

**Thursday
30 January 2020**

**Volume 670
No. 19**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Thursday 30 January 2020

House of Commons

Thursday 30 January 2020

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Road Safety

1. **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to improve road safety.
[900500]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

The Government are committed to improving safety on all our roads, and to reducing the numbers of those who are needlessly killed and injured. Last July, we published “The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety”.

Lilian Greenwood: The right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) has this week accused Highways England of
“a shocking degree of carelessness”

in rolling out all-lane-running motorways, and the chairman of the Police Federation has described smart motorways as “inherently dangerous” and “a death trap”. I welcomed the Secretary of State’s announcement of a rapid evidence stocktake, and he promised to bring forward recommendations in a matter of weeks, but it has now been three months. What is he going to do, and when, to prevent further avoidable deaths?

Grant Shapps: I should like to start by thanking the hon. Lady for her sterling work as Chair of the Select Committee on Transport, which I am sure is recognised by all Members of the House. She is absolutely right about that stocktake. Two things have happened. First, the general election intervened and took up some weeks. The other thing that has happened—I say this in all sincerity—is that I have uncovered a range of issues that I am not content simply to brush over. I have therefore requested further information, and we are nearly there. In this process, I have specifically included going back to, speaking to and in one case meeting the families of those who have been affected by these issues. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead that there is far too much complication in having all-lane-running dynamic motorways—smart

motorways. If the hon. Lady will forgive me, this is taking a little longer, but I think we will get to a much better outcome.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It has been clear for some time that all-lane-running motorways are death traps. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) has pointed out, five people have been killed in just 10 months on a 16-mile stretch of the M1. The Secretary of State has the power to scrap these dangerous motorways now, so will he stop this dither and delay and act now to avoid further tragic deaths and serious injuries? Will he also assure the House that there will be no restoration of these motorways without full radar coverage?

Grant Shapps: As I pointed out a moment ago—perhaps after the hon. Gentleman’s question was written—it is important that we gather all the facts. Sadly, 1,700-plus people died on all our roads in 2018. Motorways are the safest of those roads, but the question is: are smart motorways less safe than the rest of the motorway network? For me, we must make them at least as safe, if not safer, otherwise they cannot continue. But we have to do this as a fact-based process. I am interested, rightly, in speaking to the families of the victims as well as to organisations such as the AA and the RAC and to Members of this House. Forgive me, it does take time to do this correctly, but I do not think the hon. Gentleman will be disappointed with the results.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I should like to join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for the way in which she has chaired the Transport Committee over the past two years. She has done so with great fairness, and she probed with great diligence as well. I want to give her my thanks for that, and she is also a wonderful friend.

When it comes to road safety, there is great concern that school safety is at risk. Would it be possible to set up a programme of investment so that the most dangerous schools can get the necessary technology and 20 mph speed limits put in place? That would also encourage the use of walking buses.

Grant Shapps: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as Chair of the Select Committee. Yes, I agree with him about working with schools. One point that is often forgotten is that local authorities already have the power to reduce speed limits, for example to 20 mph. I look forward to working with him as Chair of the Committee.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the stretch of the M20 that runs through my constituency is due to open as an all-lane-running motorway in March, but it does not have stopped vehicle detection systems or appropriately spaced emergency refuges. I appreciate that it will be frustrating for those using it to continue to have cones and low speed limits, but does he agree that, given the concerns about safety on all-lane-running motorways, it should not open until all those measures have been put in place?

Grant Shapps: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has campaigned on this issue for a long time. That stretch of the M20, and all other stretches that are currently being worked on, will not be opened until we have the outcome of the stocktake.

Transport Investment: Regional Disparities

2. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce regional disparities in transport investment. [900501]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): We have made clear our ambition to level up opportunity across the country, including through more investment in transport infrastructure.

Afzal Khan: The removal of Northern's rail franchise is long overdue, but that alone will not fix the systematic problems of poor infrastructure and lacklustre investment that cripple our rail network. Northerners are frequently promised investment for new infrastructure projects, but it is rarely delivered. We were promised new platforms at Manchester Piccadilly way back in 2014 as part of George Osborne's northern hub, but the money has never materialised. When can we expect the platforms to be built, so that passengers are no longer left waiting hours for trains that never turn up?

Grant Shapps: We are spending £48 billion on rail over the next five years, not including Northern Powerhouse Rail. We are spending £13 billion just in the north and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, I made a significant intervention on the Northern franchise yesterday. That level of investment will continue, and a figure that has not been exposed enough is that £333 per person is spent in the north-west, which compares with £183 per person in London. This Government are more committed to the northern powerhouse, the rail network and the transport network than any before.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The news about Northern proves that the current system is simply not fit for purpose and highlights yet again the chronic lack of investment in the transport infrastructure of the regions of England. Transport for the North has said that £70 billion is needed for the required improvements, yet regions outside London have averaged a third of London's public transport spend per capita over the past five years. Does the Secretary of State not see the sheer scale of investment required and therefore accept that gimmicks such as the £500 million announced this week will simply not cut it?

Grant Shapps: We have heard several Opposition Members claim that the half a billion pounds on Beeching announced the day before yesterday is somehow just a drop in the ocean and does not matter. Only the Opposition could think that half a billion pounds is not very much money these days. We are absolutely investing in all the other areas. An IPPR North report claimed that there was much less investment in them, but I have figures that challenge that.

Gavin Newlands: I would love to hear those figures, because the maths simply does not add up. The RMT described the money as a drop in the ocean, and it

is right. The Scottish Government have invested in modernisation and electrification schemes, completing them without cancellation, on the Aberdeen-Inverness and Edinburgh-Glasgow lines, the Paisley corridor and many other routes, and we reopened the hugely successful Borders railway. Does the Secretary of State not see that that level of ambition is needed to modernise the rail network? If the Government match that ambition, then through consequential funding Scotland could build the rail network of the future and decarbonise even quicker than our 15-year target.

Grant Shapps: We share the same ambition, and I hope the hon. Gentleman will join us in welcoming the Williams rail review which, among other things, will do so much to devolve more power to local communities.

18. [900519] **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): Historically, one of the greatest areas of disparity is between our cities and our regional seaside towns, such as Southport. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reopening of the Burscough curves line would not only give Southport rail users greater access to the network, but contribute significantly to our tourist and retail economies?

