbeck Moor, for his service to the constituency over the last 18 years. I congratulate him on his elevation to the other place. Let me also praise his efforts in combating the scourge of antisemitism. I look forward to his work as the Government's new antisemitism tsar.

Before my parliamentary career began, I was a schoolteacher. Over the years, I have made many visits to the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in the neighbouring constituency of Newark. A few years ago, I took a group of my pupils to Poland to visit the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. That was a haunting experience that I will remember for the rest of my life, as will my former pupils.

The camp serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of extremism and intolerance. Monday will mark the 75th anniversary of its liberation. All the more poignant was a discussion I had with a friend and fellow teacher there who told me of her childhood experiences in fleeing the atrocities in Bosnia. The year 2020 will also mark the 25th anniversary of the massacre in Srebrenica. To hear the testimonies of those affected by such tragedies, especially those that have happened in my own lifetime, puts life and the importance of hope over hate into perspective.

I have spoken about difference quite a lot today: the diversity of my own background and of those in this Chamber; the diversity of my constituency; and the

diversity of beliefs and values. I want to finish by echoing what the former MP for Batley and Spennings said in her maiden speech: despite our differences, we share far more in common than we realise. Together we have the opportunity to ensure that we not only remember the past but create a better present and a brighter future for all. I shall end with a quote from William Bradford, one of those Mayflower passengers:

“Just as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many.”

1.10 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) on his excellent maiden speech. Given that I was thoroughly entertained throughout and gripped by what he was saying, I am sure he will have a long, prosperous and useful career in this Chamber.

I want to thank and pay tribute to Olivia Marks-Woldman, the inspirational Karen Pollock and all the wonderful people at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust for their tireless work. Among the many things that they do is ensure that, every January, we have pertinent themes and rich resources from which to draw when we stand up to contribute to this poignant, far-reaching and important debate. I really try to contribute something different every year, because I think that that is important. I am very grateful to them. Often, because of the shortness of these debates, we do not get enough time to praise them as we should, so I find myself in the bizarre situation of thanking the Government for making time available today for us to have a proper and fulsome debate.

Today, the theme is “standing together”. We spend months in my office talking about what we are going to talk about in this debate, because it is an annual event and we always buy an extra book or two. One of the things we talked about was the different forms that resistance to the Nazis took. In previous debates in the House, I have spoken about the incredible bravery of Jewish people in the most extraordinary and terrible circumstances, and the extraordinary strength that they displayed when they must truly have felt that there was no hope left. That strength was epitomised in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. The Bielski partisans also showed that strength, as did the Sobibor uprising. The strength and courage in evidence there were simply staggering.

Today, because of this theme, I want to share stories of some of the people who stood with the Jewish community despite the grave personal danger to themselves. As we have heard, after the German occupation of Poland in 1939, the Nazis pursued a policy of segregation. The Jews of Warsaw were relocated to a ghetto, and at the outset 138,000 Jews were forcibly transported there, and 113,000 non-Jewish Poles were also forced from their homes. Society was split in two. People were forbidden to bring their possessions into the ghetto, and they were thrust into immediate destitution. Conditions inside the ghetto quickly deteriorated. Eight or 10 people were living in just one room, and the German Administration severely limited food supplies. Jews found trying to escape were murdered. Within the first two years, 92,000 had died of starvation, of disease and of cold; that was 20% of the people imprisoned in the ghetto.

It cannot be denied that some were looking on in satisfaction, gloating that their Jewish neighbours were being forced from their homes and forced apart from them, but thousands of people stood against this awful racism. They shared their food and their shelter, but that had a cost too. As we have heard, a new law in Poland decreed a death sentence for all those who “knowingly give shelter to such Jews or help them in any way”.

Helpfully, examples were given, just in case anybody was in any doubt. Those examples included taking a Jewish family in for the night or offering a lift in a vehicle. Any of these led to execution.

Daniel Kawczynski: The hon. Lady rightly acknowledges that Poles were killed for helping their Jewish friends and neighbours, but it was worse than that. In the case of my family, it wasn't just that you were shot by the Germans; first, you had to watch as your children were shot. They made you watch as they killed your wife and children, then they shot you. Your crime was helping your Jewish friends and neighbours.

Ms Brown: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, right.

I know I will not be the only person in this Chamber to own a copy of Martin Gilbert's tremendous yet totally horrific book, “The Righteous”, which documents many stories of brave people who defied that law and similar laws, not just in Poland but across occupied Europe. I do not have personal stories that I can recount, but I would like to use the debate to put on record stories of heroic people, and today I want to talk about two Polish families who stood together with the Jewish people in the Warsaw ghetto.

First, I want to talk about Jan and Antonina Zabinski. Jan was the director of the Warsaw zoo, which was emptied of animals because of the air raids. When deportations to Treblinka began in 1942, Jan and Antonina decided that they had to help. They secretly provided shelter to 20 Jewish people in their two-storey home, and Jan sheltered hundreds more using the only other shelter he had available—the empty animal cages. Jan was employed by Warsaw city council, and he used that privilege to gain access to the ghetto. He used the pretext of looking after small trees and the public gardens inside the ghetto to aid his Jewish friends, and he tried to help them in any way he could.

One of those that Jan helped was Rachel Auerbach. Rachel secretly compiled records of everything that happened in the ghetto. This was an invaluable record of daily life under Nazi persecution, and she entrusted Jan with her precious manuscripts. He buried them inside the zoo grounds in glass jars. When the war was over, Rachel was able to retrieve her book and publish it, and it provides us all with a precious, dreadful insight into her first-hand testimony of the holocaust, as well as her memories of pre-war Jewish cultural life. Unsurprisingly, Jan was a member of the underground resistance, and he was eventually discovered. He was arrested and deported to Germany, but even after that, when Antonina was alone and even more aware of the terrible risks, she continued to provide shelter. The courage of Jan and Antonina was recognised at Yad Vashem as members of the righteous among nations.

Another of those recognised at Yad Vashem—one of the very first—was Dr Felix Kanabus. Felix was a young Polish surgeon, a socialist. He was disgusted, as

were so many, by the sight of his fellow Poles aiding the Nazis in their persecution of the Jews, because he had many Jewish friends and he had spoken out publicly against antisemitism. So, when the crackdown began, many of his friends reached out to him for help, and he used his skill as a surgeon to help where he could.

Felix helped several Jews to avoid persecution by performing operations to reverse their circumcisions. In other cases, he provided medical certificates stating that a circumcision had been performed as a medical necessity—anything he could do to throw the Nazis off and stop their attention from falling on those that he could help. Felix protected a colleague and their family when they were summoned to the ghetto, by disguising them as servants, and he and his wife Irena worked with their networks to find safe apartments for many others. Like Jan and Antonina, Felix and Irena risked their lives, and those of their families, to resist the holocaust.

These are truly moving stories; but they are absolutely nothing compared with the scale of the violence—the 6 million Jewish victims and the millions of others who were subjected to systematic disfranchisement, dispossession, detention and murder. These stories of Jan and Antonina, Felix and Irena tell us something about what it means to stand together; because each and every one of us has a role in standing up to hatred, discrimination, persecution and genocide, whatever form it takes. One person's actions will never be enough, but it is infinitely important to act, rather than do nothing.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a German theologian that I absolutely love; I love the idea of religionless Christianity. He was an anti-Nazi dissident, and he said:

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of the victim beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

Bonhoeffer was a Christian pastor and a pacifist, but when he saw what was happening all around him in Germany society, he understood what he had to do. He saved many Jewish lives. This German pastor—this man of God—became involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler, and as a result he was arrested and taken to Buchenwald where, just one month before the Germans surrendered, he was hanged. I can recommend “Letters and Papers from Prison”, which talks about his ministry in Buchenwald and is a remarkable testimony.

Sadly, the reason it is so important to remember these histories is that the poison of racism has not gone away. It is really frightening to see how it rears its ugly head again and again, right around the world; whether it is the treatment of the Uyghur Muslims, who have been put into re-education camps in Xinjiang; the treatment of Indian Muslims in Assam and throughout India—many of whom are being stripped of their citizenship and being attacked; or the attacks on refugees by the President of the United States, who employs the rhetoric of the terrible so-called “great replacement theory”.

In the spirit of today's debate, let us reflect on what standing together actually means. I believe it is more than just a passive virtue; I think it is an active obligation, and I believe that every single one of us can learn more, and do more, to stand together against hatred wherever and whenever it emerges.

1.23 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown), who spoke very well. It has been a privilege

[Stephen Crabb]

to be in the Chamber to hear so many powerful and moving speeches, especially the contribution by the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who spoke about family connections and friendships. All Members on both sides of the House will have found it very enriching to hear that.

It is a privilege to be called to make a short contribution to this important debate. This year's Holocaust Memorial Day debate is perhaps the most important yet as we not only mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the other death camps, but recognise that, with each passing year, the living memory of those horrific events among those in our society leaves us. Over the past 12 months, since the previous such debate, here in Britain we have said goodbye to holocaust survivors Rudi Oppenheimer, Harry Bibring, Fred Austin, Judith Kerr, Hermann Hirschberger, Leslie Brent, Edward Guest and Rabbi Harry Jacobi—all remarkable men and women who refused to allow the pain and trauma of the events that they lived through as younger people to define their lives as holocaust survivors. Instead, they chose to spread light—they chose to be a shining light in our society, spreading the light of forgiveness, tolerance and love, and spreading that light as educators as well.

As we have heard, many of the survivors, including many still with us today in our society, have devoted enormous amounts of time to teaching young people about the past, and about the challenge of antisemitism and hatred in our own society. Much of that work, as we have heard, has been done through the Holocaust Educational Trust. I, too, wish to place on the record my admiration and support for its work. I, too, have been to Auschwitz-Birkenau with students on a trip organised by the HET, and seen the powerful learning effect of such visits. Discussing with the young people afterwards what that visit meant to them really demonstrated to me how effective those visits are, and how important it is for us, as a Government, to continue to provide financial and practical support to the HET.

In 2019 we also said goodbye to Ron Jones. Ron Jones was not Jewish, but he did survive Auschwitz; he was known as the goalkeeper of Auschwitz. He was a Welshman from south Wales who found himself incarcerated in a section of the camp that was reserved for British and other servicemen, so the conditions that he experienced at Auschwitz were different. He played a lot of football there, and that is where he earned his nickname. We said goodbye to him last year. He was Britain's oldest poppy-seller—102 years old. But what he lived through he never forgot; what he witnessed in Auschwitz remained with him forever. He, too, carried that with him into society and did what he could to spread knowledge and understanding about those horrific, dark events.

Daniel Kawczynski: My hon. Friend mentions the very important visits to Auschwitz by young British schoolchildren. Sometimes they are just taken to the camp for the day and flown straight back to the United Kingdom the same day, and I have heard from some pupils that they get—obviously—a very negative perspective of Poland, because all they see is the concentration camp. I very much hope that as this programme is developed, children will be allowed to stay a little bit

longer and see cities such as Krakow so that they find out what Poland is really like and their camp visit does not represent their only experience of the country.

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend makes his important point well—it is now on record.

I only learned about Ron Jones, the goalkeeper of Auschwitz, last week, when I attended the holocaust memorial event run by Chelsea football club at Stamford Bridge. Ron Jones is one of three individuals depicted on a huge new mural that stands outside the ground that has been painted by the Israeli-resident street artist, Solomon Souza. The other two figures depicted in the mural are Jewish footballers from central and eastern Europe who did perish at Auschwitz.

I thought that this would be a good moment to place on record my admiration for what Chelsea has done in the field of combating antisemitism. I confess that I am a little bit of a cynic when it comes to premiership football, given the vast amounts of money sloshing about in the game, and the eye-watering transfer fees and TV revenues, but having followed what Chelsea has done in combating antisemitism over the past two years, the leadership that it has shown on this issue and the way in which the club has approached its work, I am very impressed indeed. I think there is an integrity about that work, which demonstrates real leadership in the field of sport.

Recognising that premiership football is probably one of the main cultural leaders in our society and has enormous influence, I think that what the club is doing is incredibly important. It launched its "Say No To Antisemitism" campaign two years ago with a powerful foreword, written by Roman Abramovich, the owner of the club, in its programme notes for a match against Bournemouth. He wrote:

"On 27 January, the world observed Holocaust Memorial Day. The Holocaust was a crime without parallel in history. We must never forget such atrocities and must do our utmost to prevent them from ever happening again. It is my honour to dedicate this match to the victims of the Holocaust and to the Jewish community."

Those are remarkable words to read in a match programme on a mid-week evening or a Saturday afternoon. That work, and the work that Chelsea are doing with the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Jewish Museum, the Community Security Trust, Kick It Out, the World Jewish Congress and the Anne Frank house, is worthy of putting on record and deserves a lot of support.

At the event I attended at Stamford Bridge last week, we heard from the club captain, other players, including the English defender Ruben Loftus-Cheek, and the club chairman, Bruce Buck. They all spoke with genuine interest, knowledge and integrity. We also heard from the England women's player, Anita Asante, who spoke powerfully about this subject, which she linked to her visit to Israel last summer with the Chelsea women's team.

Israel has not been mentioned a lot in this debate. When we discuss antisemitism, or when it is discussed in our society, people often skirt around the issue of Israel. I recognise that there are distinctions, and I put on record that I am the parliamentary chairman of Conservative Friends of Israel, but when we call out antisemitism in our society today it is important to recognise that the mask—the face—worn by antisemitism in 2020 is often a blatant hatred of Israel. People dress

up their core antisemitism with a hatred of Israel, thinking it somehow makes their antisemitism more acceptable.

Andrew Percy: That was precisely why, when I responded to such a debate a few years ago, I referenced the Israelification of antisemitism. That is why it is so important that we sign up to the IHRA definition. We have a big problem with antisemitism on the campuses of our universities in this country, so will my right hon. Friend condemn universities like Warwick, whose vice-chancellor is refusing to sign up to the IHRA definition that addresses the Israelification of antisemitism?

Stephen Crabb: I support my hon. Friend's suggestion. He has done fantastic work on this, and it is valid for him to call out those universities that still refuse to sign up to the IHRA definition.

Antisemitism in this country often has a face of Israel-hatred. I have a problem when people talk about fighting antisemitism, and being against antisemitism, while indulging in far-right or far-left conspiracy theories and tropes of Jewish stereotypes, even though they try to untangle those remarks.

I follow some of the commentaries and debates online and, as CFI chairman in the Commons, I receive a lot of emails about my position on Israel and my defence of the state of Israel. I challenge those people on some of the language they use. The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) mentioned how "Nazi" is repeatedly used as an insult. People know exactly what they are doing when they describe Israelis as Nazis, and it stems from the core of antisemitism that underlies a lot of this.

I am a proud defender of the state of Israel—that makes me a Zionist—and I believe in a Jewish homeland. We recognise that the state of Israel was founded in the ruins and the aftermath of the dark events we are remembering today—there is a direct link. A Jewish homeland, the state of Israel, is the last defence against antisemitism. It is the right of Jews to live in a country where they can walk around without fear of being who they are, and where they can fully own their identity and live in a Jewish state.

I hope that this has been a helpful contribution. Friendship and support for the state of Israel are part of our fight against antisemitism in the United Kingdom in 2020. We can be critical friends—we are not asked to be cheerleaders for any particular Israeli Government—but we stand in defence of a Jewish homeland, the state of Israel.

1.34 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), whom I thank for his balanced contribution. Like him and many other Members, I am unashamedly a friend of Israel. I believe in it biblically, but I also believe in it politically and socially.

I am pleased to be speaking today. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their significant contributions, which have been made with real sincerity and depth of interest.

Along with other hon. Members, I attended a holocaust event in the House just last week. I met a holocaust survivor there who was sent as a child to a farm

on the Drumfad Road in Millisle in my Strangford constituency—she was one of the Kinder children. Many such stories have been told in this House, and it is always good to be reminded of them. She came from Czechoslovakia and is fortunate to be alive, and hers is a true story of what happened to her and how she was saved from death in the German camps.

When she told me about her experience, it had a personal impact. It is so sad that we are losing more and more people with personal stories, and there is a real fear that this will become just another page in a history book, as opposed to an horrific event that exemplifies the fact that evil triumphs when good people do nothing.

It is great to see streaming services such as Netflix providing documentaries like "The Devil Next Door", showing the testimony of concentration camp victims, which is important in reaching new generations. I commend the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) because no one in this House was not moved by his personal contribution—not that anybody else's contribution was not moving. There was silence in the House, which encapsulated how we all felt at that moment, as we heard the true story of his family, for which I thank him.

We must continue to ensure that the truth is told and that the ink does not fade on factual cases. We must make sure that history is not rewritten, as is the case with some of Northern Ireland's troubles. The horrors faced in the holocaust are as important to this generation as they were in 1950.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): My hon. Friend will know that some 41,000 schoolchildren from across the United Kingdom have availed themselves of the informative "Lessons from Auschwitz" programme, which in the past three years has been extended to Northern Ireland, where hundreds of schoolchildren have been able to get involved. Does he agree it is essential that the new Northern Ireland Executive continue the programme so that future generations can learn about Auschwitz and about combating racism, hatred and antisemitism?

Jim Shannon: I agree with my hon. Friend. With a reinvigorated and restored Northern Ireland Assembly, hopefully we can continue to see the benefit of such programmes right across Northern Ireland. Such programmes provide an understanding that men can be unbelievably and despicably evil. We can never forget that beneath a polished smile and a well-presented press release can be the heart of prejudice and hatred.

My son Luke and his friends went to Auschwitz last year on a weekend away. I was rather surprised—not that they should want to go there, but that, as young 24 and 25-year-olds, they felt they needed to do so. They came back with some incredible stories. The Royal British Legion of Ballywalter in my constituency also went, and grown men came back and unashamedly told me that they shed tears for what they had witnessed.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of those remaining in Auschwitz, I feel sickened and saddened by the images that are conjured. It is important that future generations understand this and feel as we do. The UN Secretary-General said after the "75 Years after Auschwitz" exhibit was unveiled:

"Understanding our history connects us to the essential human values of truth, respect, justice and compassion."

We should be pleased to be involved in all those things.

[Jim Shannon]

Although it is right that we mark the horrors of the holocaust, we should not and cannot pretend that all is well in the world, because quite clearly it is not. Srebrenica, the Rohingya Muslim group in Burma and Rwanda are all examples of man's inhumanity and brutality to man. This tells us that there are still evil people about who are intent on doing similar things.

The evil events we remember today started more than eight decades ago, but antisemitism is not called the "oldest hatred" for no reason, and neither has it been eradicated. Our Jewish brothers and sisters—we are all clearly referring to them as such, because although we may not be Jewish, we look upon them as our Jewish brothers and sisters—have been persecuted for millennia. Even in 2020, Britain, Europe and the world have witnessed rising levels of this sickness in society. We are reminded daily that antisemitism is alive and destructive not only across the world, but here in the United Kingdom. In this place, there have been accusations of antisemitism being brushed under the carpet, as opposed to being confronted and dealt with. Let us be clear: antisemitism was at the heart of the Nazi plan. If we, as political leaders in the constituencies we represent, are not brave enough to recognise and call out the cause and effect of the oldest hatred, we will not find a solution. Sadly, that is why I say that far too often in this place, far too many Members have stoked the flames of hatred by unfairly attacking Israel, the world's only Jewish state.

Like the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire, I stand here to support Israel and to be its friend, just as I did in a previous job in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I have spoken in every one of these debates since I have been in the House. We also have to recall the Gaza border debate that took place in this House on 15 May 2018, when Member after Member stood up to denounce the state of Israel for killing innocent people. We found out a day later, of course, that 53 of the 62 killed at the Gaza border on 14 May were members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad—terrorists trying to breach the border fence to kill innocent Jewish people. We must keep in perspective the fact that hatred towards the Jewish people is clear. Nine innocent people were also killed, having been used as human shields and cannon fodder by the terrorists. Furthermore, those who denounced Israel on 15 May 2018 did nothing to alter the *Hansard* record of their contributions. No apologies were issued and there were no retractions; their comments stand in *Hansard*, despite the factual information that followed contradicting much of what was said. Such loss of life is devastating but, as in many cases in Northern Ireland, if people are killed in the midst of terrorism, they are not victims but perpetrators. I offer deep sympathies, even at this stage, to those who lost innocent loved ones at that dreadful time.

Hansard still contains the vitriol used that day, and we have to learn that careless words can cost lives and breed hatred, so there is an important responsibility on all of us. We are entitled to criticise when criticism is merited. The right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire said that we can be a critical friend—so we can—but that is verbal criticism given in a decent way to bring about change. We should all be constructive, but we are not entitled to hold Israel to a different set of standards

from those that we hold other nations to, including our own. There must also be the opportunity to record an apology when we get something wrong.

Antisemitism is bred in many places, with the middle east being one of them. It is in our media—on TV and radio—every day. Antisemitism is a powder keg and inevitably, without peace, there will be many more times over the course of this Parliament when we will debate the issues. Let us not fall into the trap of encouraging division and hatred, and let us commit over this parliamentary term to listen to both sides of the debate. As the chair of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, I feel it is so important that we speak up for those of a Christian faith, those of other faiths and those of no faith. I know that all Members subscribe to that same commitment. I believe that in this House we have a duty, on Holocaust Memorial Day, to do just that. We must pledge to listen to organisations such as the Israel-Britain Alliance, which sends briefings to MPs every month that offer a sober, honest and realistic assessment of the challenges faced by tiny Israel. Let us in this House commit to offer a commentary that takes the gun and the bullet, as well as assertions, institutional racism and bigotry, out of the dialogue. How better to remember the price paid by ignoring the signs and signals of antisemitism and to set a better example for people to follow so that there is never a repetition in this generation and in any other to come?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Scott Benton to make his maiden speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

1.44 pm

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and colleagues. It is an absolute pleasure to be able to give my maiden speech in this debate and to follow the excellent contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), to name but a few. May I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) on a fantastic maiden speech?

To use the first line from the well-known poem, "The Lion and Albert":

"There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool".

If Members are unaware of the poem, I should say that it does not end well at all for Albert and his parents. They visit the zoo and Albert ends up being eaten by a ferocious lion named Wallace. Despite the rather unfortunate end to the poem, I can assure Members that Blackpool is a fantastic place to visit. I would like to take this opportunity to thank its residents for putting their trust in me to serve as their Member of Parliament: I will not let them down.

I also thank my parents, who are in the Gallery this afternoon, for their support in getting me here and my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) for his fantastic and wise counsel and guidance over the past 10 years.

Before I talk more about the town, I would like to mention my predecessor, Gordon Marsden, who served Blackpool South well for 22 years and was ever courteous

when our paths crossed. That turned out to be more often than I expected during the election campaign, because I inadvertently moved in next door to him! Gordon held a number of shadow ministerial portfolios, but, as a former teacher myself, I give particular recognition to his contribution as shadow Minister for higher education. He also chaired the all-party group on veterans, a cause close to my heart and one that I will support during my time in this House.

I am lucky to represent Blackpool, a town steeped in history and with far too much heritage to fit in this speech. It is famous for the confectionary Blackpool rock, and I welcomed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during the election campaign to assist in making a special “Back Boris” version of the rock. We were grateful to be offered a job should all have gone wrong on 12 December, but, fortunately—for the company at least—that has not been necessary. I am sure there are some leftovers for my hon. Friends.

If, like George Formby, you take your stick of rock for a stroll down the promenade, you will see many of the great tourist attractions of Blackpool. We have the world’s oldest and largest electric tram line still in use today, three working piers and the illuminations, which are at the forefront of technology, using only green energy to power more than 1 million bulbs. Of course you will also see Blackpool Tower, which is synonymous with the town. It celebrated its 125th anniversary last year and at the time of building it was the tallest structure in Britain, at 518 feet tall: you can see blue skies—and, now, blue constituencies—for miles and miles around. In its base, it contains the must-see circus, with the brilliant clown Mooky—that is definitely something to go to see when in Blackpool—and the Tower Ballroom. Many Members will have seen this great venue on the special episode of “Strictly Come Dancing” each year. Although I must confess that I am not much of a dancer, I would welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) coming to join me for a few lessons, if she would so wish.

Stepping back from the seafront slightly, Blackpool is also home to the Winter Gardens. Some of my hon. Friends will remember this as the rightful home of the Conservative party conference. I hope to see it return one day, particularly as the multi-million pound investment in a new conference centre facility will provide us with outstanding facilities that are second to none.

After several rollercoaster years in politics, it would be remiss of me not to mention our very own theme park, the Pleasure Beach. More than 5 million people a year flock to be thrilled on its many rollercoasters—it has more than any other park in the UK and it has won many more awards than other theme parks. It has been owned and run by the same family since its opening, and they continue to invest in and develop the park, an approach typical of our strong enterprise culture in Blackpool.

The thousands of hotels, shops and pubs that are the economic backbone of my constituency are built on the values of hard work and self-reliance. Those values are epitomised by Chris Higgitt, the owner of an arcade who works 16 hours a day, seven days a week during the eight-month holiday season. He prides himself on working hard for his family so that he does not have to rely on the Government for support. With such values, it probably is not a surprise that Chris shares my admiration for one of our greatest ever Prime Ministers, Baroness Thatcher.

Our mission as a Government has to be to support businesses like Chris’s and to ensure that innovation, talent and effort are always rewarded.

The people of Blackpool are proud of our great country, our history and traditions and our monarchy. They share my desire for ours to be a truly independent country once again. Many of my constituents voted to leave the EU, not just because of the fantastic opportunities that that presents but because they were unhappy with the status quo. People in Blackpool and towns across the north feel left behind by the pace of economic and social change in recent decades. As a Government, our challenge must now be to address this through investment in our ageing northern infrastructure and to create an environment in which enterprise can flourish.

When we leave the EU, we will emerge into a world that is crying out for leadership, and our country is uniquely placed to provide that. We must work with our allies to promote free trade and our shared values of democracy, freedom and liberty around the world. Few relationships are more important in supporting us to achieve that aim than our strong bond with the state of Israel. We can rightly be proud of the UK’s role in creating a homeland for the Jewish people. It is more important than ever that we reassert our commitment to Israel’s security, its right to defend itself and its right to exist. The relationship between our nations is built not only on trade, research collaboration and security, but on our shared values. Indeed, it is Israel’s commitment to freedom, religious tolerance and equality that distinguishes it from its neighbours and that its enemies in the middle east want to eradicate from the region.

Sadly, that is not the only thing that Israel’s enemies want to eradicate. Terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah continue to peddle antisemitic propaganda, and in many ways it is Israel’s Jewish identity that makes it so vulnerable. But it is not just groups in the middle east, or indeed those who deny Israel’s right to exist, who hold such vile views. Antisemitic incidents are on the rise across western Europe and here in the UK. It is appalling that an antisemitic element has crept back into our politics. Antisemitism should have no place in politics, nor in the world. I know that all hon. Members in the Chamber will join me in taking a stand against it.

It is in that context that we are having this debate about Holocaust Memorial Day. Education is a vital tool in the fight against antisemitism, and it is imperative that the lessons of the holocaust are not forgotten. The new national holocaust memorial and learning centre is welcome and will both act as a lasting tribute to the victims and help to challenge antisemitism. It is vital that we take a lead and use our role as hon. Members, not just in this House but in all our communities, to tackle this prejudice and to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

1.53 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) on his excellent maiden speech about a venue to which all South Walsians have made the annual pilgrimage to see the lights. We thank you, Blackpool.

I am honoured to have sat next to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) and witnessed his speech. His testimony was mesmerising and truly humbling. I deeply congratulate him on it.

[Carolyn Harris]

It is a privilege for me to be able to take the opportunity each year to remember and pay my respects to those who were lost. That is particularly true this year, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia. As those who experienced these atrocities reduce in numbers, it is more important than ever that we continue to observe this day and talk about their stories and experiences, and to honour those who lost their lives, so that generations to come never forget the horrors that occurred and the sacrifices that were made.

The holocaust has always been of great interest to me personally, and many moons ago it was the subject of my dissertation. Over Christmas, I read “The Tattooist of Auschwitz”, the true story of Lale Sokolov, who described the horrors that he witnessed while living in the camps. As I have said many times before, I am continually shocked and saddened whenever I read or hear the many, many experiences of the horrors faced in the genocide.

I note that this year’s theme is “stand together”, set by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which I must thank for its amazing work around Holocaust Memorial Day each year. The fact that nearly 8,000 activities take place throughout the UK every year around 27 January is a true testament to the work of the trust in exploring and remembering the Nazi persecution and the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The “stand together” theme highlights how isolating a group in society allows such horrors to occur. The creation of societal divisions, the fractioning of relationships, workplaces and schools, and the destruction of an individual’s rights all make it easier to oppress a group and divide them from mainstream society. However, there are many examples—importantly shared by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust—of people uniting in the face of such hatred to protect the persecuted from genocide. Those examples include the story of Sir Nicholas Winton.

Members will be aware that I have worked on children’s rights for a long time and the issue is incredibly important to me. When I hear of the devastation that was inflicted on children during the holocaust, it truly breaks my heart. The murder of innocent young people is something that I cannot comprehend. To know that around 1.5 million children died in the holocaust—it is just too big a number to comprehend. But we can never forget.