Grant Shapps: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend and pay tribute to him for his doughty campaigning for the reopening of that line. Members across the House should have received a letter inviting them to a Beeching event here in the House on 4 February at which they can find out how to apply for schemes in their constituencies.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): My constituency has no rail line or dual carriageway. Does my right hon. Friend recognise the challenges facing communities such as mine, and will he support my campaign for better local bus services and a feasibility study into reopening the rail line from Consett to Newcastle?

Grant Shapps: I was delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency to see that railway line. I absolutely support his ambition and look forward to seeing him at the Beeching meeting on 4 February.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): One way of addressing regional disparity in transport investment might be to continue with High Speed 2, so will the Secretary of State join the Chancellor in supporting the continuation of that project when he meets the Prime Minister later today?

Grant Shapps: It has taken seven minutes for the subject to be raised. I do not wish to disappoint my hon. Friend, but he will not have to wait very long. We will make an announcement next month.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the pre-announcement of the HS2 commitment, but our local services are important. Funds are being developed for a tram link from Bury to Middleton, and hopefully through to Oldham, but we need to connect the whole north-east of Greater Manchester. Will the Secretary of State commit to a meeting, at least, to discuss a link from Oldham to Ashton?

Grant Shapps: I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman. He may recall that I came up to his neck of the words during the election campaign and pledged that, through the local funding approach to transport, we will help to empower local communities in such decisions.

Road Network: England

3. **Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve the road network in England. [900503]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The Government have invested £17.6 billion in England's strategic road network since 2015, and we intend to invest a further £25.3 billion over the next five years.

Mark Jenkinson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his promises on road investment across England. In my constituency of Workington, we are waiting for a start date for the planned roundabout on the notoriously dangerous staggered junction on the A66 at Brigham and Broughton. Does he have an update on the proposed start date for those improvements?

Grant Shapps: I will never forget my recent visit to the site of that roundabout with my hon. Friend, and I look forward to it being taken forward as part of road investment strategy 2, which is to be announced shortly.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The Conservative manifesto made strong statements about improving cycling and walking on our road network, but it committed only £350 million. That is not new money; it is money that the Conservatives promised given that other cycling infrastructure funds have now come to an end. What will the Secretary of State do seriously to improve safety and to encourage more people to cycle and walk?

Grant Shapps: Like the hon. Lady, I support the ambition for more cycling. That £350 million is in addition to the existing funding, and I think she will be pleased to back our manifesto commitment to make cycling proficiency, or Bikeability, available to every child in England.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Can the Secretary of State advise me of when the development consent order decision on the Lowestoft third crossing will be announced? This was due on 6 December, and it was understandably postponed due to the general election campaign, but we are now eight weeks further on and a statement from him would be appreciated.

Grant Shapps: I need to be cautious—it is going through due process, and I will contact my hon. Friend to give him a bit more detail.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): After a campaign of over 50 years and quite a lot of lobbying from me and my predecessors as MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, and indeed from successive Members for High Peak, the development consent order for the Mottram bypass is due this year. The Department has confirmed to me in writing that it will still do this bypass as part of the trans-Pennine upgrade programme. Anyone who has ever driven from Manchester to Sheffield has been stuck in my constituency, and this is a big

chance to get it right, but the project has slipped so often that people are understandably sceptical. Will the Secretary of State recommit to the programme at the Dispatch Box and perhaps meet me to talk about how we can make sure the project happens this year?

Grant Shapps: I am delighted to help everybody travel through and beyond the hon. Gentleman's constituency as quickly as possible. I would be happy to meet him or, probably more helpfully, to ask the Roads Minister to do so.

Bus Services: Staffordshire

4. **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve bus services in (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and (b) north Staffordshire. [900504]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Buses are at the heart of the Government's transformative agenda and, with that, we have a new £220 million fund to make sure buses are working across our urban and rural areas. We are putting together the UK's first long-term bus strategy.

Aaron Bell: Newcastle-under-Lyme is one of the largest towns in England without a train station. We also suffer from very heavy congestion on the roads into Stoke-on-Trent. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that Newcastle-under-Lyme, and north Staffordshire more widely, should be at the front of the queue for a new Superbus funding settlement?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend has made a stellar pitch for the new Superbus fund both today and previously in a Westminster Hall debate. It would be remiss of me to say anything at the moment. All the proposals are being assessed, and I assure him that the announcement will be made very soon.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The Government have quite clearly failed on buses. They have cut funding by 45% since 2010, and passenger numbers have plummeted. In contrast, the few remaining municipal bus companies run by Labour councils have both low fares and rising passenger numbers. When will the Minister allow councils to bring buses back into public ownership to provide the quality of service to passengers that local people desperately need?

Ms Ghani: It is a shame that the hon. Member is always running down buses and does not even speak about the network in his constituency, where bus patronage is going up. We have just committed a further £220 million. Furthermore, on the request of the Transport Committee and a number of people lobbying for the very same thing that we have wanted for so long, we have committed to a long-term bus strategy.

Rail Connectivity: Burnley

5. **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve rail connectivity in Burnley constituency. [900505]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Work is nearing completion to assess the potential role of a reopened Skipton to Colne rail line to deliver real benefits for passengers in east Lancashire, freight users and the local economy. That is to name but one scheme.

Antony Higginbotham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and for yesterday's announcement on Northern rail. The reopening of the Todmorden curve in 2015 had a hugely positive impact on my constituency, providing a direct train service to Manchester once an hour. What support can his Department give me as I look at a business case to increase the frequency of that service?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is already proving that he is going to be a strong voice for Burnley in this place, making sure that Burnley will always be heard. The best thing is probably for he and I to meet in the short-term, because there are plenty of ways in which we can help develop transport for Burnley.

Railway Stations: Accessibility

6. Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that railway stations are fully accessible. [900506]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): As part of our inclusive transport strategy, we have put together a £300 million fund to improve access at our railway stations.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Minister for that answer. She and I have met before and she has been incredibly helpful, but I am getting frustrated now. I know she will not be surprised to hear that I am referring to Lawrence Hill station in my constituency, which has been waiting such a long time; I know there are funds and application processes, but is it not time the Government admitted that all stations, which people need to use, should be accessible and just got on with making them all accessible?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Lady will know that most of our railway stations were built in an era when no thought was given to accessibility, let alone to parents and people with wheelchairs. That is why we have a £300 million fund, which is supporting over 73 stations, and another tier of £20 million for smaller upgrades. I know that there are two stations in her constituency in the review, and she will not have to be patient for much longer.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Will the Minister urge Network Rail to get on with the level access improvements at Alfreton station and urge East Midlands Railway to scrap its plans to end the direct train services to London from my constituency, which would make it harder for disabled passengers to get to stations south of Nottingham?

Ms Ghani: I am a little cautious about the second point, but I will most definitely do what my hon. Friend asks on the first. Network Rail has a duty to make sure its stations have decent accessibility, and where there is

no accessibility, the rail operating companies have a duty to make sure passengers can carry on with their journey.

Southeastern

7. Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What recent discussions his Department has had with Southeastern on the adequacy of its rail services. [900507]

19. Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the future of the Southeastern rail franchise; and if he will make a statement. [900521]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): Southeastern's performance has been strong—much improved—and remained relatively stable over the last year. Southeastern is subject to several contractual performance benchmarks as part of its franchise agreement, and the Department monitors those closely.

Matthew Pennycook: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know that reliability is still a problem on the line and that for many years I have pressed his Department to hand responsibility for Southeastern services to Transport for London to ensure that passengers in my constituency get the high standard of service that those who use London Underground receive. I know that his immediate priority will be dealing with the franchise expiring on 1 April, but may I ask him and his officials, particularly in the light of positive developments in relation to Great Northern services, to step up conversations with the Mayor of London and TfL about the possibility of rail devolution in south-east London?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his supplementary question. We have met and spoken about this issue in the past. He will know that I am completely focused on making sure that that franchise works and on whatever might happen on 1 April, but I am interested to hear the proposals going forward for the devolution of certain areas of Southeastern's franchise.

Clive Efford: I thank the Minister for that answer, because it opens the door to some hope and to getting some resolution on the future of this franchise. Our constituents have long suffered delays, and despite what he says about performance having improved, over a long period it has not been adequate. We had a constructive meeting, but will there be another meeting with the local MPs to discuss the future of this franchise?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes, I would be delighted to meet again to press ahead on this agenda. Obviously business cases and a host of other details need to be worked up with TfL, but I met Heidi Alexander, its deputy chairman, earlier this week and we had a conversation on the matter then.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): Angry and frustrated passengers in the south-east and elsewhere will have been delighted to hear the Secretary of State say that rail franchising is not working anymore, but will the Minister confirm that swapping the uncaring private sector monopolies of franchising for the equally

uncaring state monopoly of renationalisation will not help overcrowded or stranded passengers one bit? Will he accept that we need a new and third option in which passengers can choose between lots of different provider services on their line each day and switch to whichever one they like best, in the same way as they choose different brands of coffee or cornflakes instead of taking whatever they are given?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I hear what my hon. Friend says. There is an argument for open access on our railways. The Williams review, which will report in the near future, will provide an opportunity to debate the issue at quite some length. I very much look forward to having that debate with my hon. Friend because he has some positive ideas.

15. [900515] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should extend contactless payment throughout the south-east, and perhaps even out to the coastline of Clacton?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Yeah, why not?

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): If the Minister is prepared genuinely to think about rail devolution, will he think not just about Southeastern but about West Midlands trains as well? Some 40% of trains were not on time last month and 2,000 services were cancelled. The police and crime commissioner has had to convene hearings because the Mayor has failed to get a grip. It is not an acceptable standard of service. We want local rail devolution and we want it now.

Mr Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, the question is on Southeastern railways and is not really connected to Birmingham. If the Minister could pick something out that would address that, I would be grateful.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I must say that Andy Street is an excellent Mayor for Birmingham and I hope he is re-elected.

Rail Infrastructure

8. **Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve rail infrastructure in (a) the Castlefield corridor and (b) West Yorkshire. [900508]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): My Department is working closely with Network Rail, train operators and stakeholders to develop options for improving rail capacity and performance on the Castlefield corridor in Manchester. We completely understand that sorting out the capacity there is so important.

Chris Clarkson: I thank the Minister for that answer. The national railway network barely grazes my constituency, and Metrolink avoids it altogether. Does he agree that an extension of Metrolink and the welcome reversals of the Beeching cuts will be an important part of levelling-up the forgotten towns in the north-west such as Heywood and Middleton?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I welcome my hon. Friend to his seat. As a strong representative of Heywood and Middleton, he will be pleased to hear that we are very supportive of measures to improve public transport in large urban areas such as Greater Manchester, which is why we have provided £312.5 million to the Mayor through the transforming cities fund and agreed, through the mayoral devolution deal, an earn-back mechanism that supported the construction of the latest Metrolink extension to Trafford. We will continue to do further work in that field and hopefully extend Metrolink towards my hon. Friend's constituency.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): From Castlefield to Castleford. In West Yorkshire we are grateful that the Government have finally sacked Northern Rail, but we do need investment in our northern infrastructure as well. Will the Minister push for the Department's plans to include definitive plans for tackling disabled access? I have been raising for a long time the serious lack of disabled access at Pontefract Monkhill and Knottingley. It causes huge problems for parents with buggies, as well as for those in wheelchairs, and they cannot even get on the delayed or cancelled trains.

Chris Heaton-Harris: There is a fund for improving these things, but the right hon. Lady is absolutely right that accessibility on our railways is nowhere near as good as it should be in this day and age. We are trying to do much more with the train operating companies and Network Rail. I think she will be pleased to see what is said about accessibility in the Williams review White Paper when it comes forward.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): If the Government were to scrap HS2, which everybody knows is a catastrophic waste of money, we would have a huge amount available for more rail infrastructure in West Yorkshire and across the north—we need better infrastructure in the north and across the north. Northern Powerhouse Rail, or HS3, is much more important to us than HS2. What is the Government's intended timetable for the completion of Northern Powerhouse Rail? Can the Minister guarantee that Bradford will have a city-centre stop on that route?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The Government are spending a huge amount of money on improving the infrastructure in the north. My hon. Friend will see lots of improvements in the Bradford area and the area he represents. On HS2 and the various other bits of infrastructure, it is not an either/or: they are additional investments that we are making in infrastructure.

Crossrail Delays

9. **Sam Tarry** (Ilford South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the financial effect on people living in London of delays in Crossrail. [R] [900509]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): No recent assessment has been made of the financial effect on individuals as a result of the delays to Crossrail.

Sam Tarry: I thank the Minister for his answer. I wish quickly to bring the House's attention to my declaration of interests. With four Crossrail stations in Ilford South

and the huge economic growth potential not just across Ilford but across the whole of London, does the Minister agree that it was utterly mad to get rid of the operating grant of £900 million year on year that has crippled Transport for London? In fact, this is an example not just of another failed project by the Department for Transport, but of a Government in crisis over the delivery of any infrastructure project. Will he commit to restoring that grant and restoring London—

Mr Speaker: Too long!