When I read stories of how individuals, families and groups stood together to protect children, it truly amazes me to hear of the steps they took to save the innocent and vulnerable. They were people like Sir Nicholas Winton, the stockbroker from London who worked to secure foster families who would provide homes to Jewish children, whom he would transport from Prague to Britain in 1939. The children travelled on trains through the heart of dangerous Nazi territory, then through Holland and on to London. Sir Nicholas Winton’s co-ordination of those trips and his work to find families for the refugee children led to the protection of 669 children from the horrors and atrocities of the holocaust. Winton’s incredible, brave work demonstrates how standing together alongside one’s fellow man in the face of such evil can truly save lives.

By keeping alive the memory of acts of defiance and bravery during the holocaust, we shine a light on the exceptional examples of individuals standing together in the face of evil. It is important that we remember them on this day, as well as the many, many victims of the holocaust and the families who lost people in the camps, to remind us how important it is that we unite against hatred. For the sake of those who were taken too early—those who could not defend themselves against the evil they were up against—we must continue to tell their stories and honour their sacrifice. Holocaust Memorial Day gives us the opportunity to stop and reflect; to remember those who were lost; to pay tribute to those who risked their own safety to help; and to ensure that we will never forget the innocent victims of this dreadful and evil crime.

1.59 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who made a powerful speech. In particular, she made us focus on the children—the rights of children and their plight, which was deeply upsetting to us all. It is also a great pleasure to follow most people who have spoken in this debate. It is one of my favourite debates to take part in, because the speeches are so poignant, so meaningful and so personal, and it really does show this House at its best.

It is also a pleasure to follow the excellent maiden speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) and for Blackpool South (Scott Benton). Living just down the road in Liverpool, I, too, have fond memories of the annual pilgrimage to the Blackpool illuminations.

It is a great honour to take part in this debate and to take this opportunity to remember the actions of the brave people who saved the lives of Jewish people during the holocaust and to ensure that those human stories are not forgotten. That is why it is so important that we are all here to remember the human cost, the human bravery and the human stories.

I would like to take the opportunity to tell one of those stories. It is about a young boy. The story is set in Belgium in 1943: a young boy clutches to his mother and sister on a train, terrified of what awaits them at the end of the tracks. This small family, who were joined by 1,631 others that day, were being transported to Auschwitz. Unlike the many trains that came before them, and the many that followed, this particular train did not reach its destination without incident—some people escaped. The brave actions of three resistance fighters stopped the train, giving 223 people a chance of escape. When the small boy’s mother saw what was happening, she took her chance and pushed him off the train while it was still moving. He, along with 108 of the 223 people who did manage to escape, escaped with his life. That was the last time that the 11-year-old boy saw his mother and his sister, who, like the majority on the train, made it to the end of the line where the gas chambers awaited them.

The boy, Simon Gronowski, survived the war and I have had the honour of getting to know him over the past couple of years. Last year, many hon. and right hon. Friends joined me in Speaker’s House where we

hosted a performance of the opera “Push”, which tells his remarkable story. Sitting next to Simon for the performance was one of those memories that will live with me for ever. Seeing his story brought to life—the opera has now been shown many times—was truly remarkable. What was remarkable about his story actually came at the end: he went back to Belgium, found the neighbour who had shopped his family to the police, and forgave him. He was asked for forgiveness and he forgave him.

The darkest hours in human history have been fuelled by a false narrative of difference, ignoring the fact that, as the former Member Jo Cox said in this Chamber, we have much more in common. It is clearly wrong to ignore the fact that we are all human. It undermines our society and has brought the greatest shame on humanity throughout our collective history. Holocaust Memorial Day asks us to look at the horrors of our past and to remember and learn. This year’s theme is “stand together”, emphasising the point that, standing shoulder to shoulder, humanity has done, and will do, exceptional things: we have wiped out diseases, ended wars and connected the world from east to west.

I am proud to say that Chichester is standing with people across the world. A group of local volunteers have organised several special events to mark this year’s memorial day. Before I continue, I wish to thank Councillors Clare Apel and Martyn Bell, Trevor James, Ralph Apel, Jill Hoskins, Cynara Davis, Jonathan Golden, Andrew Smith and Mark Schwarz for all their hard work in Chichester to ensure that Holocaust Memorial Day is marked, and marked with distinction.

This year, there are two special performances of “Push” being held on Monday at Chichester Festival Theatre—so, we have gone from Speaker’s House to one of the main theatres in the country. I am told that the performances are completely sold out. Another showing has also been organised for 15 February by the Sussex Snowdrop Trust charity, which will take place at Westbourne House School, a local prep school, and all the children are very excited about it.

Having been so involved with the production last year, I know how powerful the story is, bringing to life the reality of an unimaginable situation. This story is perhaps even more relevant this year as we mark 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 1945.

Holocaust Memorial Day also gives us the opportunity to learn about genocide more widely, as a number of Members have mentioned. We explore how regimes have fractured societies and marginalised certain groups, and we all know that that still goes on today. I will be learning more about that when I attend Chichester’s New Park cinema on Sunday for a showing of the film “Enemies of the People”, which tells the story of one of the most brutal and genocidal regimes that the world has ever known—the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia. The film interviews some of the perpetrators whose murderous socialist regime invented the killing fields. The film tries to get behind the reasoning of the genocide, which killed 25% of the Cambodian population. The director, Rob Lemkin, will attend the performance in Chichester to host a question and answer session afterwards, and we thank him for that.

Given that we know from our history the horror that hate and discrimination bring, a resurgence of antisemitism in the UK today seems unthinkable. Yet, sadly, it seems

to be rearing its ugly head across our society, and we have heard several examples of that in today’s debate. The rise of virulent antisemitism on social media platforms is truly appalling, and I want to take this opportunity to praise the brave members of our Jewish community who have taken a stand against it—people such as Rachel Riley, Tracey Ann Oberman and Stephen Pollard—all of whom deserve our respect and support for taking on people who hide behind anonymity and perpetrate hate. I wish to add my voice to theirs and to all those who call for love over hate, and I assure Members that the people of Chichester stand together with them.

2.6 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who told us the story of her constituent and the film made about him. I hope the Chichester festival brings that message to many other people.

The contributions in this debate have been truly impressive. It feels odd to single out any one Member, but the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) deserves singling out not just for his stories about his family, but for the dignified way in which he told them. I will never forget the image that he painted of Heinz’s doctor sitting there in his first world war Wehrmacht uniform with the Iron Cross, giving the Nazi Waffen-SS the impossible task of how to deal with him.

I am delighted that the House is standing together today on this Holocaust Memorial Day. I want to share with colleagues the lessons that I learned on a trip to Auschwitz, which was organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust. It was a truly moving day—I went with some young pupils from a school in my constituency. I had been to Auschwitz before—I had been to Dachau and Yad Vashem—but I had never received the insight of the Holocaust Educational Trust. I learned two things. One was about telling the individual stories, and I want to tell an individual story today in the words of someone who was murdered in the camps. It is a story of how her hopes for her child were snuffed out. I also want to talk about the academic studies that have been done on how we learn the lessons, and what the lessons to be learned are.

Let me start with the individual story first. When people go round Yad Vashem, they see the candles and they see and hear the names. That does speak powerfully, but among the material from the Holocaust Educational Trust was a pamphlet with a letter from a lady to her daughter, and that daughter, Miriam Bas Leiba, published it many years later. I want to read from that letter, because it is a testimony from those days, from the people who were experiencing the holocaust. In the letter to her two-year-old daughter, a mother wrote:

“Dear Mirele,

I can’t believe I have one night to fill a lifetime of love into this letter.

Tomorrow morning...I am giving you up. I am taking you, Mirele, to the back entrance of dear, brave Herman’s grocery store and the child rescuers will be waiting there for you and the thirty-two other children under the age of three. They’ll inject you with a sedative so you won’t cry and then they’ll slip you off in the predawn with you—my life, my love—out of this barbaric country to safety.

[*Sir Edward Davey*]

By the way, Mr Deputy Speaker, these are just extracts. I will not detain the House by reading the full letter.

“Mirele, do you see why I have to give you up? He said no belongings, but I will beg, I will plead that this letter be allowed to go, sewn into your undershirt. And then, I will pray to God that the letter stays with you until you are old enough to read it. You must know why you are alone, without parents. Not because they didn’t love you...but because they did.

It’s eerie to think that by the time you read this, I will probably be dead. That’s what Herman says is going on...But I won’t have lived in vain, Mirele, if I know that I have brought you into the world and you will live and survive and grow big and strong and you will be happy. You can be happy, Mirele, because we loved you.

What makes a difference in the lives of adults, it seems, is if they have secure childhoods. Secure, with lots of love and acceptance and needs fulfilled and predictable routine and the like. You’ve had that up to this minute...but then you won’t. Who knows who will end up taking care of you? Some family who will take you in for the money Herman will pay them? They will surely be kinder to their own than to you.

Here is where the pain mixes with rage! I rage at the animals who are making it possible for you to cry and I won’t be there to comfort you.

But you will have this letter, and this letter will make you feel secure, if God answers my prayers. You have us, Mirele, even though you can’t see us, we’re with you. We’re watching you and praying for you...

Mirele, you’ll wonder what your first two years were like. You’ll wish you could remember. Let me remember for you right now, tenderly, on this piece of paper.

You like hot cereal in the morning, with lots of milk and sugar. Except there is no milk and sugar now, none in this whole city. But I will make your cereal anyway and you eat it with big smiles between every bite. Then you become ready for your nap, so I will rock you, after putting the rocker where the sunlight will fall in it...

God! It’s 2am already. Only two more hours with me, my love, my baby, my Mirele. I’m going to hold you now, Mirele for two hours. Your father and I are going to wake you, feed you and tell you over and over how much we love you. You’re barely two years old, but maybe, if God is good, maybe, you’ll remember it. And maybe you’ll keep this letter until you are old enough to read it...

I love you. Your father loves you. May God help us all.”

You can hear in that letter, Mr Deputy Speaker, the pain of a parent thinking about what is going to happen. When I read that letter for the first time, on the plane to Auschwitz, it took me back in a way that nothing else had done. Those Members who, like me, are lucky enough to have children will know that that bond is more special than anything. For the Nazis to take that away from so many parents and to kill so many people will always be the most unforgiveable crime the world has ever witnessed.

On that day, I learned about how we can stop holocausts and genocides of the future. The hon. Member for Chichester spoke about the Cambodian genocide, and we know about the genocides in the former Bosnia, in Darfur and in too many other places. I do not suggest that all genocides are the same. The holocaust stands on its own, not only for its sheer scale but for the political ideology that forced it through in the most appalling machine-like way. But as we look at antisemitism, racism and hatred in society here and in other places, I think it is important to discover lessons we can learn. Academics have studied the holocaust and other genocides and I pay particular tribute to Gregory Stanton, who wrote about the steps that lead to genocide.

The first step is classification of different groups—dividing them into them and us. Symbolisation, with hate symbols for the other. Discrimination—excluding groups, segregating groups, denying them rights. Dehumanisation—denying the humanity of people and equating them with vermin, animals, insects and so on. Organisation, because genocide does not happen because of just a few people; it takes a whole group of people in society, determined to carry it out and working together in militia groups.

The sixth step is polarisation, which we are seeing in social media, as the hon. Lady rightly said; propaganda is being put out now, in Britain today, to polarise society. The seventh step is preparation—the Nazis and others prepared, in cold blood. They did not commit genocide by accident; they prepared in detail. They identified the victims, separated them out and built their killing machines and camps. The eighth step is persecution—expropriation of property, displacement, putting people in ghettos and sending them to the death camps and concentration camps. The ninth step is extermination, when the killing happens and humanity is just gone. The tenth step Gregory Stanton identifies is denial, which we see now—people denying the holocaust, which is utterly shocking.

I have read out those 10 steps to the House today because when I read them and had them explained to me—the way they can operate at different levels, even here in the UK—I realised why we have to step in early. Gregory Stanton did not just try to identify the different stages that linked various genocides together, starting with the holocaust; he said what, at each stage, we have to do to prevent the genocide—to stop step 1 going to step 2, then to step 3 and so on. Governments, Parliaments and civil society need to reflect on the need for early intervention, so that no stage goes unchallenged. When Gregory Stanton was asked what he thought was the best antidote to these appalling crimes and the best way to prevent genocide, he said the answer was popular education—educate everyone as well as we can—and then develop a social and cultural tolerance for diversity. I worry that we are not working hard enough to develop that tolerance. We have to do more.

Let us remember the victims. Let us remember Mirele, her mother and her father. But let us, in remembering them, pledge ourselves to ensuring that we really understand what happened, and to fighting every step of the way so that these things never happen again.

2.18 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): This is a debate in which we all have a duty to speak. It is simply inconceivable, from where we stand now, how in the last century, within 1,000 miles of this House, unspeakable evil worked systematically to destroy an entire people, those who opposed it, the disabled and those who just wanted to love freely. There is something distinctly perverse and pernicious about antisemitism, in particular its manifestation in the creation of conspiracy theories that feed off division and envy. It is supremely disheartening that between January and June last year, the Community Security Trust recorded the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents in a six-month period. None of us can be left in any doubt that we have to do more to combat the malign force of antisemitism.

The terrors of our past must never become the fears of our future. On Remembrance Day we say, “Lest we forget”—not just for the fallen, but for those who were killed in barbarous acts of tyranny. The holocaust memorial and education centre next to Parliament will serve as a stark reminder of our enduring responsibility to prevent such atrocities from happening again.

We must also look to the past for inspiration. This country has a proud history of advocating on behalf of the world’s most vulnerable. In 1938 the then Home Secretary, Samuel Hoare, pledged that

“there will be no Government among all these Governments more sympathetic than the Government of the United Kingdom”—*[Official Report, 21 November 1938; Vol. 341, c. 1475.]*

and said that there would be “no Government more anxious” to solve the plight of the Jewish people.

One year later, during the second world war, a family in Oakham in my constituency of Rutland and Melton took in an eight-year-old evacuee. Upon meeting their guest, they discovered that she had travelled from her home in Berlin to London in 1939 to live with a distant relative as part of the Kindertransport. She was then evacuated to Oakham, as so many others across the country were. The family in Oakham gave that young girl a home, treated her as their own and ensured that she got the education of which she had so far been deprived. Tragically, both her parents were senselessly murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, as no doubt she would have been if the British Government had not reacted in a timely manner to Kristallnacht. That girl now lives in America with her husband, and has three children and four grandchildren—eight lives saved.

We in this House have an intrinsic responsibility to reflect on history to prevent it from repeating itself, and to respond with swift resolve to atrocities. The Kindertransport saved abundant human potential, and it is only when we truly stand together that our society can decidedly flourish. As Elie Wiesel said:

“Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

I therefore commend my colleagues on both sides of the House who have so bravely spoken out against antisemitism with such conviction—from small, everyday interactions to those who have courageously stood up to systemic antisemitism on a national level, at great personal and professional cost. But we still see genocide and hatred. The Rohingya, the Yazidis, the Uyghur—these people are being massacred. It is still happening, and I will always be someone in this House who will speak out for these communities, who are too often being forgotten or pushed under the carpet.

We have spoken today about the genocide in Srebrenica—another that people still shamefully refuse to admit took place. A few years ago I had the utter privilege of going Srebrenica. I apologise to the House if my voice fails me at this point. I travelled with members of our armed forces who had served in Srebrenica and in Bosnia. Going back to Bosnia with them for the first time since they served was the privilege of my life, and one of the hardest memories that I will always take with me.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I share my hon. Friend’s recollection of that time. I have not had the privilege of travelling to Bosnia as she has, but I was special adviser to the Defence Secretary and then the Foreign Secretary

during that period. The failure of the United Nations and the troops there to prevent that appalling massacre, which undoubtedly amounted to genocide given the thousands of people concerned, must continue to disturb us. It must concentrate our minds on peacekeeping and on the necessity of having the capacity to ensure, when we are engaged in peacekeeping, that as an international community we are not responsible in any way for being party to such events.

Alicia Kearns: I agree. It was a privilege to see the work of the UN.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I led the first troops into Srebrenica in April 1993. My men were surrounded. About 20 people were killed and a couple of my soldiers were wounded. We established Srebrenica, and as a result of that it was declared a safe zone. I am sorry that this intervention is going on a bit, but I want to put the record straight. I pleaded to keep British soldiers in Srebrenica because I felt that we could protect the people, but we were ordered out and two years later—after we had left—the massacre occurred. I am sure that if we had been present, the massacre of 8,400 men and boys might not have occurred. But let us get the record straight; the people who went in took huge risks and we did not want to leave, because we felt that our duty was to protect people.

Alicia Kearns: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which expresses far more eloquently than I ever could the exact sentiment that I share with him.

When I went to Bosnia, I saw the work that the UN is still doing to bring together the remnants of those who were massacred—piecing together small bones to work out who had been buried. Bodies were purposely moved from place to place to make it harder to prove that these people had been murdered. I attended a funeral for those whose bodies had been brought back together, and I met the widows of Srebrenica. I encourage everyone in this House to go to Bosnia in order to experience what it is like there and to learn as much as they can.

There is so much more that we all need to do to eviscerate hatred and division in our communities. We must refuse to see history repeat itself. We each have a duty to change the level of debate at our dinner tables, in the shops, on WhatsApp, on the tube and within our own families. That is how we change things. None of us can stand idly by; we have a duty to do more. It is only by talking to each other, and by creating the understanding and empathy that comes through that dialogue, that we build stronger communities who refuse to accept hatred and division.

Violent extremism feeds on the everyday indifference and hatred that we refuse to challenge—that we hear and dismiss or, worse, laugh away. During my career I have seen what that hatred breeds: the demonisation, violence, torture, rape and murder. No more. We must all say, “Never again”. We must all commit to building empathy and understanding, and to saying no to hatred. That is the commitment that I make today, and that I hope all my colleagues and everyone in the country will make. This country deserves better, the world deserves better and we need to raise our voices because we have the privilege and ability to do so.

2.26 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate, and one that is very close to my heart. As part of this country's vibrant and diverse Jewish community, I have had the honour of knowing a number of holocaust survivors at first hand—like Marianne, who came to this country on the Kindertransport, and who taught me and so many others in my community Hebrew. I will be forever indebted to her for helping me to access the Torah much more deeply. Our tradition teaches that the Torah is the tree of life to all who hold fast to it, and I thank and cherish Marianne for giving me that opportunity. With the passage of time, as the holocaust fades from living memory, this is something I will never take for granted.

I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for their work in providing more people, particularly young people, with opportunities to hear powerful first-hand testimony from survivors and to learn about the holocaust. I also pay tribute to the survivors for their bravery and for their generosity in educating others, reliving again and again some of the most traumatic personal experiences that many of us can never even begin to comprehend.

There is something about the sheer scale of the holocaust that makes it so hard to comprehend; it becomes almost an abstraction. Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau as a teenager, the part that really brought it all home for me was standing in one of the gas chambers and realising how small it was, how many people had been murdered inside it, and in such a relatively short timescale. It began to dawn on me how mechanised the holocaust was. It was a whole system, designed with the goal of murdering Jewish, Roma and Sinti, disabled and LGBT people on an industrial scale. Civilians from across Nazi-occupied Europe and political prisoners were also murdered in great numbers. As someone raised with the belief that humans are inherently good, facing up to the reality of man's capacity for evil towards his fellow man totally shook my world view.

In the midst of the horror of the holocaust, however, there were some glimmers of hope that should stand as an inspiration to all of us in upholding the diversity of this country, which is its strength, and not being bystanders to evil and to fascist tyranny. I encourage all Members of this House to research the story, for example, of the Sarajevo Haggadah—a priceless artefact and a keystone of Bosnia's Jewish heritage. The Haggadah escaped the Spanish inquisition and migrated east along with the Jews expelled from Spain, and in 1894 it was obtained by the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the Nazi occupation of Sarajevo, it was saved from destruction by the museum's chief librarian—a Muslim man named Derviš Korkut, who risked his life to smuggle this priceless, sacred artefact from the museum, giving it to an imam who hid it under the floorboards of a mosque outside Sarajevo, then returning it to the Jewish people after the war. Derviš Korkut is now recognised by the Yad Vashem World holocaust Memorial Centre as a righteous gentile to whom the Jewish people owe a huge debt.

Holocaust Memorial Day also commemorates the post-war genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. Four years ago this month, I took part in the Lessons From Srebrenica programme organised by the

charity Remembering Srebrenica with an inter-faith delegation of 21 women from Greater Manchester. Our trip had a specific focus on the women of the Bosnian genocide, learning about the use of rape as an act of genocide, including in camps set up specifically for this purpose—on European soil, in my lifetime. I met the mothers of the Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves—women like Munira Subašić, who has shown such unimaginable resilience and empathy. I was particularly struck when speaking to her about the trials taking place and her saying that she had pleaded for clemency for a Serb soldier who had been directly involved in the murder of her family because he had recently had a young family and she did not want anyone else to have their families taken away from them like hers was from her. It was a harrowing experience and one that will stay with me forever.

This experience has hardened my resolve to bring all our communities together so that never again can such horrors take place. We cannot allow our communities to be pitted against each other. Our oppressions and our destinies to overcome these are inextricably linked to one another. The Bosnian genocide was within my own lifetime. I am determined that my generation will carry forward the memory of the holocaust and subsequent post-war genocides for the generations that come behind us. As Elie Wiesel, of blessed memory, wrote, we now have “a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”

We must not allow these atrocities to fade from the public consciousness, nor our commitment to standing against hatred and division to be dulled by time. We must stand firm against fascism and confront it by any means necessary to stop this vile poison from again taking root. If you will forgive my bad Yiddish, *mir veln zey iberlebn*—we will outlive them.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her assent to the following Act:

European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I regret the fact that this announcement has come during this most important debate; let me thank all those who are contributing to it.

I am duty bound to signify our deep regret at what has taken place with this Royal Assent, and I am seeking your guidance because it is something quite momentous. This is absolutely unprecedented, and I must say to the House that it is a constitutional crisis. We are faced with a situation that is completely unprecedented when the Governments in Edinburgh, in Belfast and in Cardiff have not given consent to this Act of Parliament. That completely contravenes the devolution settlement that made it clear that the consent of the devolved Administrations had to be given for Bills of Parliament involving the devolved Administrations to become Acts of Parliament.

I fully respect the fact that those who voted for the Conservative party in England have got what they wanted, but the fact remains that the people of Scotland were told in 2014 that if we stayed in the UK then our

rights as EU citizens would be respected. Moreover, we were told that we were to lead the United Kingdom—that this was a family of nations and our rights would be respected. We find ourselves here today in the situation where our Parliament has been ignored, our Government have been ignored, and the express wishes of the people of Scotland who voted in the referendum and reaffirmed their right to determine their own destiny have been ignored.

Crucially, Mr Deputy Speaker, a debate that took place in this House in July 2017 reaffirmed the concept of the rights of the people of Scotland—the claim of right, or the democratic right whereby sovereignty rests with the people and not with this place. So I ask your guidance as to what I have to do to ensure the mandate that the Scottish Government have for the people of Scotland to have an independence referendum on our future to make sure that Scotland has the right to be a European country—an independent country. A very clear message has been delivered from this House that the rights of the people of Scotland are to be shut down, and we will have no part of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are a very experienced Member of this House, Mr Blackford, so you do not need my guidance on anything. You know that that is not a point of order for the Chair; it is a political point that you have made, and made in your own way. Royal Assent has now been given. As you quite rightly say, this is a very important debate, so let us move on. I call Bob Blackman.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Debate resumed.

2.36 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this deeply emotional debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) on her speech—on a personal level, but also in understanding the Jewish people and what they actually went through.

Antisemitism is not new. It has been prevalent in society for centuries, and it is still prevalent today. But what makes the holocaust different is that it shows us the ultimate destination of antisemitism, with a systematic attempt to wipe out the Jewish race and anyone of Jewish religion—not just people who were openly Jewish, but anyone with Jewish genealogy somewhere in their DNA. The way in which people's backgrounds were traced to see whether any relative or any person of their blood was Jewish was systematic, deliberate and intentional.

I was at school with many Jewish children, and no one ever spoke about the holocaust. It was ignored—perhaps to be airbrushed from history forever because it was such a tragedy. The relatives—the fathers and mothers—of many of my friends had actually come from eastern Europe or Germany as refugees, but they never spoke about the holocaust. Whenever one went for dinner on Friday nights, it was never mentioned—I often wondered why. When we were at school, we never got the opportunity to learn about the horrors of the holocaust and what people went through.

I remember my first visit to Yad Vashem. It was not the Yad Vashem that we see now—I have been there many times since—but the first formation of it. This was back in 1992, I think, on my first visit to Jerusalem. It was a much more intimate museum at that time. It commemorated things that had gone on. It had the first recordings of survivors—people who had sadly passed away, but recorded their testimony—and early photographs and other details of what had gone on in Germany and in eastern Europe, in particular, during the holocaust. That made Yad Vashem more intimate, in many ways, than it is now. When I heard the names of the children being recited, it brought home to me how people could systematically murder children—wipe them off the face of the planet—and what a terrible experience it was. I do not mind admitting that I cried. I cried for humanity, and I cried for the people who had lost their lives and their relatives.

When I was elected to this place, the first all-party parliamentary group that I joined was the one on combating antisemitism, because it is right that we in this House stand up against it. I also do not mind admitting that when Holocaust Memorial Day was first mooted—it was when I was the leader of my party's group on the London Borough of Brent Council—I was concerned that we were going to get into virtue-signalling. I am glad to say that I was wrong. It is right that we educate people, that we commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz and that we bring to bear greater understanding of the horrors that went on.

I, too, have visited Auschwitz-Birkenau. My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) alluded to the concern that students see

[*Bob Blackman*]

Auschwitz for one day, and it would be better if they could stay for longer. The problem with that is funding and the fact that lengthening the amount of time spent away might reduce the numbers who could go on such visits. The problem that I see with the programme of Auschwitz-Birkenau visits is that students learn about what went on there and think that that was it. We need to remember that there was a network of death camps—forced labour camps—across eastern Europe and Germany, where Jews and others were forced into slave labour and then systematically exterminated.

I have often wondered how a civilised nation such as Germany could get into a position in which it would commit such inhumane acts. How could that possibly happen? When we talk about 6 million Jews being killed, it is a number, and it is hard to personalise that down to individual circumstances. It is difficult to visualise the horror of this attempt to wipe out the Jewish race. We have to remember that this did not just take place in one or two years. This was a deliberate attempt by the Nazis to eliminate the Jewish race.

The roots of this are at the end of the great war, when Germany was subjected to severe reparations. That led to incredible poverty in Germany, which then gave rise to the Nazis, who could say, “It’s the Jews’ fault that you haven’t got any money. Let’s take it out on the Jews. If we take Jews out of their position, we can spread the wealth.” That was a deliberate policy, and it should never be allowed to be repeated. There needs to be a greater understanding and appreciation that, from the early 1930s onwards, this systematic approach led to the Shoah. We all have to remember that.

We must also remember that antisemitism was rife in this country at that time. We should not think that it was only going on elsewhere. The thought process and the demeaning of Jewish people was going on in this country, and that is one reason why few people were allowed to escape from Germany to here. Had they been allowed to do so, many people who unfortunately lost their lives in camps would have survived.

I pay tribute to Karen Pollock and her brilliant team at the Holocaust Educational Trust, who do such wonderful work to educate people—young and old—about the horrors of the holocaust. Not everyone can go to Auschwitz-Birkenau and witness evidence of the terrible crimes that were committed. We talk about the shoes, the spectacles and the clothing at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The memory that I have above all else is walking across the park with the lakes, where there is an eerie stillness. No birds tweet, and there is no sign of wildlife. There is nothing there because those ponds were where the Nazis put the ashes after emptying them from the gas chambers and incinerators. The wildlife know what happened, and so should we.

One aspect of the Holocaust Educational Trust’s work that has become more important is the outreach programme. Last year, more than 600 schools partnered with the trust to enhance educational provision. That is important, because it allows holocaust survivors to give their first-hand testimony and lead workshops so that more and more young people can understand what happened and learn the lessons from it. It is important that we remember the survivors.

I echo the need for a holocaust education centre to be set up alongside this building. People visit this place as the cradle of democracy, and it is right that we have a holocaust education centre alongside our Parliamentary Education Centre so that people visiting London can see a proper record of what happened without having to travel to Jerusalem or other parts of the world. I co-chaired the all-party parliamentary group on holocaust memorial in the last Parliament. I pay tribute to my co-chair, Ian Austin, who called out antisemitism and did so much to ensure that people understood the evils of antisemitism and the need for an education centre.

The testimony of survivors is most important. I want to place on record the details of those who sadly lost their lives last year and this year. Eve Glicksman and Henri Obstfeld both died last year, and Hermann Hirschberger MBE passed away on 1 January. One of the most famous holocaust survivors was Gena Turgel, who lived in Stanmore in my constituency. In many ways, she was a pioneer of holocaust education, as she was going into schools and colleges way before many of the current structures were set up. She was born in Krakow in Poland and had eight brothers and sisters. She was only 16 when her home city was bombed on 1 September 1939.

Here is the part of Gena Turgel’s story that I think is most pertinent. Her family had relatives in Chicago, and they planned to leave for the United States, but they made their decision too late, as the Nazis had already invaded and closed all the entry and exit points, so her family had to move to just outside Krakow. In autumn 1941 she was moved to the ghetto in Krakow, and then moved after some of her family were shot by the SS in the ghetto. She was then forced into a labour camp, and in 1945 to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was sent with her mother on the death march from Auschwitz, leaving behind her sister, whom they never saw again. They then arrived in a further labour camp, were forced on to trucks, and travelled under terrible conditions to Bergen-Belsen, where they arrived in February 1945. On 15 April 1945, the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen and among the liberators was Norman Turgel, who became Gena’s husband just six months later. Gena passed away in 2018, but her record is in a book called “I Light a Candle”, so her legacy will live on.