Paul Maynard: We should be a little cautious as the Department co-sponsors projects with TfL and works very closely with the Mayor of London, with TfL and with Heidi Alexander, who are very keen to see this project brought to a speedy conclusion for the benefit of all Londoners.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): We also need to examine the role of the Mayor and chairman of TfL, Sadiq Khan, in this. In his just four years in the role, Crossrail has been delayed by three years. Does the Minister agree that the Mayor's incompetent handling of TfL's finances has exacerbated this terrible delay, and that it is time for new leadership in London under Shaun Bailey as London Mayor?

Paul Maynard: I rather think that we will be having a lot of back and forth across this Chamber in the months to come with various mayoral contests. It is safe to say that on these Benches we are very keen to see Shaun Bailey as Mayor.

Oxford-Cambridge Expressway

10. **Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of proposals for an Oxford-Cambridge expressway. [900510]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): The Government are completely committed to the east-west innovation corridor, the arc, and the Varsity line—one of the most exciting pieces of corridor infrastructure in the country. We are committed to the rail link, and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced, we are looking closely at the business and sustainability case of the expressway.

Anneliese Dodds: I was pleased to hear the Minister reconfirm that a review will take place. Of course, that was finally agreed to in the heat of the election campaign, perhaps because of concerns that were heard about the expressway. It would be very helpful to understand the parameters of that review: when will it be taking place; who will be involved; and will local authorities and groups such as the No Expressway Group be invited? We really need to know about this if that promise of a review is to be a reality.

George Freeman: I am delighted to say that we are listening to all the representations that we have received. There will be an announcement coming very shortly. Let me reiterate that this is about our commitment to sustainable and integrated public transport with housing. That corridor is a vital housing and growth corridor and we want to make sure that it is sustainable transport that works for the benefit of the people who live there.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): On infrastructure and paying in, we in Iver in Beaconsfield receive very little money for transport infrastructure. We would love to see our footpaths and our roads used, but we simply do not have the money coming in from bodies such as TfL. Will the Minister look into expanding investment in places like Iver, so that we can have an Iver relief road and actually get the south of Bucks moving again?

Mr Speaker: May I advise Members that their questions should be linked to the main question? If a certain area is specified, your questions are meant to be about that area. You cannot just have a free for all. Minister, if you can pick something out of that, please do so.

George Freeman: At a stretch, Mr Speaker, I think that Buckinghamshire touches the east-west corridor. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to look at a place-based solution for sustainable housing and transport.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Martin Tugwell of England's Economic Heartland sub-national transport body described the expressway as a 20th century solution to a 21st century challenge. Is it not absolutely clear that the real answer is a public railway, an electrified railway, with an interchange with HS2?

George Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is bowling outside my off stump, but he knows that we are deeply committed to rail, to connectivity, and to sustainable transport. I cannot pre-empt the Secretary of State's announcement on the expressway, but let me be very clear: we are committed to sustainable integration of housing with public transport, and that rail link is an absolute priority.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): My constituents were very relieved when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Verney Junction during the general election and said that there would be a priority review of the expressway. He gave a commitment that were the expressway to be cancelled, funds would be made available for improvements to existing roads. Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that, should it be cancelled, those funds will be available?

George Freeman: I am delighted to give an assurance that, were the expressway to be cancelled, we would absolutely recognise that significant investment in other and even more important road links in that corridor would be needed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

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

Foot and Bicycle Journeys

11. **Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of journeys taken by (a) foot and (b) bicycle. [900511]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): As the Minister for the future of transport, I am committed both to creating a framework for UK leadership in transport technology and innovation and

to bolder measures for place-based cleaner, greener and healthier transport and decarbonisation. I am delighted that, as a result of the £2 billion that we invested during the previous Parliament, we have seen a 13% increase in cycling and walking, and we are committed to a 100% increase over this Parliament.¹

Feryl Clark: The Minister will be aware that transport accounts for a higher share of overall emissions than any other sector, so helping people to drive less and cycle more is crucial to tackling the climate crisis. We currently spent £7 per head on cycling infrastructure, but the Walking and Cycling Alliance recommends that we should be spending £17 per head on cycling infrastructure if we are serious about improving cycling. He will be aware that the Conservatives' pledge to spend £350 million on cycling infrastructure actually reduced that spend to £1.18—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the Minister.

George Freeman: As the new Minister for the decarbonisation of transport, I can say that the Government are absolutely committed to this, and we have a cycling Prime Minister who is committed to it. We have announced £350 million for cycling infrastructure. As I have said, we are completely committed over this Parliament to doubling the number of people cycling and walking.²

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Walking and cycling have a vital role to play in easing congestion, cutting carbon emissions and helping people lead healthier lives, yet cycling and walking rates are flatlining in this country, and we are a very long way from Dutch or Danish rates. Interestingly, a report from University College London has criticised the Government for approving new housing developments that are dominated by roads and do not take account of pedestrians or cyclists. It found, quite simply, that three quarters of developments should not have been given planning permission because of the lack of safe cycling and walking routes. When will the Government address this important issue?

George Freeman: Right now—we already are addressing it. We are quite a long way from Denmark in all respects, but we are completely committed to this. It is true that for decades this country has not put cycling and walking at the heart of housing development—that was as true under the Labour Government as it has been over the past 40 years. We are committed to it, through the work we are doing with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with the housing infrastructure fund and our new single housing infrastructure fund. I am talking to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government about how we can ensure that every housing development has proper cycling, walking and public transport integration. If we are to achieve our decarbonisation targets, we have to do this.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Cycling is extremely popular in my constituency of Ynys Môn, with its 125 miles of stunning coastline and unspoilt countryside. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are committed to doubling cycling by 2025, and what difference does he think the £350 million cycling infrastructure fund will make in achieving that?

George Freeman: My hon. Friend is a brilliant advocate for Ynys Môn. I can confirm that commitment, and she is right that it will have a big impact on cycling and walking.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Very complementary to cycling and walking are electric scooters, which are increasingly popular and commonplace in cities across the continent—they have just been legalised in Germany—yet they remain illegal in this country. Can we at last have a review to regularise the situation, because they are environmentally friendly and could make a huge contribution to reducing congestion, and it is a hip and cool thing to do?

George Freeman: Again, I seem to be a purveyor of good news. My hon. Friend will be delighted to know that as part of our innovation strategy we will shortly be announcing that we want to test scooters as part of a mixed economy for sustainable transport.