Hermann Hirschberger was born in 1926 in Germany. He lived with his mother, father and older brother. He attended a local non-Jewish school; in fact, there were only two Jewish students in his class and school. In 1936, Nazi laws ruled that Jewish children could no longer attend non-Jewish schools—that was part of the programme to eliminate and delegitimise Jewish people.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Those who have not ought to look at Adolf Eichmann’s story. He was appointed in 1932, and in 1933 he started dealing with what was thought of as “the Jewish problem”. The idea was to persecute, isolate, emigrate and then literally exterminate the Jews—it went all that time back.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It was clear that this was going on for a long time before the second world war broke out.

Hermann and his brother had to walk to and from school, because German culture at that time prevented Jewish people from travelling on trams. Jewish people

were not allowed to mix with other people on trams—this was the dehumanisation of Jewish people. Of course, on their way to and from school, Hermann and his brother were often verbally and physically attacked by students from the non-Jewish school. The people they called friends suddenly turned on them because they were Jewish.

Then, at 9 pm on 9 November 1938, across Germany the synagogues were burned, and businesses and homes and shops were smashed. Windows were smashed and homes and buildings were burned to the ground. This is known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass.

Hermann and his brother had not seen these crimes at first hand, but when they went to school the following morning, many of their teachers had been arrested and they were sent home. Hermann's mother went to the bank where his father worked to warn him. However, two members of the Gestapo forced their way in and arrested his father at work. His father was then held for two days before being allowed home.

After Kristallnacht, Hermann's parents realised, as did many others in Germany, that they could no longer stay there safely. They tried to arrange for the family to leave but could not obtain visas for the whole family. However, they managed to arrange for Hermann and his brother to be sent to England on the Kindertransport, meaning that they were making a huge sacrifice—they knew they would probably never see their sons ever again.

Fabian Hamilton: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work on fighting antisemitism, defending against it and ensuring that this curse can never happen again. Has he visited the amazing and incredible holocaust museum, Beth Shalom, in Ollerton in Nottinghamshire? It is absolutely incredible. It recreates the classrooms he has just talked about as well as the carriages of the Kindertransport. If he has not done so, I urge him to visit it.

Bob Blackman: I have not visited, but I will make it a priority to do so when it is convenient, because I believe that it is something we should go and witness for ourselves.

Hermann and his brother had a long journey to get to the United Kingdom. They were then taken to a refugee hostel in Margate, where they remained for about a year, during which time Hermann had his bar mitzvah. They regularly wrote to their parents and two days before the war broke out, their parents wrote to them to say that they had just received their permits—they were going to be allowed to leave. However, once war had broken out, they were not allowed to leave. They were sent to a camp in the Pyrenees, from which they were still able to write to the brothers, but eventually they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were both murdered.

In this country, Hermann and his brother were separated and sent off to different schools. Hermann was sent to work in Staffordshire while his brother worked in London, but eventually they were reunited. Hermann went on to marry and to live in London. He lived in my constituency, and he regularly spoke in schools about his experiences not only in Germany, but in this country, because we should remember that Jewish people coming as refugees to this country did not always have a happy experience.

We should own up to that, and we should also say that we are not unique in offering service now to Jewish people. Sadly, Hermann died on 1 January 2020. I met him on many occasions and had the opportunity to hear of his experiences both in this country and before he arrived.

I want to single out two other people. The first is Angela Ioannou, who is an ambassador for the Holocaust Educational Trust. She recently attended the Lord Merlyn-Rees annual lecture in Parliament, and has given an account of her views on how we can make sure that holocaust education continues to be rolled out. The other is Dr Alfred Weinberger, who was born on 26 April 1900—he shares my birthday, if not my exact birth year. He was deported to the ghetto in 1943, and then on to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was killed.

The reality is that the testimony of survivors and their experiences bring to life the horrors of the holocaust. We must set out our stall to make sure that such things never happen again. Members have mentioned other forms of systematic murder, but I have seen the plight of the Rohingya at first hand. The duty we owe is to ensure that those people who have perpetrated murder are brought to justice and suffer for the war crimes they have committed, and that we help and assist people who are refugees.

I end by saying that the theme of this year is “stand together”, and I think that the whole House stands together united today in remembering the horrors of the holocaust and saying, with one voice, never again.

2.56 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) noted earlier, it is a privilege to take part in this debate, and it is a very special debate. Before the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) departs, I want to say just how much his speech has contributed to this debate, with the enormous emotion, which we were all moved by, that sat behind the testimony of his own family. It is of course a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has committed so much to this issue during his time in the House.

For the beginning of my remarks, I want to pick up where the Minister began, which is by making it clear that this day marks a number of appalling horrors. He mentioned the Khmer Rouge, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester. What I would describe as my first launch into public speaking was on the issue of the Khmer Rouge, when I took part in a United Nations Association speaking competition. As a 17-year-old then, I was trying to understand how on earth 1.7 million people had been killed in Cambodia through the work of the Khmer Rouge. It was quite appalling testimony to a failure of global policy to prevent that from happening.

We heard moving testimony from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) about her visit to Srebrenica, and of course from my hon. and truly gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I am utterly convinced that had he been in command of those Dutch troops who were charged with the defence of Srebrenica at the time, there would have been a very different outcome. That is the difference

[Crispin Blunt]

in the traditions and the pride that we take in our Army, and the proper latitude that we give our field commanders to deliver on their mission.

The right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) mentioned today's judgment in the International Court of Justice about the Rohingya, which is another searing issue that is current. Srebrenica of course happened in the context of the massacre in Rwanda just a year before. The fact that the ICJ is considering the Rohingya today should mean that we understand the purpose of today's debate: it is current. However, the single worst atrocity of the 20th century—and possibly, in scale, of all time—was of course the holocaust visited on the Jews of Europe by the Nazis under the German Government of Adolf Hitler.

This is very personal for me. My father, towards the end of the second world war, commanded a company that defended Field Marshal Montgomery's army group headquarters. He was one of the young officers sent to go and see what had been found in Bergen-Belsen. He recalled that to explain to the German population, who had averted their gaze from what was happening very close to them, local leaders were invited to go and see what had happened.

That is the lesson. This happened in a "civilised" nation. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East gave some of the historical background. It is now in school curriculums. Pupils are taught about the causes and how it ended with this worst ever atrocity. I wholly applaud the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust. I have had the opportunity to use its resources and to go with it, with schoolchildren, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East suggested that one should be there for more than one day. I have to say that a day was more than enough. It was one of the grimmest experiences of my life. As someone interested in history from a young age, it did not tell me anything new. I can vividly remember, aged 13, the episode of "The World at War" which focused on the holocaust and the camps. I grew up with the books of authors, such as Leon Uris, who made it clear what had happened to the Jewish people of Europe.

I do not think that there is any doubt that this experience has been seared into the German soul. One can see it in its foreign policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski), wholly understandably, has a Polish perspective. These events and these days are so important, so that we do not forget and that we try to learn. But we have not learnt. What we need to understand is that too often other conflicts in other parts of the world have their base in hatred. Antisemitism is the virulent hatred that led inexorably to the holocaust, which is why it is so important it is called out. Other hatreds, based on ethnicity, sexuality and other characteristics, continue to exist. We saw that with ISIS, only too recently controlling a very large area of territory in Iraq and Syria, visiting out its version of it what it thought were its values that are so appalling and so anti the very tenets of civilisation. We have to pick up and learn the lessons that we do not pass by on the other side.

There is no monopoly of good in the world. I have in this House pointed out, and will continue to point out, that there is very unlikely to be security for Israel until

there is a decent measure of justice for the Palestinians. It is the elision sometimes of these issues that makes things extremely difficult. I have, in the whirl of social media, been called an antisemite, because I have had the temerity to stand up for the Palestinians. It is deeply hurtful—I worked for four years for the first Jewish Secretary of State for Defence and for the second Jewish Foreign Secretary, who is a very close friend of mine—to have that accusation made, simply because I have expectations of the Government of the state of Israel, as an important ally of the United Kingdom and as a font of democratic values in that region, that their policy should be not only in their interests but based on the morality and law that they expect their people should have respect to. We have to continue to find a solution there.

I will finish with the words of Pastor Niemöller:

"First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me."

It is the duty of this House, and the lesson of today's debate, that where we see injustice in the world and it is perpetrated on the back of ethnic hatred, we call it out.

3.5 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I want to talk about my personal experience of genocide—I am afraid that it was up close.

In 1992, I was commanding a British battalion—the 1st Battalion, Cheshire Regiment—in Fallingbommel, Germany. I rang my mother and said, "We are surrounded here by disgusting locations—concentration camps, not just Bergen-Belsen, but others that held British and Polish soldiers." There was a graveyard opposite my house that 50 babies were buried in after liberation. I said, "It is incredibly disgusting to go to Bergen-Belsen to see these mounds covered in heather with just a little sign that says, 'Here lie 5,000 bodies.'" My mother said, "I know, Robert." I said, "What do you mean, you know?" She said, "I was there." I said, "I can't believe it—how were you there?" She said, "I went there in 1945." I said, "You've told me you remember the Special Operations Executive"—she was a special agent. She said, "I was with the British Expeditionary Force". Surprisingly, my battalion—the one I commanded—was one of the battalions that was there when Bergen-Belsen was liberated. My mother said, "I was there." I said, "You never told me that. You never said to me that you were here—why didn't you tell me?" She said, "I was ashamed." I said, "How can you have been ashamed? You were a young woman in your 20s, and you had volunteered to take incredible risks. You were an SOE

officer. You knew how to parachute and, dare I say it, kill people.” She said, “I was ashamed,” and I said, “Why?” She said, “Because it happened in my lifetime and I am responsible for what happens in my lifetime.”

I did not understand why my mother would say that until later that year, when I was sent to Bosnia. I took my battalion, the Cheshire Regiment, into Bosnia and became the de facto British commander for the UN in central Bosnia. We saw quite a lot. It was bad—there was quite a lot of killing. On 22 April 1993, in particular, I was with my soldiers in the hills north of the River Lašva, trying to stop the battles—trying to stop Bosnian Muslims fighting against Bosnian Croats—because so many people were being killed. My job was to try to stop that.

I was with the Bosnian Muslim commander. I said, “You’ve got to stop this. This is madness. You’re killing innocents—all sides are. Stop fighting!” He said, “We’re not stopping fighting. In the village of Ahmići, a large number of women and children have been murdered.” I said, “No, not a large number. It cannot be.” He said yes. I said, “If I go there and discover that that is not the truth, and I come back and tell you that, will you stop fighting?” He said yes.

What I was doing that day changed. I came off the mountains in my armoured vehicle; strangely, it was called Juliet—my second-in-command’s was called Romeo, which I resented deeply, but he had named them. That apart, Juliet led the way off the hills, towards Ahmići—I had never been there before. We got attacked a couple of times, and as we approached the place we called the Swiss house, the Bosnian Muslim special forces on it opened up on us. We skirted round that, although we were in armour, so it did not really matter.

I then went into the village of Ahmići. The mosque’s minaret had been blown up—it was lying across the building. I took Lieutenant Alex Watts’s platoon with me, in four armoured vehicles, and we drove all the way through the village. It was a linear village. It was about a mile, and the road was quite small, but we got through with our armour. At the far end, I said to Alex, “One section left, one section right—sweep. Let’s find out what happened here.” The vast majority of the houses had been destroyed, although some had not been—later, people told me they had apparently been marked so that they would not be destroyed, because they belonged to Bosnian Croat families rather than Bosnian Muslim families.

As we went through the village, some of my soldiers shouted, “Colonel Bob! Over here!”—they always called me that; there was a lack of discipline in my battalion. They showed me a man and a boy who were burned. Their clothes were off. The boy’s hand was in a fist. They were in the door of a house. I suppose they had been shot—we were standing on empty cases—and burned.

Round the back of the house was worse. I went into a cellar, as directed by my soldiers, and I could not believe what I saw. When my eyes grew accustomed to the dark, I saw flesh—a head. Then I realised that I was looking at the remains of perhaps two women and some children. I am sorry, but that is what it was like; we are talking about the holocaust, and this is a kind of holocaust. All of them had been burned. The head of one was arched back, and it was burned, but, my God, the eyes were

still there. I could not believe what I was seeing. I ran out with the men. Some were sick. The smell was appalling.

I immediately decided we had a duty to explain what had happened. I called a press conference. Then I informed the Ministry of Defence that was I was going to give one, because I suspected it might not be too happy. At the press conference, I explained what we had found. It went viral—all over the place. People tried to stop me. Some Bosnian Croats stopped me, and I remember saying to them, “Get out of my way. I am from the United Nations. That is my authority.”

Later, we found a family. My God. The family were stretched out in front of their house, dead: mum, dad, boy, girl. The little girl was holding a puppy. The bullet that had killed her had probably gone through the puppy beforehand. I really did not know what to do. By the way, we took that family to the local morgue. The next day we went back, and they were back in front of the house, because we had taken them to the wrong morgue. It was a Croat morgue rather than a Muslim morgue. A soldier of mine said to me, “Sir, this is 1993, not 1943. What the hell is happening?”

I used my satellite phone to speak to New York. I spoke to the Security Council, and the Security Council came to visit us. I took them to the site of this massacre. The Venezuelan president of the Security Council was deeply shocked, and some of the members were sick. I said to them, “How are we going to have justice for these people?” Well, I do not know whether it was because of that, but a month later they set up the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, at which I have given evidence in five trials.

I will stop shortly, but I just want to end by saying that we had to dig a mass grave. We—your soldiers—did that. In that mass grave we put more than 100 bodies, mainly women and children, all of them Bosnian Muslims. My wife, as she is now, was the delegate from the International Committee of the Red Cross. She came to witness what we were doing, because the Red Cross had to know what was going on. She said, “You cannot bury people in body bags.” I did not know that. So, led by her, my soldiers emptied the bodies out of the bags into the ground.

This Holocaust Memorial Day is terribly important. We are going to speak about this, and every year we will remember this. It is going to happen again. We have got to try and stop it, but genocide has continued and will continue, and it is our duty to try and stop it as much as we can.

3.18 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak after that passionate speech.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, as I have more Jewish constituents than anyone else in the Chamber today, apart from, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer). Unfortunately he is not able to speak because he is a Whip, but I am sure he will be thrilled that I am, no doubt, speaking on his behalf as well.

[*Dr Matthew Offord*]

If, as a Member of Parliament for any faith group, I either promote or defend a cause or an issue, many critics will say, “Well, you would say that, wouldn’t you, because your constituents would expect you to do so.” For many of my constituents—and, by default, for me as well—the holocaust is something very personal. I have constituents who were in places such as Bergen-Belsen, one of whom I have spoken about previously in the Chamber, of whom I am indeed very fond, and whom I visit regularly. I should take this opportunity to wish *mazel tov* to Manfred Goldberg and Kurt Marx, who both received the British Empire Medal for services to holocaust education in the new year’s honours list. We are very proud of them.

Just like the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown), I take the opportunity at this time of year to do two things. First, I always like to read a memoir or factual account of the holocaust, and I am pleased to be reading “If this is a man” by Primo Levi right now. The second thing I like to do—again, like the hon. Member for West Ham—is to consider Holocaust Memorial Day from a different perspective, and for the past few months I have been thinking about concentration camps on British soil.

Any Member who has read Nikolaus Wachsmann’s brilliant book “KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps” will know how the concentration camps came about. The KL refers to the German word “Konzentrationslager”. In Germany in 1933, many of the first people arrested by the Nazis were detained in a variety of locations, including police stations, stables, schools and even industrial buildings—certainly none of the locations we have in our public consciousness. Those people were held in “protective custody” for their own safety, and most of them were released at a later stage. During that time, the law was used to defend many of them. Their relatives went to the courts to say that their treatment was not as it should be, and under the law they did have some protections, but of course that did not last. We know that, as the second world war continued, the rules certainly changed.

The Konzentrationslager of Dachau in 1933 was very different from the Konzentrationslager of Auschwitz in 1944. Initially, Dachau targeted political opponents of the Nazis, such as German communists, socialists, Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals and persons accused of asocial or socially deviant behaviour. By contrast, Auschwitz was a sprawling death camp containing European Jewry, Gypsies and others. As Primo Levi wrote:

“Trains heavily laden with human beings went in each day, and all that came out was the ashes of their bodies, their hair, the gold of their teeth.”

Representation of these camps in films and popular culture depicts Auschwitz-Birkenau as the pinnacle of the death camps, but Treblinka was close behind it in the number of people who were murdered, alongside other camps such as Belzec, Chelmno and Sobibor. All those camps were devoted to killing. They were death camps, and anyone who went through their gates would not come out again. In 1967, the West German Ministry of Justice drew up a list of 1,200 camps that it said were sub-camps of the main ones. The Jewish Virtual Library has come up with the even greater figure of 15,000 camps that it says were effectively Konzentrationslager.

To many of us, the representation of the camps through their names suggests a distant location and an otherness that is foreign and certainly not part of the British collective consciousness, but that is not the case. Last summer I was fortunate enough to sail to the Channel Islands, the only part of the British Isles to be inhabited by the Nazis during the second world war, and I visited Alderney. In January 1942, the Nazis built four camps in Alderney. There were two work camps, Lager Helgoland and Lager Borkum, and two concentration camps, Lager Sylt and Lager Norderney. Lager Norderney contained Russian and Polish prisoners of war, and the Lager Sylt camp held Jewish slave labourers. There are 397 graves in Alderney, out of a total population of about 6,000. On their return to Alderney, the islanders had little or no knowledge of the crimes that had taken place, because when they were finally allowed to return in December 1945, the majority of the senior German officers had left and no one really knew what had happened.

Interestingly, in research being conducted by Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls at Staffordshire University, she has described the estimate of the number of victims as “very conservative”, given the difficulty of identifying prisoners in war records. The whole issue of post-holocaust archaeology is very much a contested area, and indeed very painful for many people who had direct experience of the holocaust. The professor has said that her research on the island has come up against great “hostility”, including from the Alderney Government, who she said had refused a permit for her to excavate some of the sites, forcing her to rely, in the research that she undertook, on “non-invasive” methods of analysis, such as drone filming.

I have to tread carefully as I say this, but there is also some reluctance on the part of the Jewish community in the United Kingdom to give permission for the excavation of Jewish burial sites. This is a very delicate area, and I know that the great Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, who is my constituent, has been involved in this issue. Rabbinic law dictates that the grave sites of Jewish people should not be disturbed. I have a great deal of sympathy with that point of view, but I do have a belief that unmarked graves, mass graves and locations of bodies hidden by their murderers are not proper graves in themselves, and I believe that it is appropriate for the identification of bodies to be undertaken, because people do need a proper resting place. I do not believe that the locations that I have described are proper graves; and as Elie Wiesel wrote, “to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.” So I certainly will continue with the conversations that I have had with others about the delicate, sensitive process of identifying locations of bodies, and also the persons in those graves.

So for me, Holocaust Memorial Day is not just something that is evoked through films such as “Schindler’s List”; it is something that is very personal and pertinent to many of my constituents. I shall conclude with the words of Primo Levi, in his fantastic book, in which he says:

“It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say.”

3.26 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I would like to address colleagues, not as the MP for Shrewsbury, but as the only Polish-born British Member of this Parliament. A lot of the killings during the

second world war took place in the country of my birth. Of course, we could not go back to Poland after we had left, because of communism, and the martial law that General Jaruzelski imposed to suppress the Solidarity movement.

When we finally managed to get back to Poland and I could see my beloved grandfather, he never spoke to me, when I was a child, about what he went through, and the terrible devastation that the Germans brought about in Poland, and in Warsaw, the city of my birth. Subsequently, though, I found out that his brother, Jan Kawczynski, hid eight Jewish families on his estate. We have already heard what would happen to a Pole if they took the risk of helping a Jewish friend or neighbour. He was coming back to his estate one day, and a friend said to him: "Don't go back—your property has been surrounded by the Germans. Just flee: escape and save yourself." He said to his friend, "I have to go back; my wife and daughter are there."

First, the Germans made him take off his officer's boots. Then they made him dig a grave. Then they made him watch as they shot his 12-year-old daughter. Then they shot his wife. Then they shot him. And his only crime was hiding his Jewish friends and neighbours.

I related that story, for the first time after 30 years, to a friend of mine who is called Jonny Daniels, who runs a wonderful organisation called From the Depths, which seeks to bring Poles and Jews together. He investigated the story, and subsequently I went to an awards ceremony at Warsaw zoo with the Polish Prime Minister, Mr Morawiecki, and others, to be presented with an award on behalf of Jan Kawczynski for the sacrifices that he made.

It was so counter-intuitive: that is the thing. Anybody in this Chamber who is a parent, like me, will know that we are programmed instinctively, in our DNA, to protect our children. And yet what did these people do? They knew that if they protected Jews it would not be just they who were shot; they would have to watch their children being shot before they themselves were killed.

I say all these things because I am so upset about the second world war revisionism that is now taking place. As the people who took part and survived the second world war die, the next generation know so little about what happened during the second world war.

Last week President Putin accused Poland of being somehow jointly responsible for starting the second world war, and Members can imagine how aggressively confrontational that is for any Polish person. As we all know, it was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, entered into by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, that led to the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 and the subsequent butchery.

The first thing that happened to me today is that my partner handed me an article from *The Independent*—I have to say I never read that left-wing rag—by Rivkah Brown, whose Twitter account shows her wearing a "Vote Labour" sign on her hat. The article was headlined, "Poland is in denial about its role in the Holocaust—it was both victim and perpetrator." This young lady from *The Independent* is trying to suggest that Poland is equally to blame and somehow just as much a perpetrator of these atrocities as it was a victim, but in her article she could reference only the famous tragic case of Jedwabne, a small Polish town where it is alleged that

the local Polish villagers rounded up 300 Jews, put them in a barn and set the barn alight. It is a very, very tragic, brutal and well-known case that we Poles struggle with, but to compare that one incident to the systematic extermination of 6 million people in Poland through a series of concentration camps is highly distorting of the facts and is deeply regrettable.

Bob Stewart: My very good and hon. Friend mentions the 6 million people killed in Poland. I thought several million of them were actually Polish. How many Poles are reckoned to have been killed by German soldiers and the Gestapo?

Daniel Kawczynski: I do not have the exact figure to hand, but at least 4 million Poles, if not more, were killed. Of course, it is not just the killing of millions of Poles. As my hon. Friend will know, in 1944, when we had the temerity to try to drive the Germans out of Warsaw, Adolf Hitler insisted on the systematic destruction of Warsaw so that it would be wiped off the face of the earth. Ninety-seven per cent. of Warsaw was destroyed. When I take delegations of British parliamentarians to Poland on all-party group visits, the first place we go to is the Warsaw Uprising Museum so they can see at first hand the complete destruction, the extermination, of an entire city that took place in 1944 in Warsaw.

I have a thick file in my office of my correspondence with the BBC. I write to the BBC year after year with the same letter asking it not to refer, as it always does in its programmes, to "Polish death camps," and year after year I get the same reply. I tell the BBC that there is no such thing as a Polish death camp. These were concentration camps set up by the Germans and run by the Germans in German-occupied Poland. I just wish the BBC, a taxpayer-funded organisation, would understand the sensitivities of these things, rather than repeatedly referring to Polish death camps.

I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) earlier to ask why he had used the term "Nazi." Many hon. Members have used the term "Nazi," and I am very worried about that term. It is almost like a firewall in front of the responsibility of the German nation and the Germans. It is almost as if Nazis are some third party who descended on us temporarily. They were not Nazis—the Nazi party was a political party—most of the people who carried out these brutal attacks in Poland were German soldiers and German Gestapo officers who were not connected with the Nazi party. They were Germans. When I talk about the revisionism that is taking place today, we must remember who the perpetrators of these appalling crimes were.

I was invited to a German-Polish conference at the Polish presidential palace—the Belvedere palace—a few years ago. The Körber Stiftung invited me to a German-Polish conference, and I asked them why the German Government had not given war reparations to Poland. Poland is the only country that has not received any reparations resulting from the second world war, yet it was brutalised the most and had the most people—the highest percentage of citizens—eliminated and destroyed. The German Government always say to me that they will not pay reparations and they hide behind an agreement they signed with a Polish Government in 1952—they signed an agreement with a mafia-type, illegitimate

[Daniel Kawczynski]

Government imposed on Poland by Stalin. Bolesław Bierut was the communist stooge imposed on Poland by Stalin, who instructed Poland at that time, “You will have nothing to do with those capitalists in Germany. You will sign an agreement. You don’t want any war reparations.”

It is good that we are speaking here in this Chamber, but we need action for the millions of Jews and the millions of Poles who were killed, butchered and persecuted in Poland and never received any compensation from Germany whatsoever. I talk to the Polish Government often about whether or not they are going to implement a tribunal or a prosecution in an international court against Germany. They talk about it from time to time, but very little happens. I want Members to know that I am in discussions with barristers to see whether we can find Polish and Polish-Jewish survivors living here in the United Kingdom and implement a private prosecution against Germany on behalf of Polish and Polish-Jewish survivors who are British citizens.

A young Polish girl from Oxford University came to see me because she wanted to do a research programme in my office—an internship—and I asked whether she would help me write a paper on why Poland today should ask for war reparations. This young lady, who was 25 and desperate to work in the House of Commons, said, “No, I won’t do it.” I said, “Why won’t you help me with this?” Her reply was, “No, I am not doing it. I have a German boyfriend, who would be upset if I did it, and it is ancient history. It is gone, forget it.” My generation is the last generation who will do anything about this, because we sat on the laps of our beloved grandparents, and we heard about what happened to them. When we are gone, that is it, it is finished; no subsequent generation will want to stir this thing up again. But what message does this send to the hundreds of thousands of people of Polish and Polish-Jewish origin still living in this country who are now British citizens? What message is sent to them by saying, “No, this is too complicated, it is too long ago. We are not interested in the fact that the Germans did not pay war compensation to you. We are going to move on.” No, as long as I am a Member of Parliament, I will continue my fight and struggle to make sure that the Germans account for the brutality that they implemented against Poland.

3.39 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I congratulate the new Members, whose speeches were really impressive, and I especially thank two Labour Members who spoke incredibly effectively, the hon. Members for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) and for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols). All of us will be grateful for the contribution that has been made by each Member, but those in particular were very special.

A year ago, I was at the new cemetery at Bushey for the interment of the remains of six people whose body parts or bones had been found in the Imperial War Museum—they were given as part of a gift. I represented my constituency and my own family. I am not Jewish, but my grandfather’s grandmother was. A year ago, I thought that 45 of his extended family had died at

Auschwitz; we now believe that the figure is 62. More than 40 died at Sobibor. There were eight other camps around Europe where others of the 122 that we know of so far perished. Two of them perished at Bergen-Belsen, which is where Anne Frank died.

My father’s cousin George Woodwark was one of the 100 medical students who went out to Belsen in May 1945. Once they arrived at the camp, after liberation, the number of deaths dropped from 500 a day to 100. Within weeks, people were able to say that not a single person had died in one of the huts. That kind of attention to detail is going to be needed for those about whom my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) has spoken. By the way, I agree with that we should always try to remember to say that it was German camps in Poland, not Polish camps. I understand that sensitivity.

At the Imperial War Museum, where 900,000 people a year go to the holocaust galleries—the same number as go to Yad Vashem—they have the records of many of those medical students, as well as of the photographers and journalists who went in in April 1945. The details are there. Someone said that black-and-white photographs cannot convey the smell. In March 1945, some 20,000 people died at Belsen. They were not directly killed; they just died. There were 40,000 people left at liberation, of whom 18,000 died. The conditions in which those people were held are just completely unbelievable.

The camp commander, Josef Kramer, started looking after concentration camps in 1934. It was not in 1939 and not in 1941, when the extermination order came, but in 1934.

I referred earlier to Adolf Eichmann, who got the job of looking after the Jews in 1932 or 1933. The Israelis found him in South America—they nearly got Mengele at the same time. To those who want to study this subject, I recommend looking at Eichmann’s story and what he had done.

There are 37 surnames in my extended family who had deaths. When people start to try to deny the holocaust—whether the holocaust of the Jews, similar genocides that have been spoken about, including Srebrenica, Rwanda or Cambodia during our lifetime, or the other hells that people have been put through, including being sent out to camps by the Soviet Union—we have to keep our eyes open and go on being active. We have to try to do all we can, with others, to prevent this kind of thing from happening.

About 15 years ago, Governments’ duty to protect was being established by the United Nations. Since then, we have gone backwards. There are too many leaders or rulers of countries who have lost the understanding that having a reasonably flexible liberal democracy—and, for that matter, a liberal economy—helps to improve people’s conditions and allows leaders to retire or to be defeated without having to hang on to office. Leaders fear being assassinated and fear having the wealth that they have stolen from their country stolen back from them. They ought to learn—this applies to our friends the Chinese, our friends the Russians, some in eastern Europe and people in South America—that if they are going to be a leader of a country, it is better to be in a democracy so that they can retire and take their pension in their own country, rather than trying to

hang on for dear life, because they may lose their life and they will certainly lose their wealth, if they lose their power.