Train Fares

12. **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to reform the regulation of fares to encourage more people to travel by train. [900512]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): The Government have frozen regulated rail fares in line with inflation for the seventh year in a row. In addition, we have already cut costs for thousands of young people with the 16-to-17 saver railcard and announced a new railcard for veterans, which is to be launched later this year. All those measures help encourage people to travel more by train.

Peter Kyle: It has been two and a half years since the Gibb review of the main line between London and Brighton, which stated that there are three rail fare structures for one line. It is really simple: get rid of two of them and stick to the Thameslink fare, which is the cheapest. The Minister does not need another review, because there have been many already. Can he just get to his feet and give a commitment that that is exactly what he will do?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I can get to my feet and commit the Government to simplifying rail fares in the very near term.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to wish the entire House a belated happy rail nationalisation day for yesterday?

Earlier this month, UK rail passengers were hit with yet another above-inflation fare rise. Fares are now up by 40% since 2010, having risen at twice the rate of wages. In contrast, fares in Germany were cut by 10% at the start of this year to encourage more people to travel by train in order to cut emissions. Of course, Labour pledged to reduce fares by 33%. Should the British Government not follow the example of our European friends and consider a fare cut to boost rail travel, rather than imposing yet another fare hike?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The Government cap around 45% of all rail fares, including most season tickets, to protect passengers who rely on the railway from high

1.[*Official Report*, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

2.[*Official Report*, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

fares. Of every £1 spent on fares, 98p goes back into our railways. That is an investment in the railways; they are actually not bad value for money.

Andy McDonald: That is a curious interpretation of the experience of British rail passengers. The Transport Secretary will know that fuel duty has been frozen since 2010 at the cost of more than £50 billion, and he will be aware that air passenger duty has been broadly frozen over a similar period, with the cut likely to come in the Budget. He may also appreciate that rail and bus fares have increased by more than a third in a decade. Does the Minister agree that tax breaks for cars and aviation over public transport is the right approach to meet the climate crisis challenge?

Chris Heaton-Harris: We have a very ambitious transport decarbonisation plan and we want to do better, as the Minister for the future of transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), has outlined already—so yes, we do think we have the right approach to decarbonise transport by 2050.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Many of my constituents in Hinckley and Bosworth are often confused and frustrated by the rail ticketing system, and no doubt many people in the rest of the country are too. I wonder if the Minister would agree that simplifying rail tickets by moving away from splitting fares, or super off-peak and off-peak tickets, may well make things better and make people more likely to consider travelling by rail?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a near neighbour of mine, for his excellent question. We are currently trialling a new, simpler fares structure with London North Eastern Railway, and will use the findings to inform the development of wider plans to improve fares. This will be a big part of the Williams review White Paper that will be published shortly.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): One aspect of fare regulation that I invite the Minister to consider is compensation arrangements for cancellations and delays, particularly on commuter services, where the sums involved for the individual journey are small, but the cumulative effect of poor services is significant for those passengers. Will the Minister suggest some ways in which commuters can not only hope to see their trains arrive on time, but easily claim compensation when they do not?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The obvious way to get around this problem is to ensure that trains actually arrive on time. That is the ultimate aim of all that we do in this area at the Department for Transport. We have rolled out the Delay Repay scheme across the vast majority of the network, and it is working. However, we are going to spend £48 billion over the course of the next five years to try to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to make the trains run on time. That has to be the ultimate goal.

Decarbonising Transport

13. **Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to decarbonise the transport sector. [900513]

1. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

2. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Now that so much energy—over half of it, last year—is being produced on a renewable basis, it is essential that transport reduces its greenhouse gas emissions, as it accounts for about a third of total emissions.

Mr Goodwill: We have seen great progress in battery technology for light vehicles, but decarbonising road freight is going to be a much more difficult nut to crack. Does the Secretary of State think that we need to look at options such as hydrogen technology for trucks, or even freeing up space on our rail network by building HS2?

Grant Shapps: Let me be drawn on the first part of that question, if I may. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Hydrogen technology is very important for heavier vehicles and potentially for trains, whereas it is battery technology for cars. We are working on and funding both.

21. [900523] **Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank the Secretary of State for listening to my call last July and bringing Northern Rail back into public ownership from 1 March. When the trains do arrive on the Harrogate line through my constituency, they are dirty diesel trains. Will he commit to electrifying the Harrogate line so that we can have carbon-neutral travel?

Grant Shapps: On the hon. Gentleman's specific point, I have asked the operator of last resort to do a deep clean of all the trains from 1 March, and that there should be a proper schedule in place and they are cleaned. It is disgraceful that they should ever be turning up dirty in the first place. There are also new trains coming on to the network. As part of yesterday's announcement, next year trains will be brought up from elsewhere on to the network as well.

Topical Questions

T1. [900526] **Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): I am pleased to confirm that today the Government will announce the preferred route for the Bedford to Cambridge section of East West Rail. Following public consultation, we have accepted the East West Rail Company's recommendation that route E, which runs from Bedford Midland—a new station between Sandy and St Neots—to a new station at Cambourne and through to Cambridge, will be taken forward to the next stage of development.

Anthony Browne: All five proposed routes for East West Rail pass through my constituency. South Cambridgeshire has a town, Cambourne, that is so gridlocked that in rush hour, although it is only 10 miles from Cambridge, it can take people an hour to get to work. Will the Secretary of State support the East West Rail route going through Cambourne so that we can get South Cambs moving again?

Grant Shapps: I have visited Cambourne, and the answer is simply yes.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): We have a real problem with predatory capitalist shipping companies using flags of convenience to get round British maritime rules. This encourages dangerous work patterns and it is costing British seafarer jobs. Some of the worst offenders are P&O Ferries, paying £1.83 an hour on Bahamas-flagged vessels between Hull and the continent; P&O's Norbay, a Bermuda-flagged vessel between Liverpool and Dublin, paying less than four quid an hour; and Irish Ferries' Cyprus-flagged vessels between Holyhead and Dublin, paying £4.66 an hour. When will the Minister make sure that Britain has the maritime workforce it needs and deserves? Will she meet me and the general secretary of the RMT, Mick Cash, to discuss what we do to sort this mess out?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am aware of this case; it was brought to my attention. The hon. Gentleman will know that I regularly meet up with Mick Cash. I am due to meet him quite shortly. I have raised the case with the UK Chamber of Shipping. The hon. Gentleman will know, as he represents a port constituency, that last year we signed ILO 188, a convention that ensures the rights of seafarers—everything about their basic needs, whether it is the time they should be sleeping, where their sleeping spaces should be, mealtimes, or decent pay. There are some contradictions between the cases that he presented and what the UK Chamber of Shipping is putting forward, so I suggest, if he finds it appropriate, that we sit down with the chamber and P&O to thrash this out.

T5. [900530] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): When the Secretary of State meets the Prime Minister and the Chancellor later to discuss HS2, will he stress that it is of course all about capacity, but also that it is not either/or, because as well as HS2, we need the TransPennine upgrade, Northern Powerhouse Rail, a direct Huddersfield to London service, and an upgrade to the Huddersfield-Penistone-Sheffield line? This would show this Government's real, true commitment to levelling up our country and our economy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): Like any good northerner, I read my newspapers from the sports pages backwards, so I have not got to the HS2 stories yet and cannot really comment on what they might include. We need a drumbeat of improvement across the north in our rail investment, starting with the TransPennine rail upgrade, moving on to Northern Powerhouse Rail, and then who knows what next?

T2. [900527] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I would also like to wish the Minister a happy rail nationalisation day. I was rather anticipating a statement on it today, but I thank him for the letter that was sent giving some details. In preparation for the handover in March, will he look at capacity issues? All too often, the line is overcrowded, and trains have only two carriages, particularly on the Durham Coast line through my constituency. When I contact Northern Rail, it says that it simply does not have the carriages. Can we please ensure that we invest in the necessary rolling stock to provide people with the service they need?

1. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

2. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. There is a huge amount of new rolling stock coming on to the Northern network, which will take off all the Pacers by the end of May. However, I would be delighted to meet him to talk about those issues, because there is a job of work to be done.

T8. [900534] **Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): A number of my constituents in rural areas of Rushcliffe have difficulty getting buses to towns such as Melton and Loughborough. I am pleased that the Government announced a £20 million fund to trial on-demand bus services in rural areas last year. Can my hon. Friend update me on the timetable for making that funding available and how communities can apply?

Ms Ghani: Absolutely. We are investing £220 million to ensure that we have much better bus services in our urban and rural areas. Like my hon. Friend, I represent a rural constituency. We have set aside £20 million for demand-responsive buses. I believe that an announcement will be made next month, which is just a few days away. In the meantime, I suggest that she look at organisations such as Arriva, which is providing fantastic demand-responsive buses, so that her community knows what sort of pitch to put in.

T3. [900528] **Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The recently leaked Network Rail paper, which showed that the alternative to HS2 was 29 years of weekend closures and interminable delays, should be all that we need to know why we must get on with HS2. Will the Government not only commit to it but get control of the MPs who are constantly undermining this country's most important infrastructure project?

Grant Shapps: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not think that MPs who represent their constituents, whichever side of the debate they are on, are somehow undermining democracy—quite the opposite, in fact. This is the biggest infrastructure decision that this country has ever made and the biggest in Europe. It is quite right that it is properly and carefully considered, using not only that Network Rail evidence but everything else. The good news is that he will not have to wait too long.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome the fresh new approach of this Front-Bench team. Given the importance of sustainable transport and sustainable housing, do Ministers agree that building low-density housing on greenfield sites is bad for sustainable transport, bad for sustainable housing and bad for our environment, because it is so car-dependent, which is why so many of our constituents object?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): I commend my hon. Friend on that point and his "Island Manifesto", in which he makes that point. We are working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that we move the dial on much better integration of cycling, walking and public transport in new housing.

T6. [900531] **Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): Many of my constituents have been affected by the redesign of airspace, as many live below the flightpaths in and out

of London Luton airport. The Civil Aviation Authority promised a post-implementation review of the changes, and the review of one such route is now overdue by more than two years. What assessment has the Minister made of whether the Civil Aviation Authority is fit for purpose and adequately resourced, and will he meet me and St Albans campaigners to discuss residents' concerns?

Paul Maynard: I met the hon. Lady's predecessor, Anne Main, and local constituents just before the election. I am well aware that the PIR is overdue and I am very keen for the CAA to get on with it. I am happy to meet her.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): Yesterday, Highways England published the latest plans for the proposed lower Thames crossing. In that set of plans, the proposal for a Tilbury junction, which would divert HGVs from my constituency road network, has been removed. Does the Minister agree that, if we are going to get a road that the community does not want, it is incumbent on Highways England to ensure that it works for us?

George Freeman: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I would be delighted to meet her and the roads Minister, Baroness Vere, who is in the Gallery.

T7. [900533] **Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Given that nearly three years have passed since the all-party parliamentary group on taxis laid out the case for reform of legislation governing the taxi and private hire industry, and a year has passed since the Government accepted that case, when can we finally expect them to legislate for the reform we need?

Ms Ghani: I know that the hon. Member has been working incredibly hard, along with members of the Transport Committee. We put together a task and finish group to ensure that taxi services up and down the country are far more equal in their service, while providing security and safety for passengers. We will be issuing statutory taxi and private hire standards shortly. Having had many conversations with the hon. Member, I think he can be quite confident that most of the issues raised will be addressed.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): Owing to the hard work of Andy Street and this Government, work is well under way to bring the west midlands metro line to the black country. How can the Government further help to extend that line to the jewel in the crown of the urban west midlands, which so happens to be my constituency?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She is obviously going to be a doughty campaigner for Stourbridge. This Government have worked to make sure that progress continues. We have devolved £321.5 million to the excellent Mayor, Andy Street, in the West Midlands Combined Authority, as part of the £2.5 billion transforming cities fund, of which £207 million has been allocated to fund this extension.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I of course welcome any review of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, but my constituents are worried that it is

going to lead to more delays to improvements on the A34, in particular safety improvements and work on the Lodge Hill junction, which I understand is further delayed. Can the Minister reassure my constituents that there is no way any dither and delay on the Oxford to Cambridge expressway will affect improvements to the A34?

George Freeman: Yes.

James Grundy (Leigh) (Con): Many of my constituents have been waiting for decades to be reconnected to the Liverpool-Manchester line. Will the Minister meet me to discuss restoring Leigh to the national rail network?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): My residents in Erith and Thamesmead deserve decent transport. I share the concerns raised by neighbouring colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Eltham (Clive Efford) and for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), about the adequacy of Southeastern services, and I also welcome the earlier answer from the Minister of State, Department for Transport, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris). However, what my constituents want to know is when TfL will take over the franchise to start delivering decent services. When is that date, Mr Minister?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I hate to disappoint the hon. Lady in her first Transport questions, but a whole bunch of conversations need to take place first, including the working up of a detailed business plan. We are working with TfL on these matters—there is no blockage in the system—but these things do take time. I am afraid that I have to disappoint the hon. Lady and not give her a date at this point.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I have been working with Hertfordshire County Council on plans to improve accessibility to Hitchin station in my constituency. Will the Minister advise me on how best to work with Network Rail and the Department to progress this? We think it will cost £3 million to £4 million.