As I said to the Minister earlier, this debate should be about the holocaust and the horrors. It should actually be about how this country did not deal with the question of which year would have been the right one to face up to Mr Hitler in a military sense. Would it have been 1932 or 1933, or any of the years up to 1939? Or, if not 1939, would it have been 1940, 1941 or 1942?

Hitler thought that he could do a deal with the British and isolate us from continental Europe. He was quite surprised when Mr Chamberlain would not go along with that.

We have to say that there is never a right time to go to war. Perhaps we got it wrong over Iraq. In my view, we certainly got it wrong over Syria—we just have to count the millions in Syria who have either died or been sent into exile to see that. There was a miscalculation: Labour thought that the Tories—the coalition—had enough votes to get it through, and we thought that Labour would support us. The House of Commons made a surprising decision—I think that it was the wrong one—and people have suffered because of it. We should accept that we were at fault.

We can go back more than 800 years, to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, or to other times. The way in which Jewish people have been treated over the years—not just by Government, but in society—has been wrong. We should accept that and apologise for it.

The main point of this debate is about holocaust memorial and how we can make sure that we and others can learn more. I have referred to the Government's proposals for a holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens, which is subject to a call-in, rather surprisingly, before Westminster Council has made a decision.

On another occasion, hopefully in Government time, we should have a debate about how we have got to where we are at the moment. We have an unsatisfactory design for an unsatisfactory proposal that completely fails to meet the specifications of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation that were set out in writing in September 2015. I hope that we find some way of mediating this situation because many of the Jews whom I know think that it is wrong and that they are not being listened to by the foundation or the Government.

I hope that the Government will say—not necessarily in today's debate, but on another occasion—that they are open to discussions in which they will explain how they put out a document in September 2015 specifying that the centre had to be somewhere in central London between Regent's Park, Spitalfields and the Imperial War Museum, but they are now saying that the only place that it can be is in an inadequate park close to the House of Lords. However, that is for a different day.

For today, I want to thank the Minister for the way he introduced the debate and congratulate those who have contributed. By next year, I hope that we will find that progress has been made on getting rid of antisemitism, on keeping a sense of proportion over Israel, and on remembering some of our collective responsibility for allowing the Hitler holocaust to get so far in such a drastic, dramatic, hateful and evil way.

3.47 pm

Mr Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is an honour to contribute to this powerful debate. It is essential that we take time for reflection. As I wrote in the Holocaust Educational Trust's book of commitment this week, education and remembrance are the only cures for hatred and bigotry. I echo the pledge that others have made today to fight racism and prejudice wherever they are found. I stand in solidarity with Members on both sides of the House in that commitment.

It has been a privilege to hear 20 poignant and emotional speeches today from hon. Members of all parties, none more so than that of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton). I am sure that his personal and family story touched not only me, but everyone in the Chamber.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who is no longer in the Chamber, on his message that we have to do more to tackle the problems and the causes of antisemitism. He also spoke about the need for proper education. I thank him for his work as co-chair of the all-party group against antisemitism. I thank the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) for telling us in his maiden speech about his haunting experience of visiting the concentration camps, the importance of hope over hate, and his visions of a better present and a brighter future.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) for her extraordinary bravery in supporting the Jewish community and those who have stood alongside it. She spoke about the heroic people who have brought inspiration to those challenging prejudice today.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) on his maiden speech and look forward to working with him on veterans' support. He spoke passionately about the need to visit Blackpool. I must admit that my sister had her hen do there, but I will not say any more, because I do not want it recorded in *Hansard*.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) spoke, as always, with passion, and related other stories that I believe resonate today. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) spoke about the industrial scale of the holocaust. I thank her for her contribution and what she said about the pride of our country in the diversity we enjoy today. We cannot allow communities to be pitted against each other.

Having listened to today's debate, and looking back on my visit to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, one thing resonates above all else: the immeasurable tragedy of the holocaust has darkened lives on an infinite scale. That is why the salience of Holocaust Memorial Day and the continued commemoration must never be underestimated. The murder of 6 million Jews—the same number as the population of Rio de Janeiro—at the hands of their fellow citizens will always evoke shock and terror, but we all have a responsibility to ensure that the story is passed on to future generations. Why is it important that we reflect and remember? Because society is not yet free of the facets that led to this catastrophic loss of life. Still antisemitism plagues our society. Still British Jewish people in the country they call their own are subjected to persecution and racist attacks. One case recorded is one case too many.

[Mr Stephen Morgan]

Antisemitism must be drummed out with an iron fist and met with fierce opposition. In 2020, the need for reflection could not be greater. Last year, in my constituency of Portsmouth, South, we hosted D-Day 75—a commemoration of those who kick-started the operation to liberate Europe and subsequently the concentration camps across the continent. Next week, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of some concentration camps, and on 10 May we will celebrate VE day to mark the allied victory over the Nazis. To truly pay tribute to all those who sacrificed so much to overcome fascism in Europe, we must all act to ensure that such abuses never take place again. That responsibility falls on the shoulders of us all.

The importance of reflection and remembrance transcends that of commemoration. Reflection and remembrance are the tools we must use to prevent further atrocities. The holocaust was not the last genocide; therefore we still have more work to do. The loss of human life at the hands of others from Cambodia to Bosnia, and from Darfur to Rwanda, is testament to the fact that we must all do more to educate people about the perils of prejudice. Now more than ever, the harrowing story of 6 million Jews and members of other communities and faiths, including Roma, gay, black and disabled people, being murdered must be told. We must learn from the events of yesterday if we are to forge a tomorrow that is free from terror.

Education, remembrance and co-operation—these are the tools we will use to combat humanitarian catastrophes. When considering those three principles, it is imperative that we pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, whose relentless dedication to ensuring that the UK plays a leading role internationally in holocaust education, remembrance and research is commendable. They truly are ambassadors for change, and I join others in expressing admiration for the “Lessons of Auschwitz” programme, which helps to transcribe the terrors of the holocaust into the pages of history and ensures that the pain and suffering will never be forgotten.

On racism and prejudice, we must educate to eradicate, especially when hate crime in this country is at an all-time high. With around 300 police-reported incidents taking place each day and nearly 80% of cases not resulting in further action being taken, it is up to all of us to change the society to which we owe so much for the better.

If we are serious about making progress, we must be sincere in our endeavours for justice. First, we must look inwardly, applying scrutiny to ourselves. I have the honour of representing a city with one of the oldest Jewish communities in Britain, having been established in 1746. I have a responsibility to my friends in that community to lead from the front, which is why the Labour party must take on board and implement all recommendations brought forward by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The only test that matters is that the Jewish people have faith and trust in the Labour party’s ability to investigate cases of antisemitism. Anything else falls short and is a failure; anything else is shameful.

As we approach the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the closure of the theatre of war where the holocaust took place, the number of survivors

grows smaller. I would therefore like to pay tribute to a remarkable woman who died in July 2019, Eva Kor. She was a Romanian-born Auschwitz survivor who relentlessly campaigned for holocaust awareness, founding the CANDLES Holocaust Museum in Indiana. Among her immeasurable feats of human strength, she testified in the 2015 trial of a former SS officer, the so-called “bookkeeper of Auschwitz”, who was accused on 300,000 counts of being an accessory to the murder of Hungarian Jews. If ever inspiration is needed, that takes only a short glance at the achievements and resilience of Eva Kor. I conclude with a quote from her:

“Let there be no more wars...no more gas chambers, no more bombs, no more hatred, no more killing, no more Auschwitizes.”

We all have more work to do to honour Eva’s memory.

I thank everyone for taking part in this important debate. It has been an honour to sum up for the Opposition.

3.56 pm

Luke Hall: It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to open and close the debate today. I am hugely grateful to hon. Members from across the House for an emotional, thought-provoking and insightful debate, with a number of incredible contributions.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) and for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) on their excellent maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South spoke about his constituency, and about the importance of supporting business, hard work and the community he represents. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw rightly thanked his predecessor for his contribution in this area, and told us about the work he did when he was a teacher to raise awareness of the issues we are discussing today. They will both be excellent Members of Parliament for their constituencies.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) for all the work that he has done, and for his contribution today. He told us about the work that he has done with local authorities and what they have done to support the Jewish community. I also thank him for his commitment to call people out in this House when they fall short; that is absolutely right.

I thank the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) for his contribution. The letter that he read out—from a mother to her daughter, Mirele—was one of the most emotional passages that I have heard in the House since becoming a Member of Parliament. It was quite incredible to hear.

I thank the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) and my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for their passionate and informed contributions; the debate has been quite incredible. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for recounting his story about the atrocities that he saw in Bosnia. The debate is richer for it.

Lastly, I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) for sharing what was possibly the best speech that I have heard in this House, and certainly the most emotional. I have never heard the Chamber as silent and attentive as it was when he recounted the incredible story of what Heinz Skyte and his family went through. I thank him for sharing that.

We have heard today that the past few years have not been easy for British Jews, with antisemitism on the rise across Europe and the United Kingdom. Jewish families who have lived in harmony in their neighbourhoods for generations are coming forward, in some instances telling us that they have feared for their safety. Some have contemplated leaving the country. I think we would all agree that if that happened, we would lose a vital part of what makes Britain great.

We are one of the world's most successful multi-faith, multi-ethnic democracies. From the arts to business, from politics to culture, it would be a poorer country without the immense contribution of the Jewish community to British society. That is why we must all acknowledge that antisemitism is not just a threat to the Jewish community but to all of us and our country. This debate has highlighted the importance of Holocaust Memorial Day to stopping antisemitism and all forms of hatred.

The UK's Holocaust Memorial Day was created to remember all the victims of the holocaust and Nazi persecution, to remember those affected by more recent atrocities, and to educate people—we have heard so much about the importance of education—about the continuing dangers of racism and discrimination. It reminds us of the continuing need for vigilance and motivates people, individually and collectively, to ensure that the horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation committed during the holocaust and subsequent periods of genocide are neither forgotten nor repeated.

Every year since 2001, the UK Government have supported and promoted Holocaust Memorial Day. Since 2010, we have given the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust over £7 million. These funds support not only the national event but a huge number of local activities—over 10,000 in 2019, taking place up and down the country. These events ranged from commemorative services to film production, from social media campaigns to crochet flowers being made to represent and remember individual victims of the holocaust.

Each year, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has a theme. As we have heard, the theme for this year is “stand together”. This theme has explored how genocidal regimes throughout history have deliberately fractured societies by marginalising certain groups, and how those tactics can be challenged by individuals standing together with their neighbours and speaking out against oppression. In the years leading up to the holocaust, Nazi policies and propaganda deliberately encouraged divisions within German society, urging “Aryan” Germans to keep themselves separate from their Jewish neighbours. The holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups and each subsequent genocide were enabled by ordinary citizens not standing with their targeted neighbours. For those who might feel powerless when confronted with hatred, it is worth remembering that this is a powerful step we can all take—to stand up for and support those who are the victims of bigotry.

Today, as we participate in this debate, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is joining some of the last survivors of the holocaust and over 40 world leaders at the World Holocaust Forum memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The theme of this year's forum is “remembering the holocaust and fighting antisemitism”. The message is clear—that we cannot remember the victims of the holocaust without fighting antisemitism today. Earlier this week, the UK, along with other members of the International Holocaust

Remembrance Alliance, pledged to victims and survivors of the holocaust that they will never be forgotten and that their legacy will be kept alive.

We have heard many hon. Members speak about their visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death camps across Europe. Sadly, despite the often-quoted words, “Never again”, we continue to hear about violent conflicts across the world and their impacts on civilians. But there are many schemes, with state backing, to help to ensure that people in this country remember the tragedy of the holocaust and learn lessons from it. I know that many Members in the House today have visited Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust. Pupils from three schools in my constituency—Marlwood School, Brimsham Green School and the Castle School—have been there in the past few years.

The Government are supporting the work of the Anne Frank Trust, which challenges prejudice and hatred. Our Department is funding the trust with £467,000 over three years to reach schoolchildren in London and the west midlands. The trust uses Anne Frank's life and diary to challenge prejudice and reduce hatred, encouraging people to embrace positive attitudes, responsibility and respect for others. Many of the young people have gone on to become ambassadors of the programme and share what they have learned with others. I pay tribute to them today.

In January 2015, the then Prime Minister, with cross-party support across this House, accepted in full the recommendations of the Prime Minister's holocaust commission. This included the creation of a new memorial. The Government have already recorded and preserved the testimony of British holocaust survivors and liberators to ensure that their witness to Europe's worst tragedy is never forgotten.

Jim Shannon: I should have mentioned this in my speech, but Prince Charles is in Israel on his first official visit, for Holocaust Memorial Day. It is a fitting tribute that the royal family should be represented in Israel, since 6 million Jewish people were murdered.

Luke Hall: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point and agree with him about the importance of that visit.

During the debate, Members have raised concerns about how antisemitism has taken hold in British institutions including universities, local government and our political parties. The UK's Government was the first in the world to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism, which provides a guide on how antisemitism manifests itself in the 21st century. It is important that public bodies understand the kinds of behaviour that constitute antisemitism today, and that is why we are calling on all local authorities and public bodies to adopt that definition.

But our institutions need to do more. We plan to bring forward legislation to ban universities and local councils from organising boycotts, sanctions and disinvestment against other countries—a measure that is often used to target Israel and can, in some instances, lead to antisemitic acts. We all have a role to play in rooting out antisemitism where we see it, and the Jewish community can be assured that this Government will stand shoulder to shoulder with them. I know that that message goes out from everybody in the Chamber today.

[Luke Hall]

I would like to echo the many tributes that have been paid today, including to Karen Pollock, the CEO of the Holocaust Educational Trust, who has been a huge support to our Department and to me. Along with her team, she is an inspiration to us all. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and its chief executive, Olivia Marks-Woldman. The trust delivered the most successful Holocaust Memorial Day to date last year, with 10,000 local events across the country.

I would like to mention some of the other holocaust remembrance, education and survivor organisations that enrich the work we do, such as the Holocaust Survivors' Centre in Hendon; the Wiener Holocaust Library; the Association of Jewish Refugees; the National Holocaust Centre in Newark, which we heard about this afternoon; the Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre at Huddersfield University; and University College London's Centre for Holocaust Education. I would like to pay tribute to the 21 survivors of the holocaust and subsequent genocides who were honoured in the Queen's new year's honours list. I also pay tribute to those survivors who shared their testimony but are no longer with us for the work they have done over many decades and wish their families long, fulfilling lives.

This has been a sobering debate. We have heard many troubling, disturbing and upsetting accounts. We have remembered some of the darkest moments of human history and heard about some of the darkest aspects of human nature. I wish to end by focusing not on the dark side of human nature but the light. At the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem is a garden called the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations. It was designed to commemorate non-Jews who risked their lives to rescue Jews during the holocaust.

At first, a tree was to be planted for every person identified as deserving of recognition, but as time went on that became impossible for lack of space, and a plaque was put up in the garden instead. As of 1 January 2019, 27,362 people have been commemorated, and new names continue to be added. Some of the names were famous, and some were wealthy, but some were ordinary people living otherwise ordinary lives who demonstrated tremendous courage when the time for moral action came. Let us draw strength from their example and remember that, if the time comes when we are confronted by racism or discrimination, every one of us has the power to stand up against it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We remember.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day.

UK-US Extradition Agreement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Tom Pursglove.)

4.8 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, while Members make their way out of the Chamber, I will take this opportunity to congratulate you on being the man who effectively announced our departure from the European Union. Your place in history is assured.

Since we agreed the UK-US extradition treaty in 2003, it has been abundantly clear that the British Government of the day struck a truly dreadful deal— asymmetric, sometimes ineffective and often unfair on British citizens. Countless examples down the years have shown that, from the NatWest Three to Christopher Tappin, from Gary McKinnon to Anne Sacoolas, the person charged with causing the death by dangerous driving of Harry Dunn. We now risk yet another serious miscarriage of justice with the US extradition request for Dr Mike Lynch, a successful and entrepreneurial British businessmen. Dr Lynch founded an innovative data processing company called Autonomy, which by 2010 was Britain's largest leading software company. In 2011 it was sold to Hewlett-Packard for £9 billion.

Several years later, Hewlett-Packard claimed that Autonomy was overvalued. Hewlett-Packard sued Dr Lynch for fraud in the United Kingdom. After a lengthy and costly civil trial, Dr Lynch is now awaiting judgment, and I am of course prevented from commenting further on that case due to the sub judice rules, although this is a trial by judge alone, not by jury, so the possibility of undue influence is near zero.

Dr Lynch is now facing almost identical criminal charges in the United States, in yet another aggressive attempt by American authorities to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction. Despite the Serious Fraud Office deciding that there is no basis for a prosecution in the United Kingdom, the United States authorities are doggedly pursuing his extradition.

Civil cases in this country and the States are decided on the balance of probabilities, a much lower hurdle than for criminal cases, which have to be decided on a "beyond reasonable doubt" basis. If Hewlett-Packard fails to win its civil case against Dr Lynch here in the UK based on that much lower standard of proof than the criminal test, it is inconceivable that the authorities will win a near identical criminal case if it is tried fairly. Accordingly, the case for extradition would evaporate, so the only sensible course of action available to the UK authorities—in this case, the Home Secretary—is to delay the extradition until the United Kingdom judge has made his decision.

This case is important because it is characteristic of the way the American judicial system operates to favour American business. The United States has a tradition of using its broad extradition treaties to cast a wide legal net around the world. As with Mike Lynch, many of these cases are only tenuously linked to the United States. Cases such as those of Ian Norris, the former head of Morgan Crucible, or the NatWest Three all have common themes: they are all British citizens, the alleged crimes all took place on British soil, the United Kingdom system failed to protect them, and the US authorities ultimately got their way.

This does not, by the way, just apply to Britain. In March the US extradited three Credit Suisse bankers for alleged bribes passing between companies in London and Mozambique. The United States tenuously claimed jurisdiction because one transaction was operated through New York. Most of these United States cases are not in pursuit of terrorists or paedophiles or murderers, which is what the extradition treaty was originally designed for.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I should state that Dr Lynch is my constituent, so I take a keen interest here.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that back in 2003 when the treaty first came in—I was not in the House then, but he was—we were sold it very much on the basis that it was to stop terrorists and committers of serious violence, rather than to deal with these kinds of commercial cases where somebody is effectively looking to repeat a trial, but under US jurisdiction?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. I was the shadow Home Secretary at the time and I opposed this treaty, but eventually our party gave in on the grounds that it was about paedophilia and terrorism and violent crime. That was the sole basis upon which we accepted what we thought at the time was a treaty that made it too easy for the US to extradite. And of course what we are seeing now is that that is not what is happening: the United States is going after white-collar businessmen and seeking to be the judge, jury and executioner for global commercial deals. Since 2003, some 80% of the extraditions were for non-violent crimes. This seems like very strange behaviour when we consider that this is a country that did not convict any American chief executives in the 2008 crisis, which clearly had some frauds behind it.

Dr Lynch is being charged with several counts of wire fraud, an offence originally designed to make a state crime into a federal crime so that prosecutions could be made by federal authorities. Its application quickly expanded, prompting one federal judge to say it has

“been invoked to impose criminal penalties upon a staggeringly broad swath of behaviour”.

That staggeringly broad swath is now being applied across national borders. In essence, a legal playbook designed to catch and convict mobsters and racketeers has first been repurposed to catch white-collar offenders, and now that repurposing has been extended outside American borders into what should be other countries’ jurisdictions.

The Home Affairs Committee concluded, in a 2012 report on the UK-US extradition treaty, that the US

“has the power to reach out around the world and—provided there is a very, very tenuous connection with the US—it generally has the power to prosecute.”

In a 2011 report on our extradition arrangements, Lord Justice Scott Baker concluded that we do not need to change the rules to ensure that London-based offences are dealt with here in the UK. He was wrong. He failed to give enough weight to the US ambition to extend its extraterritorial jurisdiction on commercial crimes. He also made no allowance for the incredibly one-sided nature of the prosecution and trial of foreign suspects in the US justice system. This is the core problem of our asymmetric and unbalanced treaty with the US.

An American citizen facing extradition to the UK can challenge it in a US court on the basis that there is no “probable cause”, but a UK citizen facing extradition to the US has no right to a “reasonable grounds” hearing. This is what the Joint Committee on Human Rights called in 2011 a

“lack of reciprocity in the Treaty.”

It went on to recommend:

“The Government should increase the proof required for the extradition of British citizens to the US so as to require sufficient evidence to establish probable cause, as is required for the extradition of a US citizen to the UK.”

What is more, the US Secretary of State has far greater discretion to refuse an extradition than our Home Secretary—just look at the rejected extradition request for Anne Sacoolas.

The British Extradition Act 2003 states:

“The Secretary of State must order the person’s discharge.”

The equivalent US code, however, states:

“The Secretary of State may order the person....to be tried”.

That sounds like a minor difference in language, but it has had a very, very big impact.

Since 2007, the UK has surrendered 135 UK nationals to the US, 99 of them for non-violent alleged offences. During the same period, the US has surrendered only 11 people to the UK. That is why countries such as France and Israel refuse to allow their citizens to be extradited. It seems inconceivable, then, that the UK has ceded so much of its discretion, particularly given the extraordinary way in which extradited suspects are treated in the US. Many people think the US justice system is broadly similar to ours. The reality is that it is much more slanted.

If Dr Lynch is unfortunate enough to be extradited and denied bail, as most foreign suspects are—they are taken to be an intrinsic flight risk—he will face appalling conditions that are much worse than anything found in the UK. He will likely find himself in a high-security prison in a cramped cell with gang members, drug dealers and murderers. Take the example of the NatWest Three. They were investigated by the UK authorities in 2001 for financial crimes. The alleged offences took place in London, while the three were employed by a London-based company. After the Financial Services Authority and the Serious Fraud Office decided that there was no basis for a prosecution in the UK, the three were extradited to the US because the Justice Department believed their crimes contributed to the collapse of Enron.

The NatWest Three have since written vivid accounts of their experience. As soon as they stepped off the plane in the US, before a trial had even begun, they were treated like convicted criminals. Handcuffed and frogmarched to the jail, they were treated with contempt by marshals and subjected to a comprehensive and intrusive full-body search. It highlighted the classic approach that US authorities take. They were told that if they pleaded not guilty, they would be denied bail and get 35 years in a high-security US prison, but if they pleaded guilty, they would get only three years, possibly serving some of it in a British jail. In the end, they were sentenced to 37 months in a Texas prison because they gave way to the pressure.

That is standard practice in the American system, which has a corrosive over-reliance on plea bargains. Ninety-seven per cent. of cases are settled by a plea

[Mr David Davis]

bargain in the United States. In the US, mandatory sentencing means that it is the prosecutor who determines the sentence, not the judge, which allows the prosecutor to operate a sort of judicial blackmail. The US imprisons a higher proportion of its citizens than any other country in the world. There are many reasons for that, but no doubt the ferocious use of plea bargains is a major factor.

Once charges have been brought, and after Dr Lynch—if he is unfortunate to suffer this—has spent months in appalling conditions, prosecutors will almost certainly try to convince him to admit guilt to a lesser charge. They will promise a shorter sentence, some of which might be served in the UK, and they will remind him of the huge financial cost of a protracted and complex trial. If he refuses, he will face the prospect of a deliberately intimidating lengthy sentence, and the costs of the trial could run into millions. The rules are set up for him to fail. He will be told that he must run his defence from his own prison cell, where he can only have one ream of paper at a time.

To put that in perspective, Dr Lynch's trial so far has cost £40 million and has involved over 11 million documents. The opening arguments alone were 1,067 pages and the closing arguments were 4,494 pages. One can easily see how someone in Dr Lynch's position would be coerced into giving in and admitting guilt, irrespective of the facts. I would not call that a plea bargain; I would call that blackmail. This is nothing like normal British justice. It effectively turns the presumption of innocence into the presumption of guilt.

Mike Lynch could be arrested any day now and sent to the United States to go through this appalling ordeal, but I hope not. I hope that the Home Secretary will use every legal mechanism available to delay this extradition until the judge has made his decision in the civil trial. UK and European law guarantee a right to a fair trial. An extradition before a UK trial has concluded is incompatible with that right, as it pre-empts the judgment of the court. The Home Secretary should therefore delay the extradition on grounds of basic justice, just as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) refused the extradition of Gary McKinnon on human rights grounds when she was Home Secretary in 2012. If the Home Secretary certifies the extradition request, it is out of her hands. If she holds off certification, we can let British justice take its course.

In the longer term, we need to take a fresh look at our extradition arrangements with the United States, particularly as we embark on a new trading relationship with them. In the next decade, Britain and the US will develop even closer commercial relationships. Businesses developed by brilliant British inventors will look to merge, co-operate, or sell to big US companies. If the current extradition treaty stands, every one of them could face American extraterritorial legal action and a legal system stacked against them. In the interests of both countries, this has to change. We need to find a way to rein in the US's extraterritorial tendencies and ensure that our arrangements are fair, balanced and based on reciprocity.

The simplest way to do that is to change the British law to exactly mirror the American law—the Americans cannot possibly complain about that—and say that the Secretary of State “may” extradite, rather than “must”.

If the American system insists on trying to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction in the American interest, perhaps we should mimic Israel and refuse to extradite British citizens for anything other than serious crimes of violence and terrorism. We need to give British citizens, businessmen and entrepreneurs the protection, certainty and justice that they deserve.

4.24 pm

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): May I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) on securing this debate? He has long been a sentinel on the watchtower of our liberties, and we are all the safer for having him in his place.

I am sure my right hon. Friend agrees with me that extradition is an important tool in fighting crime, and it is crucial that our arrangements work well. It is vital that we strike the correct balance between effectively bringing offenders to justice and seeking redress for the victims of crime, while protecting the fundamental rights of those who have sought extradition.

My right hon. Friend has expressed his interest in the case of Mr Michael Lynch. It is well known that Mr Lynch is involved in civil proceedings in the UK's courts, so everybody has a duty, as he said, to be mindful of the effect their statements could have on such proceedings.

On the subject of extradition, I am afraid that, in line with the Government's long-standing policy and practice, I am unable to confirm or deny the existence of an extradition request. As with any case, if Mr Lynch were arrested for extradition, proceedings would be dealt with in accordance with due process and the relevant provisions of UK law.

I should also refer to the case of Anne Sacoolas, which my right hon. Friend mentioned. Harry Dunn's death was a terrible tragedy, and we have every sympathy with his family. We are doing everything we can to ensure that justice is done in this case. The request for Anne Sacoolas's extradition has been sent to the United States. The State Department is considering whether to take it forward, in accordance with its normal procedures. We are continuing to make representations at the highest level. In fact, the Prime Minister raised the case with Secretary of State Pompeo at the weekend.

As in every case, it is important that we follow due process and act appropriately. We must be aware that actions and statements by the UK Government, and indeed in this place, could have the effect of prejudicing a future case, giving Mrs Sacoolas grounds to argue that it was not possible for her to receive a fair trial in the UK and so avoid extradition.

Let me turn now to the general subject and title of the debate—our extradition treaty with the United States. When the coalition Government came to office in 2010, there were long-standing and deeply held concerns regarding the UK's extradition treaty with the United States. That was why an independent review was initiated to examine those and other extradition issues. The review was chaired by Sir Scott Baker, a former Lord Justice of Appeal.

The independent panel undertook an extensive examination of the issues and carefully examined evidence from a range of parties representing all shades of opinion on the subject. Importantly, and contrary to suggestions

by some, the panel also carefully assessed representations from those who had experienced extradition at first hand and the evidence of their families.

The report of the review concluded that, although there is a perception that the evidence tests used by the US and UK—probable cause and reasonable suspicion, respectively—are unbalanced, there is no significant difference between those two tests in practice. A second independent review in 2015, run by a Select Committee in the other place, came to the same conclusions. The Government accept those conclusions, and they are the basis of our policy position.

The treaty continues to produce tangible results, bringing justice to victims in both the UK and US. Since 2016, the UK has sought and procured the extradition of 10 people from the United States. Among them were individuals accused or convicted of murder, manslaughter, sexual offences against children, rape and money laundering. Since the treaty came into force, the United States has never refused to extradite somebody sought by the UK.

Of course, the treaty also provides for extradition from the UK to the United States. Individuals accused and convicted of equally serious offences have been surrendered to the US under the treaty—individuals who would otherwise be free to wander the UK's streets

at liberty. Yet the treaty is also implemented in such a way that the UK's courts are fully capable, should they see fit, to bar extradition where it would not be appropriate. As hon. Members are fully aware, the treaty does not guarantee that every person sought by the US will be extradited. Our courts are, rightly, active in ensuring that the interests of justice are defended, and have exercised their powers to bar extradition where they have found it right to do so. We are committed to continuing and maintaining our excellent level of co-operation with the United States in the ongoing fight against transnational crime. The treaty is a core part of that co-operation.

In closing, I would like once again to pass my thanks to my right hon. Friend for having secured time for these important discussions. I know he has met the Home Secretary to raise his concerns, both general and specific. As I say, we welcome his constant attention to our liberties—something to which we must all pay due care.

Question put and agreed to.

4.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 23 January 2020

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

Public Transport: North Staffordshire

1.30 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered bus services and public transport in north Staffordshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue that features heavily in my constituency correspondence and is frequently brought up by constituents on the doorstep. North Staffordshire's public transport is simply not good enough. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) and I made clear to the Minister's colleague Baroness Vere recently, bus services are too few, too slow and too infrequent. Indeed, a survey I conducted in a number of communities in my constituency resulted in many hundreds of replies saying just that. We now have communities that lack any service, with elderly and vulnerable people left cut off. The removal of evening and weekend services has also had a major impact on people's ability to get to work and get around the area.

At the same time, local train services—they are almost non-existent and are often overcrowded—have been under a slow process of decline. Little more than 100 years ago, north Staffordshire had an excellent local rail and tram network. Old maps reveal that we had one of the most comprehensive public transport networks in the country. Since then, local rail lines and local train stations have been lost. The tram network has gone altogether and the bus has risen and fallen as a replacement. It is on bus services that I will focus most of my remarks today.

I have held a debate on train services in north Staffordshire, and there are serious causes for optimism that the situation is improving, with greater capacity and better services promised on the Crewe-Derby North Staffordshire line. Under the new franchise, I am delighted that we will see longer trains, additional services at evenings and weekends and most services extending to Nottingham. I am campaigning to reopen Meir station in my constituency, and there is a definite feeling that for rail, like for Stoke-on-Trent itself, the trajectory is upwards, which will help to reduce the pressure on our congested roads.

There is little such optimism about bus services, and the picture has often just been one of looking at which service will be lost next. That is not to say that everything is terrible with buses in north Staffordshire and, as I will lay out today, it does not mean that there should not be optimism. I understand that the First Potteries No. 18 bus, which runs between Hanley and Leek bus station, now boasts plush new seats, USB charging points and wood-effect flooring. I certainly welcome that. It is long overdue and an example of best practice in the area. It would be good to see such improvements on services

that run in my constituency, too. Frankly, it would be good to see any direct service to Leek from my constituency, even just on market days.

The city of Stoke-on-Trent is made up of six historic market towns, as well as numerous other towns and communities across north Staffordshire, each of which needs public transport provision serving its town centres. Hanley, by virtue of being the largest and in the middle of the city, is regarded as the city centre and has the largest bus station, which is also served by National Express coaches in Stoke-on-Trent. While Hanley might be the city centre, it is not the only centre. We have Tunstall, Burslem, Stoke town, Fenton and Longton—all centres in their own right with high streets to support and attractions to be visited. However, Hanley is not served by rail services. Those fell under the Beeching Act, as did those to Burslem and Tunstall, with all three on the old loop line that was immortalised in the literature of Arnold Bennett, but is sadly no longer a physical reality. Fenton lost its station even before Beeching, but Stoke and Longton fortunately still have stations, as do Longport, Kidsgrove and Blythe Bridge. Blythe Bridge is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), just over the boundary from my seat, and the station is used by many of my constituents.

The six historic market towns in Stoke-on-Trent share a north Staffordshire identity that is more than merely geographical with the other historic market towns around the city, including Newcastle-under-Lyme, Kidsgrove, Biddulph, Leek, Cheadle, Stone and Stafford, which are home to many commuters to and from Stoke-on-Trent. Improving and enhancing the public transport links between all those towns is important for our economic growth. Sadly, bus use in the Potteries has declined by more than 10% in the past year alone, with more than 1 million fewer bus passenger journeys in 2018-19 than in 2017-18. The number of journeys fell from 10.4 million in 2017-18 to 9.3 million. Compounding the disappointment is the fact that bus use had at least seemed to have levelled off from the previous decline. The 10.4 million journeys reported in 2017-18 were an increase on the 10.3 million reported in 2016-17. However, at the start of the decade, more than 15 million journeys were recorded.

Since 2010, the relative cost of travelling by car has decreased considerably. Fuel duty has rightly been frozen and even for those who are entitled to free bus passes, the falling marginal cost of driving has disadvantaged bus services in relative terms. Relative price signals have often been compounded by the enhanced marginal utility of driving instead, particularly as cars have improved in personal comfort over the decade relative to buses. Once a decline in bus services begins, it all too often feeds on itself as the relative convenience of just jumping in a car becomes ever more pronounced. Against a backdrop of less frequent bus services, passenger utility is reduced even further. With the reduction in demand comes more cuts in supply.

In north Staffordshire, journey times by bus can be more than double those by car—sometimes easily treble or worse—due to the loss of direct cross-city routes. No doubt that story is familiar to Members in all parts of the country. I have raised the situation in north Staffordshire

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in particular because, as our local newspaper *The Sentinel* has highlighted, the decline in the Potteries has been much faster than in England as a whole.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I can confirm that the issue exists across the country. In my constituency of Chelmsford, failing bus services in parts of the city are having a real impact. We have seen some services go. Does he agree that we need a medium to long-term strategy for how we run sustainable buses in our urban areas, as well as in rural areas?

Jack Brereton: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. In the Transport Committee—I was a member of it before the election—we discussed the need for a national bus strategy to look into some of these issues and ensure that we are addressing the decline that we have seen across the country in many areas.

I have also secured this debate because of the positive proposals being put forward locally for significant improvements to our public transport infrastructure and services in the years ahead. We certainly cannot go on as we are. Stoke-on-Trent is on the up and our roads are increasingly congested with cars, vans and lorries that are a sign of the city's improving economic fortunes under the Conservative Government and our local Conservative-led councils across north Staffordshire, including the city council of Stoke-on-Trent. Those cars, vans and lorries are often caught in gridlock at rush hour and are reducing air quality to unacceptable levels in the worst-affected areas. The decline in public transport and the growth of congestion has seen us breach World Health Organisation limits for air quality, with our people forced to breathe hazardous fumes.

How do we turn it around? How do we avoid being a victim of our own success? How do we make buses popular again? I certainly do not want the Treasury to hit motorists in the pocket and make it too expensive to drive. I want instead to improve the quality, reliability, journey times and frequency of buses. I want passengers to rediscover the convenience of travelling by bus or, indeed, by local rail. I am determined to see Meir station reopened in my constituency between Blythe Bridge and Longton on the line to Stoke. Since the station closed, we have seen significant growth in the area in the residential population and in levels of economic activity. Meir also has high levels of deprivation, and reopening the station would open up employment opportunities for people living locally. Much is still there, including a footbridge, so a halt is already highly feasible and the new station is likely to be relatively inexpensive.

Importantly, any new station should link seamlessly with the bus network. We really need to get to grips with seamless transitions between modes of transport in north Staffordshire. Fortunately, there is a plan to achieve that at Stoke station, under the city council's bid for a transforming cities fund investment.

Securing the full investment for which we are asking would mean significant improvements at Longton station in my constituency. The old Victorian ticket hall would be uncovered from the hoardings that have blighted it for years, and the space repurposed for retail or a café, as well as ticket machines. At the moment, there is

nowhere to buy a ticket before getting on the train at Longton, although I am delighted to say that the new rail franchisee has promised to put in machines soon.

The TCF bid for Longton also involves making the platforms accessible by lift, rather than just stairs, as at present—improvements for which we have been pushing for some time, as the Minister is well aware. There would be places of shelter that would exceed the quality of the very basic provisions currently on offer, and Longton rail services would become much better connected with bus services.

Creating a much more effective public transport system across the whole of north Staffordshire is essential. Another key element of the plans is the super-bus proposal, with a vision of an attractive, efficient and affordable bus network forming the core of our local public transport. High-frequency, high-priority bus services would operate on a network of cross-city routes, creating a bus-based urban transport system. End-to-end journey times would be competitive with cars, and travel costs would be attractive.

Just as the loop line defined the interconnectivity of the Potteries towns, so the new seamless bus network and the transport partnership behind it would be a key feature of the city, helping to attract investment into housing and businesses. The proposals are such that the bus network would be as commercially viable as possible, although financially supported where absolutely necessary. In short, the Minister will be pleased to know that full advantage is being taken of the Bus Services Act 2017 to mould a local partnership, and the super-bus proposals focus on three key elements that the Department for Transport wants to see: bus priority measures, improved frequency and a capped daily fare.

I will take each element in turn. First, on bus priority measures, work has been undertaken to identify the main causes of bus journey delays on our local road network, as part of the transforming cities fund bid. Much of the road infrastructure in Stoke-on-Trent has changed little since Victorian times, with a predominantly two-lane network that lacks effective bus priority. Well over a third of delays across the network were found to be caused by severe problems in just 20 locations that would, it is estimated, cost in the region of £50 million to mitigate.

Currently, very few buses run straight through the city centre, meaning that almost all passengers face waiting times for connecting services at the city centre bus station if they want to get from one side of the city to the other. Operators have been reluctant to provide through services, because it is much harder to guarantee their reliability. That, in turn, adds to the congestion at the city centre bus station, with two short-route buses needed to complete what could have been a single-bus through journey.

The required interventions are a mix of low, medium and high-cost schemes, ranging from relatively simple traffic management measures, such as the widening of bus lanes, to more complicated redesigns of junctions to give buses priority. As an initial step, three cross-city routes are being developed, but a number of additional cross-city routes have also been identified to create a truly north Staffordshire-wide network.

The first three routes would all run through the city centre, and they would create the following links: line A, from Kids Grove in the north-west to Meir in the south-east;

line B, from Trentham in the south to Abbey Hulton in the east; and line C, from Keele via Newcastle and Stoke railway station to Biddulph or Kidsgrove, which would provide a direct link between Keele University and Staffordshire University.

The first two of those three lines involve services in my constituency, and, of the four under consideration for future cross-conurbation routes, three would serve my constituency. They include a proposed circle line between Longton, Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and a proposed service that would link the city centre and the railway station with Trentham lakes and the World of Wedgwood, which will be important for residents and visitors alike.

A review of traffic management policy will be needed to ensure the smooth flow of buses through town centres, and that can be readily delivered with sufficient will at local government level. It has already been agreed with local bus operators that cross-city services would carry co-ordinated branding and run at regular frequencies.

The second key element is improved frequency. A turn-up-and-go service requires a frequency that does not exceed 10 minutes between buses. Even that frequency would be regarded as poor in London. A 10-minute interval is considered to be one of the downsides of some parts of the Docklands Light Railway, and it certainly would not be tolerated on the London underground. Yet in Stoke-on-Trent a 10-minute frequency is exceptionally good; currently, only four bus services operate at that frequency. The frequency of other services is generally 20 or 30 minutes.

Introducing all the proposed cross-city lines with a weekday daytime frequency of at most 10 minutes would cost some £4.8 million per annum. There would be a further capital cost of £1 million for purchasing additional vehicles. It is important to note that in certain important corridors in the city, such as between the railway station and the city centre, frequencies would be much closer to five minutes than to 10 minutes, with the exception of early mornings, night-times and Sundays.

I reiterate that bus passenger journeys in the Potteries have declined by a third in the last decade. Bus operators could have done things to lessen that decline—in customer service, promotions and the onboard experience—but they are far from solely responsible for it. The operators have identified congestion as the single biggest hindrance to providing efficient public transport as an alternative to cars. That means that congestion, which should inspire people to travel by public transport to avoid traffic jams, is feeding itself by making bus journeys unfeasible and keeping people in their cars, or even forcing people to use them.

There are two main bus service operators in north Staffordshire: First Potteries and D&G. First Potteries is the bigger of the two, with D&G often filling the gaps that First Potteries has left or vacated. Very sadly indeed, a recent and welcome attempt by D&G to save the No. 12 and 12A bus services removed by First Potteries in my constituency has not worked out.

It is deeply disappointing to me and, more importantly, to the people of the Saxonfields and Parkhall areas that commercial services there are said to be impossible to provide. It is a sign of how important it is to get our bus network right, our passenger numbers up and financial sustainability sorted.

There are other, smaller operators, which run a limited number of services, mostly using buses smaller than the standard single-decker ones prevalent in the First Potteries and D&G fleets. The current operators run a multi-operator ticket scheme. One such ticket is called Smart, which is focused on Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and another is called The Knot—after the Staffordshire knot—covering the whole of Staffordshire. There is also a PlusBus scheme covering the Smart zone.

That brings me on to the third key element: the price cap. The current standard adult fare for one of the most popular tickets, the Smart day ticket, is £5.90, and the proposal is to cap it at £3 per day, resulting in a *ceteris paribus* revenue loss of £3 million per annum. However, it is, of course, expected that all things will not be equal, and the price cap, together with congestion-busting road traffic management for bus services, should result in a substantial increase in ticket sales.

Indeed, the uplift is expected to be such that the city council has warned that operators will need to be prepared for boarding delays caused by the volume of people wanting to buy the £3 day ticket. That would have been much more of a concern only a year ago, when contactless payment was still far from widespread across north Staffordshire buses. Thankfully, operators have now invested in contactless technology that speeds up the boarding process.

It is further proposed to make PlusBus tickets even more attractive than they are at present by making the PlusBus element entirely free of charge, or at least heavily discounted. That would be particularly useful for promoting seamless travel across public transport modes in the city, and it is backed up by plans to transform Stoke-on-Trent railway station into a multi-modal transport hub, with Station Road restricted to bus traffic. Current take-up of PlusBus is so low that the total cost across three years is estimated to be only £300,000.

What matters is delivery. Stoke-on-Trent City Council is already working with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council to progress proposals to improve air quality through a ministerial direction. Getting traffic moving and promoting public transport are key to the improvements that we must make. The proposals that I have run through could easily incorporate the Potteries becoming the first all-electric bus pilot. With several town centres across the city conurbation, we would provide a lesson in good practice to cities and towns alike. Liaison with bus operators is already strong, but it needs to be strengthened further, particularly for fares management across companies. A project manager and team of engineers for north Staffordshire's super-bus proposals would cost in the region of £750,000 per annum, or £2.25 million over the three years of development and implementation. It would be well worth it.

In conclusion, Stoke-on-Trent is on the up, but we need to reverse our public transport decline. The investment requested from Government would enable Stoke-on-Trent City Council to work in partnership with bus operators and neighbouring authorities across north Staffordshire to remove the barriers to bus traffic flow. It would also ensure cross-boundary co-operation and incentivise investment in a seamless north Staffordshire public transport network, taking advantage of improving rail services and encouraging further improvements by train operating companies as the shift away from cars takes hold. The current cycle of bus service decline can

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be reversed, with more frequent, more relevant services on better buses leading to increased patronage, thereby funding further improvements that will encourage still more bus use.

Let me be quite clear: what is envisioned is nothing short of a revolution for road traffic planning in Stoke-on-Trent, with a radical reordering of highway space and junction prioritisation in favour of buses. By removing the worst pinch points and installing bus priority measures, we can improve passengers' level of confidence that buses will run smoothly and to time. The measures envisaged would mean that timetables could provide for faster services running over longer distances across north Staffordshire. We would once again be able to boast one of the best and most comprehensive public transport networks, just as we did over a century ago. I hope we will receive the Department's full support, and the Minister's support today.

1.51 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): Thank you, Sir Christopher, for the opportunity to raise the concerns in my constituency. Local buses are a vital lifeline for the people of Stafford and provide a critical link for the most vulnerable individuals in our communities. I recently visited Winchester Court, in Weeping Cross in Stafford, and was dismayed to hear how local residents feel let down by the public transport system. Several elderly ladies explained their plight in great detail: they have to travel by taxi at great expense in order to get to church services, due to the lack of bus services on Sundays. It is a very simple journey for those who can drive, but those who rely on public transport face missing out on important local events. Other residents have raised with me directly the lack of frequent buses into town on busy routes, such as Cannock Road. Lack of access to the local community is leaving people at risk of suffering further problems, such as loneliness, and I am pleased that this Government are working hard to tackle those problems.

A regular and reliable bus service is very important for those of my constituents who live in villages, as those in rural locations rely on public transport to access important services, such as their GP. For example, the 841 bus service goes from Stafford to Hixon, but only on the hour. The last bus back from Stafford to the village is at 5.55 pm, so residents have told me that if they are doing a regular day's work until 6 pm or would like to attend an evening event in the town, they are unable to do so without their own car. Some of the smaller villages in my constituency, such as Seighford, do not even have a direct bus service into town. That is why the value of rural public transport should not be underestimated.

Staffordshire County Council has managed very well under difficult circumstances, and I appreciate that the council and bus services face a challenging task in deciding which bus routes provide not only the most benefit for the public as a whole, but the best value to operate. Nevertheless, we must strive to provide accessible, affordable and reliable transport for every resident of Stafford: whether young or old, urban or rural, no one should be left behind. It is simply not good enough to leave residents without suitable transport just because running a bus route is not deemed viable.

As I said in my maiden speech,

"I believe that politics is about getting stuff done".—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2020; Vol. 669, c. 805.]

I would therefore like all parties to consider a middle-of-the-road option and find common ground. There is, in my opinion, an answer to this challenge. In the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), the Moorlands Connect service, run in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council, is already up and running. Rural residents of north Staffordshire can, for a few pounds, use the service to arrange for transport that caters for everyone, from wheelchair users to commuters with bikes, allowing them to get into local towns and villages. With just one simple phone call, residents can visit local community hubs and have access to the vital services they need. That type of dial-a-ride service model is something that we should consider expanding across Staffordshire.

It is also important to recognise the vital role that public transport and, in particular, buses play in reducing the number of car journeys. It is vital that we all play our part in tackling climate change, and I back the Government's commitment that the UK will reduce all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. I am delighted that the Government are powering ahead with that world-leading agenda by hosting COP 26 in Glasgow later this year. It is therefore a tragedy that my constituents are forced to make so many journeys by car—vital journeys such as travelling to work, doing their weekly food shop or collecting medicine—because they have no other option. That is simply not good enough for rural residents in villages such as the Haywood, Derrington and Brocton. Local residents want to do their bit to tackle climate change without disrupting their daily lives.

The residents of the beautiful county town of Stafford are also concerned about congestion, which has been raised with me time and again when I have knocked on doors across the constituency. The negative impact of unnecessary car journeys on all of my constituents should not be underestimated, from the additional air pollution that is belching out of cars sitting in queues and being inhaled by all of us, to the hours lost every week by people stuck in traffic jams. Those wasted hours are not only reducing productivity across my constituency, but reducing precious family time. People have told me that they miss reading a story to their children before bed. That is time that people do not want to lose stuck in gridlock.

By re-evaluating the public transport offering in Stafford, we have the opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives. These are the sorts of changes we should be making as modern, compassionate Conservatives. Regular and reliable buses are essential services for commuters and local residents in my constituency, so I urge all parties on a local and national level to investigate and expand upon this north Staffordshire initiative, to ensure we provide bespoke and adaptable transport for all of Stafford's residents.

1.57 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton),

on having secured this important debate. He is right to say that our public transport in north Staffordshire is simply not good enough.

The market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, which I have the privilege to represent, is not part of Stoke-on-Trent. Stoke-on-Trent has a unitary council, whereas we are administered by our borough council and Staffordshire County Council. However, the market town is very much part of the wider conurbation. We have the A500—or, as the locals call it, the D road—to separate us from the city centre, but many of the same issues that my hon. Friend has raised about bus services in Stoke-on-Trent apply equally to my constituency, and us all working together to press for the improvements we need is clearly the right approach.

On top of the similar issues we face with our bus network in Newcastle, we do not have a railway station of our own. Newcastle-under-Lyme station, which was on the old line to Market Drayton, was closed in 1964 as part of the Beeching axe. I believe that makes us the third-largest town in the country without a railway station of our own. Most of my constituents therefore rely on Stoke-on-Trent station for their connections to the main line rail network, but their having to do so is itself a contributor to the congestion that has been mentioned—particularly on the roads that link Newcastle and Stoke, one of which I will speak about shortly.

A number of my constituents in the northern parts of my constituency—the areas of Bradwell, Porthill and Wolstanton—use Longport station, which my hon. Friend referred to. That station is just on the other side of the D road. If Northern Rail would consider stopping its Stoke to Manchester services at Longport station, or if West Midlands Trains would consider stopping its Crewe to Birmingham, or even its Crewe to London, services there—both already stop at a number of similarly sized stations—that would be a major boon to those constituents, and encourage more use of Longport station.

Turning to buses—the primary topic of this debate—I was struck during the general election campaign by how often the issue of poor service was raised both on the doorstep and in correspondence. A particular concern is that a number of services simply do not run at all when constituents want to use them. For example, the last bus back up to Wolstanton from the town centre leaves at 6.25 pm and the Sunday service has recently been cancelled altogether. That is not the best way to support our Government's agenda to revitalise our high streets and our town centres, and I fear it leads to a vicious circle. People stop using the buses because they are not sufficiently convenient or reliable, which in turn leads the bus companies to make further cuts to services, all of which leads to some very heavily congested roads in and around Newcastle.

I draw hon. Members' attention to one road in particular, the A53 between Stoke and Newcastle—Etruria Road, known locally as Basford Bank. That road marks another edge of my constituency, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) is responsible for the other side of the road, which takes people into Newcastle. The traffic jams on that road are legendary and the local newspaper *The Sentinel* highlighted just the other day its impact on air quality for local residents in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend and neighbour.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has been asked to address the poor air quality on Basford Bank. Neither the council nor I believe that a chargeable clean air zone is the right approach, as it will simply shift the congestion and the problem elsewhere. The right way to improve our congestion problems and our air quality issues in north Staffordshire is through improvements to the pinch points on our roads and through cleaner and better public transport.

On pinch points, I welcome the proposed Etruria Valley link road—it is in the pipeline—which will connect my constituency better with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). That link road was secured by our two councils, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, working together, along with the Department for Transport and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local enterprise partnership. That cross-authority co-operation shows that the various local authorities in the area can and will work together to deliver infrastructure investment.

Another pinch point is junction 15 of the M6, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has been campaigning in this House. Following my election, I look forward to joining him. The cramped design of the junction and nearby roundabouts contribute greatly to congestion on the A500 and on Clayton Road, my constituents' main road out from Newcastle town centre to the south. Fixing that will go some way to addressing the concerns of my residents along Northwood Lane in Westbury Park ward, who have unfortunately experienced their road being used as a rat run because of all the congestion on the other roads.

Fixing our local road network is a major part of delivering better bus services. It will enable them to run to timetable and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has said, to run through from one side of the town to the other. It will facilitate introducing the potentially all-electric super-bus network, as outlined by my hon. Friend. I particularly welcome the proposed line C that would link Keele University in the west of my constituency all the way through to Stoke-on-Trent station and Staffordshire University.

I am wholeheartedly behind the agenda outlined by my hon. Friend for a genuinely radical transformation of public transport across north Staffordshire, particularly in our conurbation. I look forward to working with him, other new colleagues and the Department to deliver on that.

2.3 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing this important and timely debate. It is wonderful to be able to have this debate with all Members from north Staffordshire on this side of the Chamber. It has to be said that that is a first.

My constituents in Staffordshire Moorlands face similar issues to those that have already been described, but we have some additional issues that are down to the rurality of the constituency. It is one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country. A third of the seat by geography is in the Peak District national park. The constituency includes the highest village in the country,

[Karen Bradley]

Flash, where the local pub, the New Inn, is 1,518 feet above sea level. There are many villages and hamlets in the constituency and only two towns, Leek and Biddulph.

Connectivity between those villages and towns is hampered by the topography of the area. As the name suggests, Staffordshire Moorlands is quite hilly. We do not have the kind of infrastructure that many of my colleagues have. There is no dual carriageway anywhere in the constituency. There is no train station; there is no main line that runs through the constituency. We have a heritage line, but we have no main train line in the constituency. Access to our towns and villages is very important and is a matter that is often raised by my constituents.

As I mentioned, a third of my seat is within the boundaries of the Peak District national park, and tourism is one of our major economic generators. We are home to Alton Towers, which is the most visited tourist attraction outside London. Everybody who goes to Alton Towers arrives by some form of road transport—a few by bus from Stoke-on-Trent station, but the vast majority by private car. The congestion on the roads at opening and closing time is a challenge for people living in the villages of Alton and Farley. I am sure many people in this room have been to Alton Towers and have wondered what exactly is happening, as they come off the dual carriageway of the A50 and go up a nice road past JCB World headquarters at Rocester, and then suddenly find themselves on tiny little windy roads going through villages. That is because Alton Towers is located in the beautiful village of Alton. It is the former home of the Earls of Shrewsbury, and it was designed by Pugin, so it is very reminiscent of where we are today. It is now a major tourist attraction that happens to be located in a very beautiful part of the country, and we therefore have some really specific concerns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) touched on the A53. Between Leek and Buxton, it is one of the most dangerous roads in the country. It is frequently in the top 10 or 20 roads in the country for fatalities and road traffic accidents.

I have described the situation with rail. Our bus network is woeful. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South talked about the new number 18 bus. It is a great thing to have a wi-fi enabled bus with USB points and everything else—a lovely green bus—but it runs only once an hour. It is not exactly frequent, and we have very few other buses in the constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke) pointed out, we have the Moorlands Connect service. It is very good to have that dial-a-ride service, but the fact is that these villages and hamlets are not served by public transport, and that is contributing to rural loneliness and social isolation. It is contributing to people not being able to go and enjoy days out at our fantastic market in Leek and our monthly artisan market in Biddulph. People simply cannot get to these places, because there are no bus routes. A frequency of one bus every 10 minutes would be a dream come true; we are lucky if we have a bus twice a day sometimes.

Bus routes are being cancelled far too often, and there is a point at which somebody has to take responsibility. I have met the bus companies and they explain to me perfectly rationally why they cannot continue running the bus services—there simply is not the money to do it.

I sit down with the county council and the city council and they explain to me perfectly rationally that the money is simply not there and they have to prioritise those services that are best value for money. The problem with those two rational bits of behaviour is that they have led to an irrational situation in which we simply do not have buses. Then we have buses, for example, that serve the village of Alton, but they are full of people going to Alton Towers, so nobody in the village of Alton can get on the bus to go where they want to get to, because it is full of tourists visiting Alton Towers.

Will the Minister ensure that some rationality is applied on bus routes overall and that we start looking at the strategy for buses in a holistic way across the whole of north Staffordshire, reflecting the fact that we have these incredibly rural areas that desperately need a way for people to get to the post office and the local market, to see their friends and live the kinds of lives that people in London would just think absolutely normal? They would think anything else unacceptable.

Reference was made to proposals for bus routes to Biddulph. I welcome those proposals, but while they are welcome, somebody needs to look at the road layout in Biddulph, because the redevelopment of the town centre when the new Sainsbury's supermarket came to town just under 10 years ago means that getting buses round corners is not proving to be all that easy. We have speed humps and other things on the high street that make it very uncomfortable for people, and I hope the Government will examine that.

I will make a final point on buses before I move on to discuss trains. It is about school transport. The Minister will know that I have had meetings with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and Baroness Vere on disability-compliant buses in school transport provision. The problem is that a court case last year found that if any child travelling on the buses was a paying passenger, the buses had to be disability compliant; otherwise, they were no longer insured. These are the public service vehicle accessibility regulations, or PSVAR. The issue has been resolved with a temporary fix to exempt buses on which no more than 20% of children are paying passengers. As I have described, a lot of people have to travel a significant distance to get to school, and they do not all qualify for free school transport, for a variety of reasons. On the buses on which the free school transport is run, children who do not qualify for free transport are charged.

The exemption is very welcome. We have had to get a further exemption for buses for faith schools, because the rules around faith schools and free school transport are more complicated, which meant that more of the children on the buses were paying. We have a further exemption for that, and I visited Boydens Coaches in my constituency last week to discuss this issue, but we need a long-term fix. Small operators such as Boydens simply cannot afford to buy a brand new disability-compliant bus. It does not fit with their business model; they need to buy second-hand coaches. They have very smart and nice coaches, but there are no second-hand disability-compliant coaches on the market at the moment. The large coach firms simply did not invest in them at the time they needed to, and I would be very happy to sit down with the Minister and explain the detail of it. It is complicated, but we need a long-term fix so that bus operators can continue in business.

I have said that we do not have a main railway line running through Staffordshire Moorlands, but we do have a line. It was closed during the Beeching era, but it still exists, and many attempts have been made to try to reopen the line. There are a few problems with it. The station in Leek is now a supermarket, so there would need to be investment in a new station. The line unfortunately ends at Longton and does not go on to the main station at Stoke. This is one of the issues facing a city made up of six towns: sometimes the connectivity between those six towns has not been all that good. The line that was closed in the '60s did not require, at that point, connectivity to the west coast main line, but reinstating a line that did not have connectivity to the west coast main line would be nonsensical. Investment, and probably another platform at Stoke station, would be needed to get a connection and allow the line to work. The line continues from Leek into the countryside and goes as far as Alton, so it could service Alton Towers if it were reinstated.

I want to express a new idea. Instead of thinking, "Well, we have a line. Let's put some trains on it," why do we not think about a different form of rail—maybe light rail, or even a tram service? If we could get a quieter electric tram service that operated perhaps as far as Alton Towers, but definitely between Leek and Stoke-on-Trent, it would benefit many of my colleagues' constituencies. My constituency borders Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South and Stoke-on-Trent Central, all of which would benefit from a tram line. I wonder whether we north Staffordshire MPs could put on our thinking caps and work out what a light rail service might look like. We have all seen what a difference the Metrolink has made to Manchester.

Aaron Bell: My right hon. Friend mentioned that her constituency borders all three Stoke-on-Trent constituencies, as does Newcastle-under-Lyme. The tram line could run to Keele University on the same line that was axed in the Beeching era, and then we would have connectivity all the way through from her constituency to mine.

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. With vision, we could make something really exciting happen for the whole of Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire: we could see connectivity. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is another constituency neighbour of mine and was unable to attend the debate, but he is also very keen for work to be done to address the bus routes. I am sure we could benefit his constituency, too, with some form of electric tram that is clean and quiet and delivers the connectivity that my constituents would greatly value.