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend is probably one of the busiest correspondents with my Department. I will happily meet him—again—to talk about this matter, because it is of vital importance.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Our ancient woodlands and veteran trees, such as in Prior park in my constituency of Bath, are irreplaceable habitats and areas of beauty. What efforts are being made to avoid the destruction of ancient woodlands and chalk streams in the construction of HS2?

Paul Maynard: As the hon. Member will know, we paused any clearance of ancient woodlands during the course of the Oakervee review, and that remains the case. I regularly meet the Woodland Trust—its arboricultural expertise will always far exceed mine—and I listen to it very carefully.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Commuters from my constituency too often experience delays, so I welcome the Williams review, but evidence shows that

1.[Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

2.[Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

the vast bulk of the problems are caused by Network Rail. Will my right hon. Friend commit to a complete review of Network Rail's performance and of solutions, including its possible break-up into regional companies?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the railways are too fragmented. They are not, as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) suggested, being renationalised, but we do want to simplify the operation of our railways. Network Rail is just one of the dozens and dozens of companies involved, and it leads to an impossible fragmentation that means solving problems is just too difficult. So, yes, that is absolutely what we will commit to with Network Rail.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): As a long-time campaigner for the line to Fleetwood to be reopened, I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State was in Poulton-le-Fylde this week, announcing £100,000 for a feasibility study into the line. However, I was concerned that he said in his speech that one of the reasons why we are at the front of the queue is that we have all the stations on the line already. Of course, we do not; we do not have a station in Fleetwood. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the line will be reopened all the way to Fleetwood?

Paul Maynard: As the hon. Member will know, the feasibility study will look at all options for Fleetwood to Poulton. I recognise the point she makes about Fleetwood, but I am sure she will join me in praising the work of the Poulton & Wyre Railway Society, which has been campaigning for this since long before either she or I were anywhere near the political scene.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): Is it not true that the Government can remain committed to the delivery of high-speed rail, but deliver it better than with a project that, at the moment at least, will cost roughly double what its perpetrators say it would cost, and the route of which is designed only for speed although its justification is about capacity? Do not the substantial delays in the delivery of HS2 weaken fatally the arguments against taking the time to find a better way to deliver high-speed rail?

Paul Maynard: My right hon. and learned Friend always makes interesting comments about HS2, but I listen to Radio 2 in the morning, and that was not covered in its news bulletin.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State believe that the Secretary of State for Scotland taking an RAF flight from Cardiff to London is helpful in decarbonising the transport sector?

Chris Heaton-Harris: This is cheap political point scoring. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Scotland is one of the best Secretaries of State that Scotland has ever seen, and he strengthens the Union with every action he takes.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of the implications of his announcement a few minutes ago about the preferred route of East West Rail for housing growth in the east of my constituency. Will his Department commit to looking once again at realignment of the A1?

George Freeman: My hon. Friend has been active in making representations on this issue, which we hear loud and clear. Following the announcement, I look forward to talking to him, to councils, and to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, about the proper integration of housing, rail, and the A1 junction.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), I am a little surprised that the Secretary of State did not make a statement about taking back Northern rail into public ownership. It only affects in excess of 15 million people, so it cannot be that important and need a statement from the Secretary of State! The new publicly owned railway will have the same problems of poor infrastructure across the north. We need significant new investment—when will it come?

Grant Shapps: I was trying to get an agreement from those who manage the business on the Opposition Benches for me to make an oral statement during yesterday's Opposition day debate. That is why there was no oral statement—I wanted to make one, but I did not get a response, and that is why I was unable to. Investment will now flow through from the decision made yesterday, and through the operator of last resort.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Armed forces veterans deserve to be treated equally wherever they are in the UK. Will the Minister promise that when we roll out the veterans rail card later this year in England, it will also apply in Wales, Scotland and elsewhere?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am writing to the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that that card is rolled out across the whole of our country.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): My constituent, Marjorie Johnson, was badly injured when, as she crossed the road, a mobility scooter hit her full force. Seven months on, injuries to her legs still restrict her mobility. Because the scooter driver was not insured, no action has been taken against him. What will the Secretary of State do about that?

George Freeman: As part of the regulatory review of future mobility and mobility scooters, I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady to ensure that the issues involved in that case are properly addressed.

Middle East Peace Plan

10.32 am

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) *Urgent Question*: To ask the Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the proposed middle east peace plan that was announced by President Trump this week.

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison): I thank the right hon. Lady for her urgent question. As the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement on Tuesday, the Government welcome the release of the proposal by the United States for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which clearly reflects extensive investment in time and effort. A peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that leads to peaceful co-existence could unlock the potential of the entire region and provide both sides with the opportunity for a brighter future.

Only the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian territories can determine whether the proposals can meet the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. We encourage them to give the latest plan genuine and fair consideration, and to explore whether it might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations. The UK's position has not changed. Our view remains that the best way to achieve peace is through substantive peace talks between the parties, leading to a safe and secure Israel that lives alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Our first priority now must be to encourage the United States, Israelis, Palestinians and our partners in the international community to find a means of resuming the dialogue necessary for securing a negotiated settlement. The absence of dialogue creates a vacuum, which fuels instability and all that follows from that.

Emily Thornberry: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. Before I begin, may I take a brief moment to apologise to my colleagues on the SNP Benches for the language I used in the heat of hustings last week? Debating the middle east is a salutary reminder to me that there is no place for hatred in our politics, and also that on almost every foreign policy issue, including this one, we have opposed the Tory Government together. I am sorry for what I said.

Later this year, we will mark 25 years since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, who, like Egypt's Anwar Sadat, was murdered because of his efforts to bring peace to the middle east; two leaders who had the courage to risk their lives to end decades of bloodshed in their region. What we saw instead at the White House on Tuesday was a betrayal; a desecration of Sadat and Rabin's sacrifice. Trump and Netanyahu are two corrupt racist power-crazed leaders coming together not in the interests of peace, not to promote a two-state solution and not to end violence in the middle east, but simply to further their chances of re-election by doing the opposite. What a bitter irony that the next US presidential election will take place on the day before Rabin's 25th anniversary, with Trump trading on the politics of division that Rabin tried to reject and treading all over the legacy of peace that Rabin left others to follow.