I will finish with two more points on transport that are more general to the area. The first is about HS2, which is not really an issue in my constituency because, as I have said, it is hilly, as the name "Moorlands" suggests. It also means that people do not tend to want to build railway lines through it. However, we need to ensure that connectivity to the west coast main line, Stoke-on-Trent and Macclesfield station is maintained. We benefit from having two trains an hour from Stoke to London Euston, and one train an hour from Macclesfield. Those are really important services that we need to ensure we keep. It takes an hour and 24 minutes from Stoke-on-Trent station to London Euston, although

it may take my constituents another 40 or 50 minutes to get home from Stoke-on-Trent station, because there is no bus service that runs from Stoke-on-Trent station to anywhere other than Hanley bus station, and then they have to change—that is another story. In any work that is done on HS2, I hope we can ensure that connectivity to Stoke-on-Trent is maintained.

My final point is on the M6, which is our nearest motorway, and on the pinch points at junction 15 that my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) spoke about. The stretch between junctions 15 and 16 is an issue that needs to be examined. If anybody listens to any travel report at any time of the day, they will almost certainly hear that there are problems on the M6 in Staffordshire around junctions 15 and 16. We cannot widen the motorway at that point, because there are issues with the topography of the area. We cannot make it a smart motorway, because the hard shoulder is not wide enough. When we have smart motorways south from junction 15 and potentially north from junction 16, the stretch between 15 and 16 will just be worse. I ask the Minister to look carefully at what could be done to alleviate the problems, which would benefit all of us in north Staffordshire.

2.17 pm

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Thank you, Sir Christopher, for chairing the debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute, and I congratulate my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), on securing it. There is great consensus among all the north Staffordshire and Stafford MPs about some of the issues and how we need to address them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South ably put it, Stoke-on-Trent is today too car-centric and has too few rail and bus services, no trams and scant provision for cycling. Pedestrians, and town centres themselves, are too often treated as an inconvenience to traffic flow across the city. Places that would once have been market squares or bustling high streets now act instead as mere thoroughfares for vehicular traffic trying to get somewhere else. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South pointed out, we are one city but we are made up of six distinct historic market towns.

I have the great honour to represent Stoke town and Hanley, including the main railway station for the city in Stoke and the main bus and coach station for the city in Hanley. Although the city has taken welcome strides to regenerate Hanley as the city centre, my strong opinion is that it has failed for too many years to make the most of either Stoke town or the Trent, both of which are very close to, and should be an easy walk from, the railway station. I know from talking to residents in Stoke town, and its surrounding suburbs of Penkhull, Boothen, Oak Hill, Trent Vale, Hartshill and Basford, that they have been feeling left out. Well, their voices will be heard through me. It is absolutely essential to go ahead with the works to improve the onward journey to Hanley from the east side main exit of Stoke station. However, the west side exit needs equal attention to connect it properly to Stoke town, thereby giving pedestrians the most direct journey possible via Elenora Street, through the exciting development at Spode Works, on to the heritage high street of Church Street and London Road.

[Jo Gideon]

Stoke town is separated from Stoke-on-Trent railway station by eight lanes of traffic and a canal, and pedestrian access is a long and unattractive walk round. That barrier must be bridged—literally—if the strategic aim of increasing footfall in Stoke town is to be realised in full. A pedestrian and cycle bridge needs to be built from the station's west side entrance, across the road and canal to the side of Stoke town that has suffered most from being cut off from the station. I want to see it as an integral part of the city council's otherwise excellent transforming cities fund bid, which currently indicates minor improvements to the existing pedestrian route. That means that it will still take more than 10 minutes to walk from Stoke railway station to Stoke town centre.

There are concerns about the cost, of course, but if the Minister would come to Stoke and see how and where a new bridge would fit into the wider regeneration of the west side of Stoke station, she would see how important such a bridge was to making every penny of the scheme work. I note that a similar bridge in Barnsley, if a little less ambitious, is costed at between £5 million and £6 million. Such a bridge in Stoke would have a clear view down Elenora Street towards the old Spode Works, which is being transformed into an amazing, accessible cultural destination, with its museum, hotel, café and workshops. It would be deeply disappointing if, after so much had been invested in Stoke station, it still took the people of Stoke more than 10 minutes to walk to it, as planned. To finance a bridge, there may be room for savings from the current transforming cities fund bid. Local concerns have been raised about the proposed canopy, for example, which would look a bit like the roof of Portcullis House. I would greatly value a discussion with the Department about that.

Fundamentally, Stoke town suffers from the fact that its main square, Campbell Place, was reduced to a thoroughfare of four-lane traffic some years ago. Viable public transport alternatives to the car, including buses, are absolutely vital if we are to reverse the 1960s and '70s road traffic planning, which has done nothing to help the vibrancy of the town as a place to enjoy, linger and spend time.

The River Trent runs from the north of my constituency to the south, and for most of its length one would not know it was there, yet it could be one of the most pleasant pedestrian routes through the city. The Thames path was once a pipe dream, but its reality shows that it was right to dream big. Equally, there is more to be made of the Trent and Mersey Canal, and branches of it, to provide handy walking and cycling routes through the city. Access could be improved in various parts of the city, and more could be done to separate pedestrians and cyclists at certain pinch points, particularly around bridges. We need to see buses stop in convenient places for joining canal and river paths.

I deliberately say that we need to see buses stop, not that we need to see bus stops. On Leek Road in my constituency, there are already bus stops that could serve the Trent Mill nature park along the River Trent at Joiners Square, but they are no longer in service. Ironically, unlike too many of the bus stops in Stoke-on-Trent, those unused bus stops have shelters. Shelters are very important to bus users, particularly when the clouds burst and we get a dose of the rain that keeps Stoke-on-Trent a green and pleasant city. We need more of them.

In order that more people enjoy the greenery of Hanley Park, I fully support the council's bid to improve the frequency and reliability of connections to Hanley from Stoke-on-Trent station via College Road, which runs alongside Hanley Park and affords great views of it.

I am really excited by the prospect of being a super-bus city. My constituents are the biggest users of buses in the city, and one third of households in Stoke-on-Trent central do not own a car. We need something radical such as the super-bus scheme to remind people how useful and relevant bus services can be in the transport mix. We should make them attractive for the people who forgo an alternative mode, and sustainable for the people who have no choice but to rely on them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South said, Hanley used to be served by Etruria station, which was completely demolished and excavated beyond trace under the previous Labour Government, even though private rail companies were willing to run trains there. It was supposedly to speed up services down the west coast main line. Etruria served both Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme. It certainly needed clearer pedestrian routes to the city centre, but it has done no good locally for it not to be there at all. Any funding for a study into restoring the station and improving its strategic function in a seamless public transport system would be very welcome indeed.

I accept that much of the lost North Staffordshire Railway network—the Knotty, as it was known—is unlikely ever to be brought back into service. The old line to Newcastle, for example, has been built on. The most likely contender to reopen is the line from Stoke-on-Trent to Leek via Fenton Manor. In my constituency, it could serve stations at some combination of Joiners Square, Bucknall Park, Abbey Hulton and, at somewhere on the boundary with Stoke-on-Trent north, Birches Head Academy. Going north, it would have stations in Stoke-on-Trent north and Staffordshire Moorlands that a good number of my constituents would be able to walk to: Milton and Stockton Brook. The line would end at Leek, where it would meet parts of the North Staffs Railway that are preserved as a heritage railway through the Moorlands countryside. My right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) has long supported the scheme, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) favours it too. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has raised it in a previous debate on train services in north Staffordshire, which he referred to earlier.

Having being closed to passenger traffic many decades ago, the line continued to serve as a mineral line until relatively recently. It is mostly overgrown with trees, but the track bed is still there and the route has not been built on, although I understand that there is a legal battle over whether it is a public right of way for walking at the Moorlands end. I will be grateful if the Minister has any update on the contact that the Department has had to find out what the current intentions are on that.

If the Minister is able to accept an invitation to visit the city, I am sure that, between us, we could put together quite a tour of the relevant sites across Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire. It would be good to highlight the huge potential for honing the plans in the

transforming cities fund bid, and achieving a great deal with the money we are asking for. By getting it right locally, we will have our greatest economic impact nationally.

2.28 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I draw colleagues' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I want to start by reflecting on some of the points made by Members from Staffordshire, and I will then address the wider national picture with regard to transport, and discuss some potential policy solutions to the problems we all face. I found myself nodding in agreement with the points made by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). I represent an urban seat with many of the same problems, and I am aware of the same issues across the country. Our more rural colleagues suffer different sorts of transport problems, but we often face shared issues.

I want to highlight some points and praise Stoke City Council and the wider thrust of the initiatives that the hon. Gentleman describes. From the Opposition's perspective, many medium to small-sized cities, and indeed great cities, face the challenge of growing congestion. The Victorian infrastructure means that it is impossible to extend the road network. Indeed, why would we want to, given the potential air pollution and congestion problems? Many towns and cities have problems with buses. I recognise that Stoke and the rural area nearby has particular problems, about which the hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently.

Rail connectivity needs to be improved across the country. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need to improve the network's main arteries and branch lines, and to move the emphasis away from motorways and car-dependent development. That is a huge problem across much of England, particularly in densely populated counties such as those in the midlands and central southern England, where I come from.

I commend the desire of the hon. Gentleman's local council to reduce bus fares and to provide a more rational system via enhanced partnerships. I gently suggest that he and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) talk with colleagues in other urban areas, particularly Reading and Nottingham, which still have municipal bus companies—it is a national model with huge benefits. A number of other authorities follow the model, and I should add that some of them are under the control of political parties other than the Labour party. Low-cost tickets, greater frequency and bus-priority measures are all wise and sensible choices that, when implemented on a bigger scale, will hugely benefit residents across the country.

The right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) and the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) articulated the rural issues very well. Market towns and rural areas suffer from a lack of connectivity. I can quite imagine, having been to Alton Towers and the Peak District—it was very enjoyable and absolutely beautiful—the problems faced by residents in those parts of Staffordshire given the lack of connectivity. Local tourism is welcome, but it places pressure on local services, which makes it harder for local people to get to where they need to go.

Conservative Members have made some excellent points. I have great sympathy with the situation in Stoke and Staffordshire. My Labour party colleagues and I understand the pressures in both urban and rural areas around the country, and wish ardently to see the problem addressed.

Now that the Government have been re-elected, I suggest to the Minister that more attention ought to be paid to the wider national problem. Hon. Members are absolutely right to discuss the needs of Stoke and the need for more intervention in the market to provide a better quality service for residents. They are quite right to propose improvements in local bus and rail travel as part of a wider series of improvements, such as the bridge across the main road in Stoke, mentioned by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central. Similar investments in other parts of the country have brought enormous benefits to those communities. In my town of Reading, a new pedestrian and cycling bridge over the River Thames has dramatically enhanced access to our town centre, produced huge benefits in public health and got vehicles off very busy roads.

I ask the Minister to look at what the example of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent tells us about the need for changes to national policy. As with other evidence from around the UK, it clearly suggests the need for a rethink and a recalibration of our transport spending. At the moment, we live in one of the most car-dependent countries in the western world, yet we live on a very congested island. As has been mentioned, our physical infrastructure is limited, and none of us would want to see our beautiful British countryside built over with more road. We need to be careful in how we use our scarce national resources and land.

I absolutely appreciate the good point made about the widening of the M6. There are real limits to motorway widening and changes to the road network for greater efficiency. A greater emphasis on other modes of transport is needed, particularly given the common sense point that one bus could take 30 cars off the road, while one train could take hundreds off the road. Then, drivers who really need to get from A to B by car—perhaps they have a delivery business or must take an unusual route—could use the road space more effectively. That would also produce the huge benefit of tackling pollution.

We need to reshape our policy priorities and place less emphasis on road travel by car and more emphasis on public transport. The Minister is a very thoughtful member of the Government—as is her colleague, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), for whom she is standing in—and is only too familiar with the issue of bus travel because we have often discussed it in the past. I urge her to push for more emphasis on buses, which, as has been said, are the main means of commuting—far more than trains—for most people. Buses provide services to many people without cars and to older people and children who may not have access to the family car.

I hope there will be a wider rethink and a move away from car-dependent development, car-based policy and large investment in new A-roads—which take cars from one congested city centre, such as Stoke, to another and do not solve our problems—and towards a greater emphasis on rail and buses. I will outline further some possible policy solutions that may help.

[*Matt Rodda*]

Members from Staffordshire are absolutely right to highlight local problems, but they are part of a wider national picture caused by the decline of bus services across the UK. In England, there has been a 45% cut in bus services since 2010 because of the reduction in subsidies for some services. The right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands articulated in particular the severe problem in rural areas, which the Government must consider. Suburban areas are also part of the national picture. In my constituency, routes were affected by cuts to subsidies, and I have had to campaign for that subsidy to be maintained as local authorities face great austerity.

The huge rise in the cost of bus travel is also significant, given that car travel has effectively become cheaper because of the reduction in fuel tax. Arguably, central Government are making the wrong choices. As Government Members opposite articulated so well, the net effect of that policy is to create more traffic in congested centres and nearby market towns and to make it harder for people in rural areas to get to those towns. I hope there will be a rethink on the emphasis placed on car travel as opposed to buses.

We should also consider the current challenges for rail travellers. Travel by rail has become more difficult for many. The cost has risen by about 30% in the past few years and there have been notable problems on parts of the network. I fully understand that the Minister is not responsible for that part of the transport network, but I am sure that she and hon. Members will remember the considerable problems with Northern Rail. In my part of the country, the huge disruption on South Western Railway and other services has caused a great deal of difficulty for many residents. As the Government bed in, I hope they will also look at the relative lack of emphasis placed on rail travel, which, as other hon. Members have articulated so well, takes pressure of roads and allows those who have to drive to do so.

As with bus travel, another part of the solution is to take services back into public ownership. It is interesting that the Minister is smiling rather wryly, because the Department may be about to announce renationalisation programmes for two particular companies whose franchises have failed. The whole system is in crisis and, as the Minister knows only too well, that is very expensive. Bringing those franchises back into public ownership could result in considerable savings for the taxpayer. We estimate that about £1 billion would be saved by bringing all rail services back into public ownership. Nevertheless, bringing back even one or two could result in money that could be better used in other ways on the network.

I will highlight potential policy change for bus travel. Government Members have wisely pointed out the benefit of bus travel as a more effective means for residents to get around, and for rural residents to get into, city centres. I urge the Minister to consider giving all local authorities the power to franchise. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South rightly talked about the enhanced partnership scheme that he and his local authority are trying to develop. If he, as a thoughtful Member of Parliament, really wants to achieve the desired service levels with sensitivity to local needs, I urge him to go further and look at the model of franchising. At present, that may only be used in cities with a Mayor. The Minister is nodding thoughtfully. I hope that she and

her colleagues will consider allowing all local authorities to franchise bus services. Stoke residents clearly wish to go in the direction of better, more integrated services that are linked to their local needs. Their local authority wants that, too, so perhaps that is how to improve the situation.

As part of the mix, I strongly recommend the municipal model. Towns and cities with municipal bus services still have a far greater level of bus patronage. My home town of Reading—sadly, we are a borough, not a city, but we have a conurbation of 250,000 people, which is not so dissimilar to large cities in the midlands—has a far greater level of bus patronage than other comparable towns and cities. The same is true of Nottingham. We even have night buses in Reading, and the services on one route run every seven minutes. That can happen because the company, though an independent body, is council-owned. It makes a small profit, and its approach is based on the service needs of the local community.

There is a lot to be said for the municipal approach, and I hope that the Minister, who is becoming only too aware of bus services around the country, will look again at it now that she has been brought back into Government. In particular, she should consider the most successful firms and how they have developed and are of benefit to their communities and their wider rural hinterland. In my own area, Reading Buses runs services as far as London in one direction, and to Henley-on-Thames, Newbury and various other towns in the county. Equally, in Nottingham the service has a wide footprint, and many rural residents beyond the city benefit. The municipal model is worth considering.

I also strongly recommend more capital investment in bus priority measures. I can well believe the issues in Stoke city centre described by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South. That is a common problem around the country. A lot of evidence shows that, where services have been successful, such measures have been part of the picture.

I will make one more point about rail. I strongly appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern to restore branch lines in the Stoke area, but it is worth considering the emphasis on both branch and mainline services. There has been a great deal of discussion and debate about High Speed 2, but it remains a clearly thought-through programme which, despite some management challenges and cost issues, could stimulate huge economic regeneration for cities around the country, in particular in the midlands and the north.

I thank the Minister for listening patiently to my various points about bus services. I appreciate Members' desire to improve services in their area, and I urge Ministers to rethink Government policy.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, in this incredibly collegiate and productive debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) for securing it and giving me the opportunity to provide some answers that will please both Government and Opposition Members.

In this Chamber, we are all agreed that bus services matter. They are the best way for people to travel, being the cleanest and the cheapest, whether for getting to

work or for accessing social services. We are all agreed that buses are our most vital form of public transport system. Fundamentally, too, buses tackle a number of environmental issues on which we are now leading.

We must not forget that 4 billion bus journeys already take place each year. I am no longer the Minister with responsibility for buses—I am standing in for that wonderful Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman)—but I am still the accessibility Minister, and people with accessibility issues will always travel on buses first and foremost. We need to ensure that we continue to provide the service. We understand the importance of bus services, not only across the country but obviously in Staffordshire. It is wonderful to speak in a debate where everyone is agreed on how we need to go forward, because that makes solutions a lot simpler for Government to provide.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South raised a couple of issues. The introduction of The Knot is a good example of how services can become far more accessible and sexy, especially encouraging younger people to use buses, because it answers some of their problems. The Knot is a multi-operator ticket giving people the flexibility to use any bus, anytime and anywhere across Staffordshire. It sits alongside the Smart multi-operator ticket, which allows passengers to travel on buses provided by different operators across North Staffordshire with just one ticket. Fundamentally, too, there is contactless payment. Busy people and younger customers especially want to ensure that journeys are as easy as possible, and contactless payment is more efficient. National Express West Midlands says that journeys would be speeded up by 10% were people able to use the card in their pocket.

When I appeared before the Select Committee on Transport a while ago, my hon. Friend was robust in challenging me on bus strategy. However, he and I wanted the same thing, and we have got it—we have a win here. First, we have had the announcement of an ambitious and innovative £220 million bus package and, secondly, we are putting together the first ever national bus strategy, which will revolutionise bus services across England.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) will see that we now have a rationale. She can go back to her council and her councillors to say that we now have a path forward with that £220 million and a national bus strategy, which will review all existing funding. Those packages will transform our bus services, especially looking at on-demand services, which are key in rural areas and something that I have always campaigned for as the MP for a rural constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke) also spoke passionately about how we ensure that services fit rural areas with fewer passengers but are just as important.

What everyone has been asking about today of course is the super-bus network. That will decrease fares and develop a comprehensive network of bus priority measures to improve the frequency of buses. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell)—already a powerful champion on behalf of his constituents—nailed his colours to the mast. No doubt he will campaign for public transport in his constituency.

Furthermore, £50 million has already been committed for Britain's first all-electric bus town—everyone has spoken passionately about the environment here—and

an extra £30 million has been committed to bus funding to be paid directly to local authorities to improve existing bus services or restore lost ones. My right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands expressed concerns about limited funding, so I hope that she will be able to go back and mention that too. Expressions of interest have been sought for demand-responsive transport, the all-electric bus town and the super-bus pilot.

Access to public transport is incredibly important for people in rural areas, as I mentioned, so we must not forget the £250 million paid directly for bus services in England via the bus service operators' grant, which helps local authorities to ensure that the buses are running. Also, £43 million of the bus service operators' grant is paid directly to local authorities to enable them to fund services that might not provide a financial gain for bus companies. There are a few options there. We have heard that the service is mixed, and that passengers are not getting what they want, which is why MPs are present to champion their constituents. To improve existing bus services, we have that extra £30 million for local authorities and we must not forget the £1 billion spent on concessionary bus passes every year.

What will help most Members in the Chamber is a national bus strategy. It is key that the bus strategy both adopts new technology and promotes cleaner air quality, fitting into our decarbonisation strategy. Since 2010, we have set aside more than £250 million to replace and upgrade buses, meaning that we now have more than 7,000 cleaner and better buses on our roads. Most recently, the electric bus launched at Birmingham airport is incredibly quiet and has USB portals. However, that is not as good as the No. 18 bus, which even has wood-effect flooring—I hope to be able to take a journey on that bus in future.

We can go even further. Decarbonisation and tackling congestion were mentioned by both my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme. We must drive down congestion to bring greater economic benefits to the villages, towns and cities that they represent. We hope to lead the world, in particular in driving down emissions and by having the first ever all-electric bus town or city, to which we have already made a financial commitment. When we host the 2020 United Nations climate change conference in Glasgow, we can use that prime opportunity to talk about how public transport drives our decarbonisation agenda.

Something that is incredibly important for rural transport is demand-responsive transport, which is about journeys that are taken less frequently and might not be economically viable but are just as vital, especially for rural constituencies. This was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford in particular. We are ensuring that funding is available for such transport, so that those services can run for the first few years when they may not be so economical. That is why we have allocated £20 million to demand-responsive transport. I have campaigned for it in my constituency, so if any Member present in the Chamber wishes to talk through how to champion it with their local authority, I am more than happy to do so.

I was asked to be revolutionary, and I hope that I can be towards the end of my speech, but we must remember that we already have a revolutionary Act in place. The Bus Services Act 2017 is crucial in driving down the powers and choices to a local authority. A number of

[*Ms Nusrat Ghani*]

options are already available. The shadow Minister talked about franchising, but there are enhanced partnership options, which are just as valuable in ensuring that buses operate where passengers want them.

On effective partnerships, I was delighted to hear that north Staffordshire has taken full advantage of the Bus Services Act to form a local partnership, but legislation alone is not enough. We need good partnerships between local authorities, parliamentarians and bus operators. It is good to note that every Member is keen to work with other Members, local authorities and bus companies to make that happen. We must not forget the role of bus companies: they must be just as collegiate, open and transparent with local authorities, and provide services in the not-so-profitable areas just as much as in the profitable areas.

Open data is also quite revolutionary. Hon. Members may be surprised to hear that that is not the way the bus services have been run previously, but they need to adopt new technology to ensure that people can jump on a bus without a second thought, and to attract newer, younger passengers, too. Through the bus open data powers in the Act we will go further than before, to open up both routes and timetables early this year and to look at fares data by next year.

Members are keen to ensure that they are doing their bit to secure funding from the transforming cities fund. The Government are investing £2.5 billion to support the development and creation of new and innovative public transport schemes, which will improve journeys and tackle congestion in some of England's largest cities. Stoke-on-Trent has been shortlisted for an upgrade to its public transport links. The speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) was spot on; she put forward a fantastic case. At the Department we welcome the business case put forward by Stoke-on-Trent and supported by hon. Members. It will improve connectivity across the region. I am afraid I cannot say anything more right now, but an announcement on the outcome of the process will be announced in the next few months. The strength of this debate will no doubt be recognised when that decision is made.

I was pleased to hear from my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands about alternative forms of mass mobilisation of transport with a low impact that goes beyond buses and trains. I was very keen to hear her proposal to set up a session with fellow Members. I have no doubt that the Department will be keen to hear what they wish to propose, and how that can be taken forward.

Just before I conclude, I want to respond to a few comments made by Members. My right hon. Friend raised the public sector borrowing requirement for school buses, which is something that comes across my desk. Over 98% of buses are fully compliant. I completely understand my right hon. Friend's anxiety about working with smaller schools and faith schools, but they have had many years of lead time to try to get that right. The temporary exemptions run to the end of July 2020, providing even more time for the sector to become compliant. We must remember that it does not apply if the vehicles have fewer than 22 seats. If my right hon. Friend wishes to meet me or my Department once again—she does so frequently—we can try to explain

that a little more. I hope that the new funding that I announce will give her the confidence to go back to her local authority and tell them that new money is on the way. The next time I am at Alton Towers I will pay a bit more attention to the road and the impact that driving with my family has on the village.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, who is a great champion for his constituency already, talked about rail, road and buses. The road is a little beyond my remit, but the Department has heard the comments about the road improvements on the A53. It is for the local authority to bring forward proposals. If it requires any support to put the process in place, the Department or I am more than happy to show my hon. Friend, who is a new Member, the ropes.

I must reflect on the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, who spoke passionately about the environment. I hope she can relay back to her constituents our commitment to decarbonisation. She mentioned access to Sunday services, the Cannock Road service and loneliness. The bus strategy is embedded into the Government's loneliness strategy, which I have previously represented across Whitehall Departments. I hope that demand-responsive transport will provide some succour for her constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central made a passionate speech about the funds available. Let us hope that there will be positive news. I am not the Minister responsible, but I know that the Minister responsible is very keen to ensure that we are aware of the situation on the ground. I will ensure that the open invitation is relayed to him, and I hope that a visit will be down the line.

I do not know what to say to the shadow Minister, because what he asks for we are delivering. There is over £220 million and a new bus strategy, so maybe a crack of a smile would not go amiss.

Matt Rodda: I am grateful to the Minister for her pleasant response. I urge her to take heed of the requests to give further powers to local authorities. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) may be disappointed by the outcome of an enhanced partnership, which has not led to improvements elsewhere in the country.

Ms Ghani: There is always a fly in the ointment. Enhanced partnerships are a positive way forward, but if there is one thing to remind Members and the shadow Minister, it is that services cannot be left to a local authority or the bus operating companies. There must be a collective effort. It was more than obvious from support in the debate that that will take place. I hope that hon. Members will agree that we are moving in the right direction. We are ensuring that public transport is key. The Government are committed to levelling up, making sure that there is equal access to services and employment. That requires good public buses at the heart of all transport, local government and town and cities planning. I look forward to working with hon. Members.

2.56 pm

Jack Brereton: I thank the Minister for her fantastic support for improvements in bus and public transport services across north Staffordshire. I thank all my fellow

Staffordshire colleagues for their support in the debate. It is fantastic to hear their perspectives on bus services in their constituencies.

Karen Bradley: I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I just wanted to make the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has been able to make it for the end of the debate. Although he cannot contribute, he is here and is very keen to show his support for my hon. Friend's debate.

Jack Brereton: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) supporting the debate.

We have heard some valuable contributions, right the way through from rural issues to the challenges we are facing in our urban areas in the city of Stoke-on-Trent and how we can improve them. We are all united across Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire on how we can improve those issues. We want better bus services and public transport in the area, and there is a lot we can do by working with the Department. I am delighted that the Minister is committed to working closely with us to address those issues.

It is essential that we deliver on the transforming cities fund, making sure that we have the full ask of that, so we can deliver on the improvements we need as well as on the super-bus proposals. I think those issues would go a massive way to addressing the challenges we are facing with bus services and public transport in north Staffordshire.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered bus services and public transport in north Staffordshire.

Assisted Dying Law

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the law on assisted dying.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I wanted specifically to examine the law on assisted dying as it stands, given that it affects not just those who want to have some control over the manner of their death, but those closest to them. The current law in this country simply is not working. I hope that we can begin to address today the effect of that law on terminally ill people and their loved ones, and on public servants such as doctors, health and social care professionals, police and coroners. They are all, in different ways, profoundly affected by our laws on assisted dying. I am well aware that this issue is hugely evocative, can involve issues of faith and puts the medical profession in the most difficult of positions. It is also, of course, the most personal, intimate and ultimate of decisions.

Like many people—possibly many people in the Chamber—I have been on a journey over this issue. I am not sure when it began, but I know it started with the point that it was not up to me. I did not know whether I would ever be in the position to have to make the decision, but I knew I had no right to interfere with anyone else. I suppose I could have been described then as a passive supporter, but over the years there have been several landmarks on my journey, to the point that I now see it as incumbent on me—on all of us, particularly all of us here—to ensure that our law is the best and most supportive law we can have, and that it puts the interests, needs and wishes of individuals first.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to be very careful to ensure that old and sick people do not feel a pressure to end their lives, perhaps from their children, who might want to inherit their assets and to whom they may feel they are being a burden?

Christine Jardine: I fully appreciate that point. That is why I am so concerned that we should have a very narrow and precise definition if we change the law. However, it has been ascertained that a third of patients who request assisted dying and meet the eligibility criteria in Oregon, for example, do not actually take the life-ending medication. They request it as an insurance policy—not because they feel they are being a burden, but because they want to have the opportunity to make the choice themselves.

As I said, there have been several landmarks on my journey to this point. The final one was just a few weeks ago, when I was chatting to a friend. We were talking about nothing in particular, but we decided that when people say, “You only live once,” they are not quite right; actually, you can have many lives. I certainly have, and I am sure many other hon. Members have. I been a journalist, a mother, a university lecturer and a politician, and I hope one day to be retired, but I will only have one death. When my time comes, I would like it to be the

[Christine Jardine]

easiest possible for me and my family, and I would like to be able to choose for it to come at the end of a happy day.

The first step on my journey was, as I am sure it was for many other people, watching someone I loved go through an experience far from that: a long, painful death, which I still wonder about now, more than a decade later. Could it somehow have been eased? It took me years to come to terms with the emotional conflict between the despair over losing my mother and the relief I felt that she was no longer going through the pain of having her lungs destroyed a little bit every day. I have to be honest: I do not know whether she would have wanted the choice of how or when to end her life. Frankly, there would have been no point even asking, since it is not a choice allowed by the current law here, with its blanket ban, and most people cannot afford the fees to travel to Switzerland or elsewhere.

That is not in any way to criticise the standard of care in our hospitals or hospices in this country. Both provide a marvellous service.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that palliative care needs to be better funded? No matter the excellent care that is provided in hospices, it is funded nowhere near well enough. Many areas do not have hospices, and we need to ensure that they are fully funded to meet the need. That would greatly assist people as they face the end of their life.

Christine Jardine: I absolutely agree. I have also experienced final moments with a loved one who was being cared for in a hospice. They were incredibly well looked after. The whole family was looked after and supported. Changing the law should not under any circumstances mean depriving anyone of the option of palliative care. Indeed, palliative care is as important as a choice at the end of life. Again, it should be available to everyone, and we should support it in any way we can.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): What is the hon. Lady's response to the evidence that, in countries where assisted suicide has been made legal, investment in palliative care has fallen?

Christine Jardine: I thank the hon. Lady for that point. That is something we would have to be aware of, but I believe it is up to us to address it. It is up to the lawmakers and the Government in this country to ensure that we increase our investment in palliative care as a choice. There is that word again: choice. Free will—the ability to choose.

Seven years ago, in another landmark, my belief in that was firmed up by a conversation following a newspaper article I had written. At the time, the late, irrepressible Margo MacDonald was guiding her second, ultimately unsuccessful bid to make assisted dying legal in Scotland through the Parliament at Holyrood. I originally met Margo while I was a young journalist, and her amazing personality and commitment had a huge impact on me. That did not have an impact on my politics, of course—we had very different views—but I recognised in her someone who lived their beliefs and their politics. I had spoken to her while I was writing the piece, and I visited her office afterwards. On this issue more than any other, she had a

profound effect on me. It was several years ago now, but that conversation has stayed with me and made me determined to protect the right of the individual—my right; your right—to choose to have the dignity that we want in our final moments. Why should any of us, knowing that we are not going to survive, be forced to endure unnecessary pain?

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech. I am pleased that she has not brought any legislation before us, because I found this issue very difficult when we last faced it, in 2015. I actively abstained by voting in both Lobbies, and I was told off by the then Speaker for doing so. I get her point that saying goodbye in an airport is not the best thing for people who choose to go to Switzerland, but at the same time I worry about safeguards. This could be exploited as a shortcut if NHS funds are not as we want. Does she agree, at least, that more research is needed? Nothing seems to have happened in Parliament since 2015. We need more evidence before we decide on this.

Christine Jardine: I take the hon. Lady's point. That is the purpose of this debate. It is intended to get the ball rolling, look for the evidence, find out what people are afraid of, and consider the safeguards we need and how the law can be improved. We are not going to do that overnight. We certainly are not going to do it today, and I will not suggest any changes today, other than to say that we should look for the evidence and at what people want from the law.

Since this debate was publicised, I have been contacted—I am sure we all have—by a number of constituents. In some cases, they called for caution; in others, they expressed their opposition. However, in very many more, they expressed support. One in particular that I found moving came from a woman who was a palliative care nurse for more than 20 years, and who during that time witnessed numerous examples of the current assisted dying law failing dying people. One example she gave was of a gentleman with motor neurone disease who had a particularly undignified final few months of life. He was cared for at home at first before moving into a hospice, where he clearly expressed the wish that he wanted help to die. The staff had to explain to him and go over the reasons why they could not do that; it simply was not possible.

This gentleman's motor neurone disease had affected him in such a way that his legs were still working, but he was not able to use the top half of his body. One day, he tried to throw himself down the stairs as a way of ending his life. Despite him fully admitting that he was trying to end his life, some of the staff understandably claimed that he had probably fallen, and that it was an accident. Perhaps they did not want to admit or acknowledge what he had tried to do, because of the position in which the law put everyone, but that gentleman did not get to express his distress about the way he would die or have it addressed as he wanted. I understand he lived for another two months or so before he died in a hospice. I am grateful to my constituent for sharing that story because it highlights the invidious position in which the current law puts everyone.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that that story highlights a key issue that we are all wrestling with: the capacity to

consent? My hon. Friend has made the point clearly that this has to be a choice, and that safeguards must be in place to ensure a person has the capacity to make that choice.

Christine Jardine: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Capacity is important. As I have already said, it is not for me to say what the law should be; I simply ask that we address it, and that we take such points into account. I ask that we look at mental capability to make the decision, at when the decision might be made and at safeguards.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and for securing this important debate. Often, when people face debilitating illness or very difficult life events, suicide may come to their minds. Does she agree that at such times, we should provide better mental health support, psychological support and counselling to enable people to come to terms with their feelings and look much more positively towards their abilities and the contribution they make?

Christine Jardine: I agree that better mental health care should be available at all points in our lives. For every decision that we have to make, we should have support. If we are allowed to look again at the current law and the blanket ban, the question of what mental support exists is the sort of thing we should look at.

As I said, I am grateful to the constituent I mentioned, because that example highlights the invidious position in which everyone is put by the current law and its blanket ban. That includes the patient who knows they are going to die, and who simply wants help to ease their way through it; the medical staff who must not help; and the families who are powerless to support their loved ones, because the law threatens them with criminal procedures.

A recent policy paper considered by the homicide committee of the National Police Chiefs' Council showed that investigators are frustrated with the current legislation, and that families whose loved ones have had assisted deaths are losing confidence in the police and criminal justice system. Families such as the Whaleys and Ecclestons, who suffered the ordeal of court cases, are perhaps the highest profile examples of how the law fails those who are facing their final days, and fails their loved ones. Sadly, they represent merely the tip of the iceberg.

Dignity in Dying has calculated that every eight days, someone from the United Kingdom travels to Switzerland for an assisted death, with their grieving families often treated as criminals once they return. Every year in England and Wales alone, an estimated 300 people take their own lives because they are faced with a terminal diagnosis and it seems their only option. A great many more are beyond the reach of palliative care, which, sadly, needs more investment, and they die in agony. Perhaps the cruellest thing of all is that this can all be avoided if people can afford it.

The law has created a two-tier system. If someone has more than £10,000, they can travel to Switzerland or elsewhere for the end-of-life care of their choice. It is time to look at whether and how our law can be improved. There is ample evidence that the majority of the public would support a change. According to the

most recent surveys, 84% would like to see a change. They want a very narrow and specific change—perhaps that addresses some of the points that have been made—for those in the final stages of a terminal illness who are mentally capable of making a decision, but they do want a change.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. We had a discussion today, and we have very different opinions; clearly, I do not agree with what she is saying. The answer is not legalising assisted suicide. The answer is to help, to support and to be compassionate towards families. Does she acknowledge the good work that is done by many charities, particularly Macmillan, whose compassion and love make the unimaginable a little bit more bearable?

Christine Jardine: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that Marie Curie, Macmillan and other charities do outstanding work. The people who work in hospices up and down the country, and those who provide palliative care in our hospitals, perform an unenviable role and they are beyond reproach. However, it is not my view that people should have only that choice. For me, this is about being able to decide either to have palliative care—it should be there, and it should provide support—or to make another choice. That should be up to the individual, and the law should support them in that. As I said, 84% of people, according to the most recent surveys, would support a change.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): As parliamentarians we are here to use our judgment, not simply to represent the views of our constituents. However, 84% of the public are in favour of a change. The last time the issue was voted on, in September 2015, 75% of parliamentarians voted against changing the law. There is concern among the wider public that Parliament may be out of step with the public on this. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Christine Jardine: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it was unfortunate that on that occasion, Parliament took such a different position from that of the country. It is also understandable that the responsibility for making the decision is quite heavy. Many parliamentarians might like to see that change, but the thought of its magnitude perhaps makes them reserve judgment. If parliamentarians spoke to more people; if we had an inquiry and a public debate; if we had the opportunity to hear the views of the public; if we heard from the families of those who wanted to choose how to end their lives but were denied that choice by the law; and if we heard about what that had put them through, perhaps parliamentarians would have the confidence to reflect the public position.

The previous Government hinted at an inquiry into the law. When I asked about it yesterday in a point of order, Mr Speaker himself said that the time might have come for a debate. Perhaps the Minister will take the question of that inquiry back to the Government. Perhaps the time has come to think about whether the law is serving or protecting anyone. Perhaps we should have a public debate, which might allow parliamentarians to judge what is in everyone's best interests.

[Christine Jardine]

I will say one last thing. Some Members may have noticed that there is a word I have not used—one that is normally central to this debate, and that is crucial to the campaigns that are going on outwith Parliament—and that word is “compassion”. That omission is deliberate on my part because, for me, there is no compassion in the law as it stands.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, it may helpful to say that because so many Members want to participate in the debate, I propose to start off with a three-minute time limit on contributions.

3.20 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I will turn to the part of my speech that deals with some concerning developments from other jurisdictions that have legalised assisted suicide, as I prefer to call it. In Oregon physician-assisted suicide for the terminally ill was legalised 10 years ago. The annual Government report of 2018 stated that more than half of those applying now cite

“fear of being a burden”

as their major end-of-life concern. Far fewer cite pain concerns. Disability groups are extremely concerned about what has happened, for example, in Canada since 2016. In just four years, under the law that has allowed terminally ill people to request assisted suicide and euthanasia, safeguards have been ignored, removed and extended to non-terminally ill people such as those with depression. In July a depressed but otherwise healthy man was killed by lethal injection, despite not being terminally ill. Another man who suffers from a neurological disease actually recorded hospital staff offering him a medically assisted death, despite repeated statements that he did not want to die. Only this week, on Tuesday, there was an article in *The Times* about three Belgian doctors on trial in relation to the euthanasia of someone reported to have a personality disorder and autism. The family believes that she was depressed but that she did not, as required by Belgian law, have a serious and incurable disorder.

The point to note is that, regardless of the wording of eligibility criteria in legislation, in practice safeguards are often discarded, and vulnerable and depressed people are assisted to end their lives. That applies in all jurisdictions that have legalised assisted suicide or euthanasia. In Canada, where medical aid in dying was legalised in 2016, the superior court of Quebec ruled last September that it was unconstitutional to limit access to medical assistance in dying to people nearing the end of life. That is particularly concerning because, while the ruling applies only to Quebec, the Canadian Government have now committed to changing the MAID law for the whole country, so it will no longer be, as was originally intended, limited to those nearing the end of life.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; I realise that time is short. I do not have time to rebut all those arguments, and I will not do so in my speech, but will she address why more and more jurisdictions across the United States, Canada and Australia are changing the law and extending provision, if they think it is not safe?

Fiona Bruce: Actually very few jurisdictions have legalised those issues, and the lessons that we are learning from them need to be learned now, so that more do not do so.

In Canada, for example, the Federal Government are now considering MAID for what they call “mature minors” and people with mental illness. It is easy to see from the example of Canada how quickly assisted dying laws have expanded, removing safeguards and protections for vulnerable patients. Tragically, in Belgium and the Netherlands, where the law allows euthanasia and assisted suicide, the original criteria have already been expanded to include children. Is that really what we want for the UK? Surely we can do better than that.

Rather than assisting vulnerable people to commit suicide, or administering euthanasia, we should be looking to improve palliative care provision and mental health treatment. Much has been done over recent years here in that regard, and more needs to be done. Let us keep our focus on that in this country. Marie Curie estimates that 25% of cancer patients do not currently get the palliative care that they need. That is an issue to which this House should turn its attention. I am pleased to note that Baroness Finlay has introduced a Bill in the other place to do just that—the Access to Palliative Care and Treatment of Children Bill. The UK is a pioneer in palliative medicine and a world leader in palliative care. Let us keep it that way.

3.24 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this important debate. I am a humanist and I believe people should have complete autonomy over their own lives. As the Member of Parliament for Luton, South I am well aware of the case of fellow Lutonian Diane Pretty, whose hardship was publicised in 2002. She was paralysed from motor neurone disease and wanted to have agency, to enable her to make the decision on when and how she would die. Her appeal to have her husband David to support and assist her in her decision to die with dignity was rejected, and he was threatened with a significant jail sentence if he did. Diane’s case, and others since, show the glaring failure of current legislation. It creates an ultimatum whereby law-abiding people have to choose between supporting those they love and following the law.

It is vital that we seek to reform the current law. However, that is not to say that every example of assisted dying legislation has been successful. As has been said, we must consider how to prevent slippage and avoid a transition towards a lax law that would allow assisted dying without sufficient safeguards. Assisted dying should be an option for those who are terminally ill, and we must ensure that any legislation is not used as an alternative to effective palliative care. We have the tools to look into creating a narrow law that includes robust legal and medical safeguards, and to enable terminally ill people to have choice and access, and to have control of how they die. If we look to legislate to maximise the quality of life at the end of life, I am sure that that reform will represent a vast improvement and put an end to prolonged suffering and criminalisation.

We can guarantee only two things. We are born and we will all die, but why should someone suffer unimaginable pain to reach the point of death, when we have capabilities to allow those who are of sane mind to choose to die with dignity, and on their own terms?

3.26 pm

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing the debate and speaking so powerfully at the outset about why it is important that we are having this discussion. It is safe to say that politicians are opinionated people, with an opinion on just about everything under the sun. However, on this topic I am genuinely undecided. In my short contribution I want to talk about that conflict, which I think is felt by many right hon and hon. Members. I want to thank the Members who have so far made contributions, which have been incredibly interesting and have provided helpful insights. Like the hon. Member for Edinburgh West I also thank those of my constituents, on both sides of the argument, who have contacted me so far to express their validly held views, no matter what they were.

The battle that I am having is between two sets of principles that I think both fit well with my party, but also fit with my world view. One of them is my belief in the sanctity of human life, and my concerns about having adequate safeguards in place, and the possibility that they could be abused if a Bill were passed. I have a background in the NHS, and I am concerned that the Hippocratic oath that health practitioners take creates a very damaging conflict for them. Of course, the primary goal for all of us is to heal and improve our lives. Even with a sign-off from two separate doctors, can we really adequately say that we can protect people—that we can prevent people from feeling as if they are a burden? What test should we apply to mental capacity? How can we guarantee that mistakes will never be made about something as final as ending a life? As we have already heard, surely it is important to refocus our energies on finding cures and improving palliative care.

On the other side of the argument, however, there is something that I struggle with. When there is no chance of recovery and no quality of life at all, it seems almost cruel to let someone live with that and prolong their suffering for no reason. That represents to me the principle that people should be the masters of their own destiny, and that every individual should have the ultimate decision on everything that affects their life, including their death. So while I may not be any closer to deciding what Lobby I would walk through if the issue were to be brought to the House in the form of a Bill, I hope that any such Bill would recognise the need for adequate safeguards. If no Bill is introduced, I hope that we shall have a national discussion about how we move forward. Clearly, the status quo is not working, and we need to have a discussion about how we talk about and deal with the end of life.

3.29 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate. I do so not only as the Member for Bristol South, but as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for choice at the end of life.

I want to pick up the discussion where we left it at the end of the last Parliament. We were hoping for a call for evidence and to have some discussion with the Government on that. The Government said that they would continue the debate but were not currently persuaded. We can indeed debate, but ultimately only the Government can make a call for evidence; only the Government have the power to gather evidence. Only this Government can show their own compassion and demonstrate to the people of this country that compassion is not a crime.

I was privileged last year to welcome Geoffrey and Ann Whaley to the House to talk about their experiences. I do not have time today to repeat their stories, but people like Ann Whaley and Adam and Kate Wellesley are still being investigated by the police. They dreaded that knock on the door, which did come. Police officers are required to intrude on a family in the last days and weeks before the loss of their loved ones. I therefore welcome the debate that is now happening within policing. It was surfaced by Ron Hogg, a police and crime commissioner, and many police and crime commissioners are now also asking for a review of the evidence. Ron sadly died in December, but that was a powerful call about how the law is currently impacting on policing.

The current law does not offer protection. Assisted deaths are very rarely investigated. Illegal and unregulated voluntary euthanasia happens now. Current end-of-life practice is, if anything, less safeguarded than assisted dying and it is just as ethically challenging. Who decides whether someone should be sedated until death? How do doctors check that someone is not being coerced into refusing treatment? Is it right to support someone to starve and dehydrate themselves to death? I do not think so. If assisted dying laws are not proven to work, why are more and more being introduced rather than the existing ones being overturned?

My own interest in this area came from my time working in the NHS with clinicians talking to people about how to live and die. I found that it is often no one's job to talk to people about dying, and it is very lonely for those people. Despite the care from the NHS and our brilliant hospices, 17 people a day—

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way; I appreciate that time is short. It is interesting that we are in a place that deals with finalities—death and taxes—yet we never have a wider debate about what death is. As a GP, I speak to people all the time, and it is very difficult to raise the subject of death. Fundamentally, as a society, we need to be talking about what death actually is, because it is inevitable. That inevitability means that we have to answer some of these questions. Does the hon. Lady agree with me that that may well be the best place to start to move the discussion on?

Karin Smyth: I wholeheartedly agree and am grateful for that intervention from a clinical perspective, because what the hon. Gentleman describes is also my experience. Around the world, the current law does not protect the doctor-patient relationship and people are not having those honest conversations. The law does not allow the doctor to really talk to people about end-of-life choices, because people are frightened that their intention to perhaps go to Switzerland will result in someone being fearful of breaking the law.

[Karin Smyth]

I am not sure what the Government's response will be today. I hope that the Minister can respond with compassion for people who are desperate for some recognition of the way the current law is not working. We cannot keep ignoring that. Asking families to retell their stories only perpetuates the trauma that they are going through. Families will keep coming forward, and their experiences are shocking—heartbreaking. For me, representing the constituency of Bristol South, the fact that only people who have between £10,000 and £15,000 spare can access safe care—in Switzerland—is equally shocking.

Is the law working now? No, it is not. Are people safer now? No, they are not. I am disappointed not to have more time to go into why that is the case. That is why, beyond the debate today, we need a review of the current law and how it is working. People need to have time to review the law. It is not working for families at the moment, and I hope that the Government will meet me and others who would like to discuss how a review might work in practice.

3.34 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): It is estimated that some 400 people have taken their lives in the last year as a consequence of having a terminal illness. In the Netherlands, however, the service that provides assisted dying has assisted some 21,000 persons to take that route. With our proportionately larger population, are we prepared for the trajectory of increase in this phenomenon that will fundamentally change the nature of the medical profession when the clinician who brings healing is also the clinician who brings death?

The Royal College of Physicians has in the last year changed its position from one of opposition to this proposal to one of neutrality. When it took the vote of its members, more than 43% voted to maintain opposition, only 31% voted to change that to support, and 25% voted for neutrality. The college is in the absurd position of now supporting the position that was voted for by the smallest number of its members.

I have every sympathy for those who find themselves in the most awful position of having a terminal diagnosis with every prospect of an unpleasant and undignified end. They face the dilemma of whether to make the choice that has been spoken of or delay it to a moment when they may have lost the capacity to make that choice. It is a terrible position to be in, but there is no lever that we can pull to remove every aspect, every possibility, of human misery. If there were a lever, I am sure we would pull it. However, my belief is that the lever that is available to us will end up being something much, much worse. What will begin as a choice will end as an expectation. After all, Sir Graham, you would not want to be a burden, would you? Would you not actually want to follow the example of Uncle Quentin, who saved us all so much anguish and expense?

This possibility may begin with mercy killing—it ends with Logan's Run.

3.36 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) for securing this important and sensitive debate. Like, I am sure, other MPs, I have received a good number of

emails on this subject. Many asked me to speak in favour of assisted dying, and many asked me to speak against it.

It is of huge regret to me that previous debates on such a sensitive and, for many people, deeply personal issue have become such polarised “for and against” discussions. Those who are for it refer almost exclusively to the need for people to be empowered while they still have the capacity to take the decision, so that they do not have to suffer an undignified and painful death. Those against raise concerns about the safeguards.

During the election campaign, I met a couple who pleaded with me not to vote for assisted dying. They told me about their disabled child, a child born disabled and with a life-limiting disease. She was predicted to live only a few years, but despite medical predictions, she has lived for many years and become a happy and joyous little girl. They told me about their fears that a permissive law on assisted dying could have been used to end her life even before she had had a real chance to start it. As a disability rights campaigner myself, I know that those living with a disability, or with experience of disability in their family, must be heard.

Both sides quote polls and “evidence”. One side says that it has the medical community on its side; the other says that it has police enforcement representatives on its side. For my part, I agree that the current state of the law is letting some people down, but everything that I have read over the years and recent representations from particular constituents mean that I say this with caution. As a new MP, I honestly do not know which way I would vote if there were a vote tomorrow, and I believe that scores of other MPs are in the same position as I am. And it is precisely because I do not know which way I would vote that I am in total agreement with this motion. For all of us as MPs and for the House as a whole to take an informed view, there must be an independent inquiry, so that we can take an evidence-based approach to the impact of the current law and enable those who would be most affected to be properly heard.

3.39 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this important debate. As we always do in such debates, we have heard passionate contributions from all sides, with Members speaking from personal experience and discussions with constituents. I suspect I am no different from most Members inasmuch as members of my family have died from cancer; indeed, both of my parents did. My views are shaped to a considerable extent by my belief that life is sacred and God-given.

There will be those who will immediately say, “Why should you impose those views on the rest of society?” In actual fact, society is based on religious values—we might not think of them as religious, but that is certainly the case—and those values have shaped the law. The law must ultimately determine matters of this kind. I mentioned my parents. My mother died in a hospice, and I saw the change from the care she received prior to going there; likewise with my father. Our views are inevitably shaped by such personal and difficult circumstances.

Like the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), I offer a few reflections, rather than a clear direction because it would be difficult to decide how to shape a law that could cover all possible circumstances and

justify a change. I do not think we can justify change at the moment, not just because I am personally opposed to it but because, as was mentioned, it would change the relationship between doctor and patient. We should treasure that relationship. Rather than opening the door to assisting us to die, patients—all of us—need to have confidence that our medical professionals are striving to keep us in good health and alive.

Fiona Bruce: No major medical organisation is in favour of changing the law to promote assisted suicide in this country. What comment does my hon. Friend have to say about that?

Martin Vickers: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. It is notable that most professional organisations favour the current arrangements, although, as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) said, one of the royal colleges now has a neutral stance. That is regrettable. The key thing is that any change in that direction is a signal that society places a lesser price on the value of life.

My plea to those who favour change is to consider the relationship between the doctor and the patient, how we could frame a law that covered all circumstances and whether we would be taking a further step towards euthanasia. Society is moving towards a position where it might accept assisted dying, but the big danger is what could be the next step after that.

3.43 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I should declare that my daughter is an end-of-life nurse at the Marie Curie hospice in Belfast and my wife is a volunteer fundraiser for that organisation.

We will each have experience of a friend or dear loved one facing the end of life. Each of us can recount circumstances, some of which will be peaceful, some less so, some shocking and some sudden. In the midst of life we are in death. We do not continue on here—this is not our permanent resting place—and that is a shock to some people. I agree with the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) that we should have a national conversation, because people wish to exclude discussion about faith and non-faith in the midst of this. Palliative care should also be part of that discussion.

Ninety per cent. of us who walked into the building today probably did not realise that we walked under a portrait of Moses carrying the ten commandments. The top one says, “Thou shalt not kill”. We are debating at what point we shall kill. The House debates it many times. Should we kill in the womb? Should we kill at the end of life? When should we do it? We have to take those tough, critical decisions, and sometimes the House gets it wrong. We should not get it wrong on this occasion.

We should not set a position on when is the right time to kill someone who is sick. We should be asking the positive, strong question: how much palliative care and support can we give people at the greatest point of need? What question does the House face? It should be about what we do to give hope, not what we do to continue with the heartache. We parliamentarians should be prepared to offer hope to people, not to say, as others have said, “You’re now a burden. It’s time to shuffle off this mortal coil.” We should be giving hope to people.

We should also not be discouraging those involved in palliative care—the doctors and nurses who train so hard to give their all. My father, my brother-in-law and my father-in-law have been in these circumstances, and I have known the people who were around them, caring for them. To be able to work with and talk to those people afterwards gives us emotional support. Therefore, in that conversation—“What is life? Where does it end and when should it end?”—we need those people to take us through that journey and not to give up. We should not be giving up on life. We should not be asking Parliament to create a law that says, “Now is the time to tell people it’s time to get off.” We should be supporting people to the very end, giving them palliative care and putting the money and resources into making that happen.

3.46 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): To discuss matters of life and death, and of choice and obligation, is to recognise the gravity of one’s role as a Member of Parliament. It is also to grasp the very essence of our moral conviction, while upholding our calling to represent the wishes of the people by whose wisdom we find ourselves here. To consider measures relating to assisted dying demands not just the fullness of empathy but the totality of our intellect.

My constituent Phil Newby is in a battle with motor neurone disease. Phil has pursued his right to die through the High Court. It stated that it was not the proper forum to discuss the matter but that Parliament is rightly responsible for deciding on issues of such fundamental importance. I have been struck by Phil’s considered and measured case, and it sits with us to make a decision.

The crux of the matter is to recognise the terror and the agony there must be in having your body turn on you, with it racking you with pain or torturing you. Those suffering debilitating terminal diseases are being robbed not just of life but of death. To come to terms with one’s own death and to depart this life in peace and dignity is a privilege that we as a society should endeavour to extend, not to limit. What is more, those facing such daunting circumstances may wish to take the decision into their own hands. I support a change in the law, but it must be the right change with the right safeguards.

Many doctors hold that assisting in death is a violation of their professional oaths and a desecration of their ethical responsibilities. For that reason, any legislation must protect the conscience rights of healthcare professionals and ensure adequate protections for them.

While I support a change in the law, it must be limited, be done after widespread governmental and non-governmental consultation, and balance the rights of those seeking dignity in dying with our obligations to protect the most vulnerable and the rights of healthcare practitioners. As many have said, we must also improve palliative care. I do not believe we face a binary choice. We can and must balance empathy and science not just for our sake but for Phil and everyone in this country.

3.49 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing the debate.

[Aaron Bell]

The status quo is not sustainable. It puts the Director of Public Prosecutions in a difficult position, and that is no way for such an important matter to be handled in law. It is for us to make the law. Whatever we do, we must do something, because the current situation is not sustainable. It is not fair on family members who are investigated and left on bail. The evidence is that the public are willing to look again, and are willing us to look again, for the reasons already given, including compassion and dignity. I do not think there is much dignity in what people have to go through to obtain an assisted death. Another reason, perhaps, is our changing attitudes to faith. There are more people without faith or whose faith is less orthodox than it was in the past.

Like the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn), I am new here. Hon. Members who have taken part in previous debates have told me that those debates changed their minds. I recognise that exact safeguards will be difficult to agree and that if a Bill is introduced, we would have to consider them all carefully.

To conclude, although I am instinctively predisposed towards a possible change in the law, I remain open-minded. Therefore I welcome a Government-backed inquiry as an important first step.

3.50 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on what she said and the way in which she has framed the debate.

There is no doubt that opinion is moving. I myself have changed my mind completely since I arrived in this place 33 years ago. My wife is a senior an NHS GP of some 40 years' standing and, after many years of opposition, she has also changed her mind. Public opinion is moving. We should put at least some of that down to the work that has been done in the House of Lords, in particular by Lord Falconer. He has deftly aired the legal, moral and emotional issues, which has led to a majority of the House of Lords being in favour of changing the law. This place has been 75% against changing the law, but there are signs of things moving, which is a good thing.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell), I am new here. I paid my way through university by working in a care home for old people. Those people were my friends and I witnessed them screaming in pain and agony, asking for a death that nobody was able to give them. Unfortunately I have also witnessed family members trying, if I can put it in northern tones, to bump them off for the money. Does my right hon. Friend agree that any proposed legislation has to protect against that absolutely? That would be key to my decision.

Mr Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend and I hope we will hear much more from her. She expresses the dilemma on both sides of the argument extremely well. For the first time in 33 years I have drawn a place in the private Members' ballot, although somewhat low down, so I am unlikely to trouble the scorers much. I am considering, and am talking to constituents about, the possibility of

promoting a Bill for assisted dying, but the balance of the argument is as the hon. Member for Edinburgh West set out and an inquiry would be the right approach.

Perhaps it is a factor of age, Sir Graham, that over recent years you and I have seen more of our friends, families and constituents facing the dilemmas that this debate is examining. It seems to me that it is not for lawyers and judges to make these decisions, which is a point that has been eloquently made this afternoon. It is for us to wrestle to with our consciences, as a number of colleagues have said. We should do that. I can think of constituents, friends and family who, at the end of their lives, I have watched with the deepest concern and misery, and have reflected that we would not allow a family dog or a wild animal to be treated in the way in which they inadvertently ended up being treated. With all the protections that must, of course, be required, we need to wrestle with this issue.

When I feel that it is the time to go, I want to be able to choose the manner in my own way. I want that decision to be available to my constituents as well and, above all, I want it to be their decision and not the decision of the state.

3.54 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this important debate and on her excellent contribution, which eloquently summed up the issues on both sides of the argument.

When Parliament voted on this issue in 2015, I was a new MP and was invited to various debates on the subject. A local bishop invited me to a parish church to talk to the congregation about assisted dying. He knew I was in favour of it, as I still am today. We debated the issues and were asked questions about what we proposed. I was surprised, as was the bishop, that the vote at the end showed that 80% of the people there were in favour of assisted dying. There were only about 20 people present, so it is not a representative sample.

That concurs with the public view. According to the Dignity in Dying survey, 84% of the public are in favour of assisted dying. Therefore, it is perhaps surprising that in 2015 some 75% of parliamentarians were against it. We have to be careful when we are that far out of step with the general public, as we have seen before with the Brexit debate. I was one of 22 Members on the Conservative side of the fence who voted in favour of assisted dying, and I think the Minister also voted for it. It is great to see so many new Members speaking today and sitting in the Chamber. I have a feeling that may mean that the balance of opinion may have changed in recent months.

During the election campaign I lost my mother. Her final hours were difficult, particularly when she was having some fluid taken off her lungs. It was difficult for us as relatives and for other people on the ward, as she was on an open ward and she had to have a number of surgical treatments to clear the fluid off her lungs. It was very distressing. I simply do not see why someone should have to go through that in the final hours of their life. I contrast this to the way we treat family dogs, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said in his excellent speech. Our dog, Ben, was put down. He was perfectly healthy apart from

a hip problem, but that meant we had to put him down. My wife, four children and I gathered around him as a family, and he had a very peaceful end to his life.

Ian Paisley: Would what the hon. Gentleman is describing take place if more resources were put into palliative care? If that happened, precedence would be given to the care, expectation, love and compassion that Members so desperately want to see, not just for themselves but for their loved ones and their families.

Kevin Hollinrake: That is a good point. I am not against more resources for palliative care, but I am in favour of choice. I think people should have the choice. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), who is doing much work in this area, made a brilliant speech in the 2015 debate on assisted dying. In his phrase, we should have “the dominion over” our bodies.

Alicia Kearns: My father was a brave and strong man who built double-decker buses all his life. I lost him when I was 18 and I remember from my youngest years that his gravest fear was being trapped in his strong body and not being able to communicate. The father of one of my best friends in the world was the first person to be diagnosed with locked-in syndrome. It is about choice and being able to have some sense of control over the body, and about deserving to have that choice.

Kevin Hollinrake: I absolutely agree. I do not wish to impose my views on any citizens as to how they choose to end their lives, but I do not want anyone else imposing their perspective on the way I might choose to end my life in difficult circumstances.

Of course we have to have checks and balances. In my professional life, outside this place, I have dealt with a number of cases where there have been rapacious relatives. Where there is a will, there is a relative. We know what these things can be like, so we have to have checks and balances. Given that so many other jurisdictions have dealt with this issue and introduced legislation to allow assisted dying, an inquiry must be able to learn from the best of other jurisdictions, develop best practice and ensure that we get this absolutely right. We should do what the public expects us to do and bring forward an appropriate law on assisted dying that is fit for purpose.

3.59 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for whom I have great regard, but whom I disagree with fundamentally. I shall explain why in a few moments.

One of the most difficult things to come to terms with in life is the fact that it is temporary—one might say, in the great span of human existence, almost momentary. It is also difficult to come to terms with the fact that each and every life is punctuated by despair, pain, loss and disappointment. All our lives will have a share of that, and some lives have more of it than others. That is a sad fact.

In our age, it seems very unpalatable to people that that should be so. We have been encouraged, perhaps by the world we live in, by media, popular culture or the exchange of ideas, to think that lives can be made ideal,

perfect, cushioned and so forever comfortable, but it is just not like that. I say to everyone in this room that if they live long enough, unless they are taken in some dramatic or sudden way, they will become weak and wizened, frail and faltering, because that is what ageing does.

Although life, as I have described it, is momentary, each moment is precious. The life of profoundly disabled people is precious, and the life of those weak, wizened, sick and infirm people is precious. Every life has value and every life ultimately ends. If that is unpalatable, then so be it, because that is the contextual reality that this debate is considering.

Of course, it is true that people on both sides of this argument want to do right by people in difficult circumstances; they are motivated by compassion. Several people have said that they are conflicted because of that. But in the end, the truth is that it is compassionate most of all to care, to protect and to prevent where we possibly can. That is the ultimate compassion: coming to terms with the temporary nature of life and the pain that I have described, and then exercising that kind of care.

It is easier to end lives. I would not for a moment accuse anyone in this Chamber of this, but there are those who, perhaps because of their bourgeois sensibilities, find it difficult to accept what my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) says: that there are people who would take advantage and who would see this as a route to do very cruel and unkind things—not to exercise compassion, but the opposite. She described it more graphically as bumping people off; I will put it slightly differently. Some of those people would say, “You are a burden, Mother.” Mother would reply, “Do you think I really am? Am I causing you difficulty? Am I causing you disturbance and distress? Wouldn’t it be better, now that I have reached this great age, to go?”

If there is any prospect of one vulnerable person dying as a result of this change who would not otherwise do so, it is not a chance that, as a legislator and a parliamentarian, I am prepared to take. Indeed, it is not a chance that any other Member of this House should be prepared to take. The current law may not be perfect—what law is?—but I say that we should stay where we are, for anything else could be considerably more dangerous, damaging and, in the end, frightening.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): We move on now to the Front-Bench winding-up speeches, and there should then be a little time for the hon. Lady to wind up at the end.

4.3 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is, of course, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) for securing this very important debate. Although I may not personally agree with her conclusion, as many of us across the House do not, I must credit her with having set out a passionate and robust case, both this afternoon and in her recent article.

I thank other hon. Members for attending—certainly, for a Thursday afternoon, this is probably one of the largest attendances I have seen in this Chamber—and for their own moving and thought-provoking contributions.

[*Imran Hussain*]

We have heard many moving and personal accounts. Many of our thoughts and beliefs, and much of what drives our opinions, on this important topic come from our own personal experiences and stories. In this debate and the debate last year, hon. Members spoke powerfully of friends and family members at the end of their lives, or of constituents at the end of theirs. Bound together with our mortality and the fact that some day each of us here will pass on, hoping to do so as peacefully as possible, those experiences are what make this such a personal and hard-hitting issue.

Across the Opposition, across the Chamber and indeed across the country, as we have heard, we are split on the issue of assisted dying, with clear arguments advocated on either side of the divide. For those advocating a change in the law on assisted dying, important and pertinent points have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Time does not permit me to go through contributions from each hon. Member, but one of the first arguments put forward is that of personal liberty—that relaxing the law would grant an individual control over their own death when it would otherwise be cruelly taken away from them by a terminal illness; and that it would allow them to end what is often incredible suffering, which leaves them with little to no quality of life and forces others to watch helplessly, witnessing the decline of their friend or relative right in front of them. We have heard some very personal experiences of that here today.

The argument that to legalise assisted dying would also spare loved ones the fear of conviction for their compassion, as we have seen with a number of cases such as those of Zoë Marley and Mavis Eccleston, has also been put forward. It will continue to be, for I doubt whether anyone here, regardless of what our views may be, really wants to see an elderly grandmother or others prosecuted for honest acts of compassion. That is joined by an argument that adequate safeguards could be applied to prevent abuses of the process and protect vulnerable people, with several examples of countries and states that have legalised assisted dying put forward as a model for the UK to copy.

However, for every argument made in favour of relaxing the law on assisted dying, a counter-argument is advanced, as it has been by hon. Members in this and previous debates. Those who oppose change point out that legalising assisted dying could lead to an abuse of the system and to pressure being applied, even unintentionally, to those suffering from terminal illness. They may feel that they are, or will become, a burden on their friends, family and carers, leaving them, in their eyes, with no real choice but to end their own life in a selfless act to spare others. That point was made by a number of hon. Members.

Hon. Members also raised the point that to relax the law on assisted dying now would slowly allow an escalation in what is allowed, creating a slippery slope whereby the eventual outcomes are far beyond the reality originally imagined by those who advocate for change. They argued that assisted dying would put immense pressure and stress on doctors and families, and even on individuals themselves.

Karin Smyth: Some of the phrases that my hon. Friend has used are used across the world, although there is no evidence for many of those things—for

example, that there is a “slippery slope”. Does that not reinforce the idea that, whatever people think, if we can persuade the Government to look at the call for evidence, we can air these issues publicly and get the real evidence in a process that the public, and all who participate in such care, can recognise as rigorous? That call for evidence is the real thing we should be focusing on.

Imran Hussain: I thank my hon. Friend for being a strong and passionate advocate in this area. I think the whole House will acknowledge her work on this subject. A call for further evidence or an independent inquiry can only be of assistance to the broader debate. We cannot forget that the ethical and practical issues, and the threat of a slippery slope, have left even medical professionals reluctant to back any changes to the existing legislation on assisted dying.

Despite the clearly differing views in the House and in society, we are united on the principle that everyone should be able to pass on in peace, surrounded by family, friends and fond memories. That brings me to palliative and end-of-life care for those with terminal conditions, for at the heart of this debate is the matter of dignity. Indeed, much of the argument in favour of assisted dying is about the real fear faced by those approaching the end of their lives that they will lose control, that they will have their dignity taken away from them and that they will suffer in pain in their final days, weeks and months.

Sadly, for too many, that fear becomes a reality as insufficient palliative and end-of-life care, too much variation in practice and poor management of symptoms leave those who are at the end of their lives, and their friends and families, suffering unnecessarily. As I pointed out last year, the Institute for Public Policy Research found that there was considerable scope to improve the way that care is designed and delivered for those reaching the end of their lives, and that the experience faced by such people can still be poor, with medical and care staff sometimes failing to recognise that people are dying and failing to respond to their needs appropriately.

The IPPR also found that too few people were offered the opportunity to end their lives in the comfort of their own home, surrounded by their friends and family, and not in a hospital, surrounded by strangers fighting for every last breath. While talking about the pros and cons of relaxing the law on assisted dying—the arguments for and against—we must talk more about how palliative and end-of-life care is not nearly as good as it should be, and how that drives so many people to consider taking their own lives.

Time not permitting, I will sum up. I firmly agree—this is probably not a statement I will make often—with the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who stated in response to questions in a previous debate on this issue that this is a matter of conscience and must be decided by Parliament. Of course, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) indicated, for a matter to be considered properly, we must be properly informed and have as much information as possible.

I outlined my personal view at the beginning of this speech, and I believe that this is a matter of conscience that must be decided by the whole of Parliament. However, I hope that we can address some of the real issues at the

heart of the debate—insufficient palliative and end-of-life care, and allowing those who are reaching the end of their lives to die peacefully and painlessly.

4.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): It is, as always, a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing the debate on such an important and profound topic so early in the new Parliament, and on the sincerity and compassion of her speech, which I know everybody here will have listened to very carefully indeed.

Whatever one's personal view on this issue, there is no question but that Members on both sides of the argument hold strong and powerful views, which we heard expressed today with great sincerity and compassion. I thank everybody who took part in the debate. I particularly thank the new Members, who spoke with such thoughtfulness and conviction, as well as the more experienced Members, who offered their views as well, which are equally important. The debate has been an example of Parliament at its best, as we weighed up these deep and profound questions—weighing up, on one side of the argument, the sanctity of life, against, on the other side, the principle of personal choice. Few topics are deeper or more profound than those.

It may be worth my laying out the legal background to the question before us, which has not really been touched on; it is probably worth reminding ourselves of the current legal landscape. The current law on assisted suicide in England and Wales is governed by section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961, which gives a blanket criminalisation of the offence, including by “encouraging or assisting” suicide. There are no exemptions from that in statute. In Northern Ireland, there are similar statutory provisions. In Scotland, there is no statutory criminalisation of assisted suicide, but it is prosecuted as a culpable homicide, so the effect in Scottish law is, broadly speaking, the same. The law as it currently stands across all parts of the United Kingdom is that assisting or even encouraging somebody to commit suicide is a criminal offence.

The application of the law, and prosecutions for anyone suspected of assisting or encouraging suicide, is subject to prosecution policy—whether the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, or the Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland, decide to prosecute. In making a prosecution decision, with this offence as with any other, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions apply two tests. One is an evidential test: is there evidence that the offence has been committed? Secondly, there is a public interest test: does it serve the public interest to pursue a prosecution?

Ian Paisley: Is it not the case that there are about 150 of those type of cases, but that only three are actually being prosecuted for the sinister motive that could lie behind some of them?

Chris Philp: I was about to come on to precisely the figures that the hon. Gentleman refers to. Before I do, it is worth reminding the House of the current prosecution policy. It was set out substantively in February 2010 and revised somewhat in 2014. Clause 43 of those

Crown Prosecution Service guidelines sets out a number of conditions that will make it more likely that a prosecution serves the public interest.

However, clause 45 lays out six conditions that will make a prosecution less likely, including: first, that the person who has died reached a voluntary, clear and settled decision; secondly, that the accused was motivated by compassion; thirdly, that the nature of the assistance or encouragement was minor; fourthly, that the accused had tried to dissuade the person dying from pursuing that course of action; and fifthly, that the matter had been properly reported to the police. If those conditions are met, the Director of Public Prosecutions would be less likely to bring a prosecution—not completely unlikely, but less likely. The judgment as to whether a prosecution serves the public interest is an independent question for the Crown Prosecution Service, or the Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland.

Sir John Hayes: The Minister is actually setting out—I was going to deal with this in my speech had I had longer to contribute—that the existing circumstances, far from being rigid, are very flexible. The guidance exercised and the discretion used allow a good deal of latitude in the circumstances he describes. That is a good case for not changing the law.

Chris Philp: I will come on to the Government's position of neutrality in a moment.

Mr Mitchell: Before he does, will he give way?

Chris Philp: I will in a moment. I seek simply to set out, for the House's benefit, a factual description of the current circumstances. I will first respond to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), before coming to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell).

As with any offence, there is a measure of CPS discretion as to whether the prosecution serves the public interest, but of course somebody who is in the unfortunate circumstances that we have been discussing today does not have any certainty, because they cannot be certain how the Director of Public Prosecutions will exercise their discretion.

Let me just go through the numbers, before I respond to the intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield; I think that it is worth my setting out some facts and some numbers for the House's benefit. Between April 2009 and July 2019, the police referred 152 cases related to this issue to the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales; I regret that I do not have the figures for Scotland. Of those 152 cases, 104 cases were not proceeded with by the CPS; 29 cases were withdrawn by the police; three cases were prosecuted successfully; one case was prosecuted unsuccessfully, which is to say that it went to court but the jury acquitted; three cases remain outstanding; and eight cases led to prosecutions for a different criminal offence. So, just as a matter of fact—I am not expressing an opinion, but simply stating a fact—only three of those 252 cases, as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) said earlier, resulted in a successful prosecution.

Now I will of course give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield.

Mr Mitchell: What is so interesting about this issue is that I drew entirely the opposite conclusion to what my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) said in his intervention. The conclusion that I drew was how uncertain this situation makes it for anyone put in this position, and how having to wait for a decision to be made at a time of great stress and misery in their life is so very wrong. That shows, I submit, that there are deeply felt views on both sides of this debate, and that it is for this House—this Parliament—to reach a conclusion.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will my hon. Friend the Minister give way again just before he resumes?

Chris Philp: I will certainly take another intervention from my hon. Friend.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am very grateful. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that there is a difference between assisted dying and committing suicide? If I was faced with a terminal illness that I did not want to go through, I would happily choose for my life to be ended through the relevant medical procedures. However, I would not want to commit suicide, because I would not want my children to think that their father had committed suicide; I would not want them to live with that. So I think there is a complete difference between these two different ways of someone ending their life.

Chris Philp: I thank both my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for their very thoughtful interventions.

Perhaps I might just turn to the question of end-of-life care, hospice care and palliative care. Many Members on both sides of the argument, and indeed the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), have referred to the importance of these types of care. I think that one thing we can all agree on is that, regardless of our position on the question of assisted dying or assisted suicide, proper provision of hospice and palliative care is essential; belief in the importance of palliative care is unaffected by and unrelated to one's position on assisted dying. So it is very important that we ensure that those provisions are properly in place.

I am pleased to report that in 2015 the UK was ranked top out of 40 countries in terms of what is called a quality of death index, which is based on palliative service provision, access to opioids for pain relief and a national strategic approach. Very few countries have levels of integration of palliative care within wider health services similar to ours, so the UK leads the world in the quality of palliative care and end-of-life care.

In 2016 the Government brought forward the end-of-life care choice commitment. We have set out plans to improve patient choice significantly, by ensuring that more adults and children can die in the place of their choice, be it at home, in a hospice, or in hospital. End-of-life care is a key priority for the NHS, and in its long-term plan we have set out key actions to improve the care of people at the end of their life, including a £4.5 billion new investment to fund expanded community teams, which will provide rapid targeted support to those with the greatest need, including those at the end of life. Hospices are vital, and as recently as last August

the Prime Minister announced £25 million of additional funding for hospices and palliative care. So Members should be in no doubt at all that, first, the United Kingdom leads the world in the quality of its palliative and end-of-life care, and, secondly, that the Government are completely committed to supporting those services.

I have tried to lay out in a factual way what the current legal, prosecutorial and palliative care landscape is. The reason why I have tried to do that in a factual way is that, as the shadow Minister has already said, it is quite right that in matters of profound personal conscience, such as this one, the Government do not take a view. The Government are neutral in the debate on this issue and have no policy position on it. Although all of us, including me, have our own personal views about this issue, the Government's position is that it is for Parliament to decide great issues of conscience, including this one.

A number of Members have asked for a review or a call for evidence. The Government do not have any plans at the moment to initiate any review or call for evidence; our view is that it is for Parliament to act in this space. But of course it is open to Committees of the House, including Select Committees, to initiate reviews, calls for evidence and investigations, if they see fit to do so.

Of course, it is also for Parliament to initiate legislation, if it sees fit to do so. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned the private Member's Bill ballot. The last vote on this issue took place, as some Members have already said, in September 2015. The Bill proposed was defeated, but, of course, since then we have had two general elections and the composition of Parliament has changed. However, it is the Government's position that it is for Parliament to decide on this great issue of conscience; it is not for the Government to lead in this area.

I reiterate how important and moving the speeches today have been, on both sides of the argument. I think this debate is an example of Parliament at its finest, dealing with these great issues of life and death, and weighing the sanctity of life against personal liberty and personal choice.

There are no easy answers to these questions, but I can think of no better way of resolving them than via a measured debate and a parliamentary decision. We have certainly seen a fine example of that in today's debate, and I again thank and commend the hon. Member for Edinburgh West for her speech and for securing this debate.

Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair): I call the hon. Member for Edinburgh West to wind up the debate.

4.27 pm

Christine Jardine: Thank you very much, Sir Graham, for calling me to sum up; it is a pleasure to do so.

I thank the many right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this debate, which, for me, showed exactly why this debate today needs to be the beginning of a debate throughout this Parliament, so that we can come to the sort of parliamentary decision that the Minister has just referred to. I hope that we can take it from his comments that we will now have a proper and meaningful debate on this issue.

I thank the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for clarifying, in the way that I would have done, the legal position on prosecutions, with 150 prosecutions being pursued, whereas more than 300 people have gone to Dignitas. There is a lack of clarity. The public deserve to have things made completely clear, so that they do not face having to make the most horrendous decision about their own future or a relative's future without knowing whether prosecutions will follow. They deserve clarity.

I will just refer to two other specific points that were made. One was about medical organisations. The Royal College of Physicians has carried out the largest survey of medical opinion ever conducted. That survey showed that fewer than half of hospital doctors support the current law; the RCP's elected council voted 36 votes to one in favour of moving to a position of neutrality. And both the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association are looking again at their policies.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) mentioned religious beliefs, and I completely take that on board. I do not think that any of us in this place

would want anyone to go against their religious beliefs or expect them to do so, but religious beliefs are a matter of personal choice. I say that because my own belief is very different to others' beliefs, and I respect all manner of beliefs about the sanctity of life and whether we have a right to end life. And the humanist view is very different from some religious views.

I will make one final point about palliative care, and I thank the Minister for what he said about it. Perhaps the most important comment was made by both the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell), and my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), who are two of the many new Members in this place. We have a duty to consider this issue, and to reflect on what the public might want and what the law might be. So, although all the opinions expressed here today are equally viable, we need to address the situation and come up with a fresh and accurate view about it. I hope that we can do so.

4.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No.10(14)).

Written Statements

Thursday 23 January 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Offshore Wind Projects

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Kwasi Kwarteng): This statement concerns applications made by Orsted Hornsea Project Three (UK) Limited, Norfolk Vanguard Limited and Vattenfall Wind Power Limited for development consent for the installation, operation and maintenance of the proposed Hornsea project three, Norfolk vanguard and Thanet extension offshore wind farms respectively, their related offshore infrastructure off the coast of Norfolk and Kent and their related onshore electrical connections within those counties.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Planning Act 2008 to set a new deadline.

Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it.

The statutory decision deadline for the Hornsea project three offshore wind farm application was re-set by written ministerial statement on 8 October 2019. However, following a request by Orsted Hornsea Project Three (UK) Limited on 12 December 2019 for an extension of the period of six weeks by which to provide additional information to the Secretary of State, to 14 February 2020, the Secretary of State has decided to re-set the decision deadline to 1 June 2020 to allow that information to be received and assessed including any further consultation required.

The deadline for the decision on the Norfolk vanguard offshore wind farm was 10 December 2019 and the deadline for the Thanet extension offshore wind farm was 11 December 2019. The Secretary of State has decided to set a new deadline of 1 June 2020 for deciding these two applications to allow further information to be provided and assessed including any further consultation required.

The decision to set the new deadlines for these three applications is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to grant or refuse development consents for them.

[HCWS57]

CABINET OFFICE

Government Transparency and Accountability

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Since 2010, the Government have been at the forefront of opening up data to allow Parliament, the public and the media to hold public bodies to account.

Such online transparency is crucial to delivering value for money, cutting waste and inefficiency, and to ensuring every pound of taxpayers' money is spent in the best possible way.

The Government are today publishing a number of documents as part of their ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability.

The following subject areas include documents and data that the Government are due to publish, or which have recently been made available.

Ministerial transparency

Departments are publishing the routine quarterly ministerial data on external meetings, gifts, hospitality and overseas travel.

The Government are also making available the agenda and the meeting notes of the July 2019 co-ordination committee meeting between the Government and the DUP.

Further transparency documents relating to Ministers were published on 20 December 2019.

Transparency in the civil service

Departments are publishing reports on the median gender pay gap. Across the Civil Service, this encouragingly states that the median gender pay gap has narrowed to 11.1%. This demonstrates progress to date, but shows there is still further to go.

Departments are also publishing routine spend and prompt payment data, demonstrating our continued commitment to supporting businesses by ensuring they are paid on time.

Transparency of senior officials and special advisers

Alongside quarterly data on the travel, expenses and meetings of senior officials, the Government are also publishing the annual list of salary details for senior public officials in Departments and arms' length bodies earning £150,000 and above, reflecting the enhanced scrutiny we have put in place for these most senior posts. Though the Government recognise the need to attract the brightest and the best to deliver on the people's priorities and save taxpayers' money, very high salaries must be justified and publishing this data allows them to be scrutinised.

Departments are also publishing routine returns from special advisers.

Departments are also publishing routine quarterly data summarising decisions made by Departments about outside appointments or employment taken up by former members of the civil service at SCS1 and SCS2 level and equivalents (including special advisers of equivalent standing).

These documents will be published on gov.uk.

[HCWS59]

Contingencies Fund

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden): The Cabinet Office has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £19,740,000.

This routine requirement arises each year because the Cabinet Office receives a relatively high proportion of its voted funding at supplementary estimate, and as a

consequence may only draw the related cash from the consolidated fund after the Supply and Appropriation Act has received Royal Assent in March 2020.

The cash advance will pay for programmes which will generate Government-wide benefits or savings and are urgent in the public interest, including advancing EU exit objectives, public inquiries, security and the efficient management of Government property.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £19,094,000 and capital of £646,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Cabinet Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £19,740,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS58]

EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove): This Government was elected with a clear mandate to deliver the result of the 2016 referendum, and to ensure that the UK ratifies the deal reached by the Prime Minister, before the UK leaves the European Union on the 31 January.

The Government have sought, in line with the Sewel convention, legislative consent from the devolved legislatures of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill.

It is important to note that despite the argument of some, the devolved legislatures have not been asked to consent to Brexit overall. In line with the devolution settlements, they have been asked to consent to the specific parts of the Bill that fall within devolved competence, or otherwise engage the legislative consent process.

It is therefore disappointing that the three devolved legislatures have refused to agree a legislative consent motion (LCM) for the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill.

We recognise that taking the Bill to Royal Assent without the consent of the devolved legislatures is a significant decision and it is one that we have not taken lightly. However, it is in line with the Sewel convention. It is also necessary in order to ensure that all parts of the UK have the powers required to meet our obligations in the withdrawal agreement. These include important protections for EU and UK citizens' rights as we leave the EU.

The Sewel convention—to which the Government remain committed—states that the UK Parliament “will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent” of the relevant devolved legislatures. The circumstances of our departure from the EU, following the 2016 referendum, are not normal; they are unique.

At every stage of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, the UK Government have demonstrated their enduring commitment and respect for the Sewel convention and the principles that underpin our constitutional arrangements.

The practices and procedures that have developed to deliver the Sewel convention encourage the UK Government to consult with the devolved administrations on legislation at an early stage to ensure their views are taken into account.

Through extensive consultation and engagement it has respected the spirit and the letter of the devolution settlement. Changes have been made to recognise the valid concerns of our partners in the Scottish and Welsh Governments. We have also, during the absence of the Executive, worked closely with the Northern Ireland civil service.

Despite the Government's efforts, it is unfortunate that common ground could not be found on all elements.

We will continue to respect and uphold the Sewel convention and the devolution settlements going forward.

We will also continue to engage with the Scottish and Welsh Governments, as well as the newly formed Northern Ireland Executive, as we negotiate our future relationship with the EU.

[HCWS60]

DEFENCE

Royal Navy Historic Aircraft

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heappey): I have today laid before Parliament a departmental minute describing a gift which the Ministry of Defence intends to make to the Fly Navy Heritage Trust Ltd.

Since 1960, the Royal Navy has operated a collection of MOD-owned historically important naval heritage aircraft with the Royal Navy Historic Flight (RNHF). Five military-registered aircraft formed part of the Royal Navy Historic Flight, all of which have been maintained at some expense on the military register by the MOD. In January 2018 it was determined that, to allow greater freedoms in operation at reduced cost to MOD, the Royal Navy Historic Flight should be disbanded, with its aircraft transferred to a civilian owner operator.

The gift comprises four of the former Royal Navy Historic Flight aircraft:

A Swordfish (W5856) torpedo bomber aircraft, famous for Taranto and operations throughout world war two.

A Sea Fury (VR930), famous for operations in Korea and the only propeller aircraft to have shot down a jet.

A Sea Hawk (WV908), a pioneering carrier jet aircraft and the first Hawker aircraft company jet.

A Chipmunk (WK608) is required to transfer with the heritage aircraft on the basis that it provides pilot continuity and generates income.

Their associated spares and support equipment.

The total value of this gift is in the region of £1,810,000.

The future of a fifth aircraft, Swordfish (LS326), is currently under consideration.

The RNHF has been supported in its activity by the Fly Navy Heritage Trust, a charity operating under the umbrella of “Navy Wings”, that has promoted the culture and heritage conservation of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm since its formation in the early nineties. The Trust has provided significant financial support to the renovation, repair and maintenance of the MOD-owned heritage aircraft, whilst also operating their own naval heritage aircraft in direct support of naval service

engagement aims alongside the Royal Navy Historic Flight aircraft or when Royal Navy aircraft are unavailable.

The gifting of four of the former Royal Navy Historic Flight aircraft to the Fly Navy Heritage Trust will allow these historically important aircraft to continue to be used in support of commemorative and educational aims in support of the Royal Navy and Fleet Air Arm for many years to come.

The transfer of ownership is expected to be undertaken over the coming weeks, subject to completion of the departmental minute process.

[HCWS55]

EDUCATION

Schools: Vocational Guidance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Michelle Donelan): Information supplied by the careers and basic skills division of the Department for Education has been identified as containing incorrect information in the response provided by the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch) to the parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) concerning the number of careers advisers employed by schools (PQ286227).

In response to PQ286227, the correct answer is that information on roles of staff employed in schools is collected via the school workforce census. Information on the role(s) a staff member is employed to carry out is collected for all staff who have a contract lasting 28 days or more. As at November 2018 (the latest data available), there are 264 schools where a member of staff has been recorded with the role of careers adviser. There may be other staff in schools who fulfil this role but have not been recorded as such; they may have a contract of 28 days or less: or, because schools may record up to three roles per member of staff, the school may have allocated them to other roles.

[HCWS53]

HOME DEPARTMENT

College of Policing: Annual Report and Accounts

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): I am today publishing the 2018-19 annual report and accounts for the College of Policing Ltd (HC 48). This will be laid before the House and published on www.gov.uk. The report will also be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS54]

TRANSPORT

Dartford-Thurrock and Severn Crossings: Accounts

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) has made the following ministerial statement.

Under section 3 (1) (d) of the Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (Keeping of Accounts) (England) Regulations 2003, annual accounts for the Dartford-Thurrock crossing charging scheme and the Severn river crossing charging scheme are published today.

In addition, annual accounts for the now-abolished Severn river crossing toll are released today under section 28 of the Severn Bridges Act 1992. Since there are no longer tolls or charges on the Severn river crossings these accounts will not be produced in the future.

The accounts relate to financial year 2018-19 or 2018 and will be placed in the Library of the House.

Attachments can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questionsanswers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-01-23/HCWS56/>.

[HCWS56]

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