Let us make no mistake: this so-called peace plan has nothing in common with the Oslo accords. It destroys any prospect of an independent, contiguous Palestinian state. It legitimises the illegal annexation of Palestinian land for settlers. It puts the whole of Jerusalem under Israeli control. It removes the democratic rights of Palestinians living in Israel and removes the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land. This is not a peace plan; it is a monstrosity and a guarantee that the next generation of Palestinian and Israeli children, like so many generations before them, will grow up knowing nothing but fear, violence and division. Trump and Netanyahu care nothing about those children's futures; they care only about their own.

The only question—the urgent question—I have today is why on earth are our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary just going along with this sham of a peace deal by actively welcoming it and saying that Palestine should get behind it? That is a shameful betrayal of decades of consensus, across this House and from one Government to another, that we should unswervingly and neutrally support progress towards a two-state solution, a prospect that this plan permanently rips away. I ask the Government: why are they supporting this plan? Why will they not, for pity's sake, recognise the independent contiguous state of Palestine while there is still one left to recognise?

Dr Murrison: I thank the right hon. Gentleman—the right hon. Lady. Actually, I have made that mistake before, Mr Speaker. I apologise once again, since we are in the mood for apologies this morning, to the right hon. Lady.

The right hon. Lady has made her points in her own way and I commend her for her rhetoric. I spent last night actually reading the plan. It is a large document. I do not know whether she has done more than just skim through it and read the remarks of her researchers, but I have actually read it. This has been years in gestation. America is one of our closest allies, and I think we owe America and its President at least the time to consider this plan.

That said, this is not our plan. What the right hon. Lady should have done is consider the remarks of our international friends and partners on this plan. She would have found, if she had bothered to take note of them—I have a gist of them written here—that the UK position, iterated by the Foreign Secretary in his statement on Tuesday, is right in the mainstream of international opinion on this document. At the moment, we have a vacuum in which there is no negotiation. We want to see a return to negotiation, and we need something that will get us going in that respect. If this plan, with all its faults and foibles—every plan has them—enables us to get around the table again, that has to be a good thing.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's support for getting peace talks going. Will he confirm that no less than five Arab countries have already welcomed this proposal as a basis for restarting talks between the Palestinians and the state of Israel? Will he therefore commit the United Kingdom to helping the Palestinians to get around the table with the state of Israel and deliver peace in the middle east?

Dr Murrison: It is clear that peace in the middle east needs to be negotiated by the parties concerned, and I think everybody understands that. My hon. Friend is

1. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

2. [Official Report, 10 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 8MC.]

quite correct; I have a list of countries from across the world that have commented on the proposal, and I have been road-testing our statement against some of those comments. We have comments from Saudi Arabia, Egypt—we will come back to that—the United Arab Emirates, EU High Representative Borrell, the E3, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden and Australia. They all welcome this as the basis for talks and negotiation.

Emily Thornberry: It's a betrayal!

Dr Murrisson: The right hon. Lady can chunter as much as she likes, but she needs to understand where we sit in the mainstream of international opinion on this matter, which is as I have described.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Lady for her most sincere apology, and I extend an invitation to her as my plus one for tomorrow night's London SNP Burns supper, at which I am sure she will have a great time. That sounds like a threat, doesn't it? I am sure that she will have a great time and be welcome none the less.

On the issue at hand, I have to say that I agree with much of what the right hon. Lady said. The Minister can cite as many people as he wants who have come out in some guise or another to support this plan, but I am with the former Israeli defence chief of intelligence and military attaché to Washington, Amos Yadlin, who has said that this is "not a peace plan", and that it is not "even a basis for a peace plan".

This simply will not do. I get that the United Kingdom Government find themselves in a tough position, but simply uttering the words

"this is not our plan"

will not cut it.

The Prime Minister of Israel has made it clear that he will unlawfully annex the Jordan valley—Palestinian land. Annexations are unlawful because they fuel conflict. If the Government can get that right on Crimea, why on earth can they not get it right in this instance? Can I ask the Minister what he is doing to make sure that no undue pressure is applied, either by Israel or by the United States Government, on the Palestinian Authority to accept a plan that delivers neither peace nor prosperity for anyone involved?

Dr Murrisson: I wish that I was able to be at the hon. Gentleman's Burns night supper. Indeed, I wish to God

"the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us!"

We could go on.

On the subject of annexation, which I think is the burden of the hon. Gentleman's question, let us be clear. Annexation would be illegal under international law. Some of the rhetoric we saw in the aftermath of the release of this document "Peace to Prosperity" was perhaps overdone and overblown, and it has been reined back on overnight by a number of those who claimed that that would happen in the immediate aftermath of the release of the plan. The UK Government's position on annexation is, as he knows, very clear, and it is completely compatible with what others say and maintain on this matter: annexation—that is to say, Israel commanding space that has not been negotiated and agreed internationally—would be illegal.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update us on what conversations he has had with UN partners and with the UN Secretary-General's office?

Dr Murrisson: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent success? The UN General Secretary has made a statement that is in keeping with most of the comments made internationally yesterday and overnight. He welcomes this as a point of dialogue and is insistent—we have discussed this with him and others—that we need to get back around the negotiating table. I do not think that anybody really accepts—certainly not on the part of the UK Government—that this is a perfect plan by any means. It could be baby steps towards a negotiation, but it has to be a negotiated settlement that eventually falls out of this. Clearly, this has not been negotiated, so those who suggest that it is in some way a final settlement are way far of the mark. This clearly has to be the subject of a great deal of further work, but if it is the catalyst for negotiation, I suppose we have to welcome it in that stead.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister is an intelligent man. He must see how intellectually dishonest the position he is taking is. On the one hand he is saying that the UK Government's position has not changed and they are against annexation, but this plan endorses that and makes it possible. He should not hide behind what others say. This country has an historical responsibility to Palestine, and he should stand up for what should be this Government's policy.

Dr Murrisson: It is not a question of hiding behind what others say. Generally speaking, it is a good thing to be in the mainstream of international opinion. I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be quite keen on that. I have already read out some of the comments made over the past 36 hours or so, and most of them say that they want to see a negotiation between the parties. At the moment, there is none—there is a vacuum. What we have is this document, launched this week, and if this can be baby steps towards something that makes sense in the future, I would have thought that most of us would at least welcome that as part of a process.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): We are dealing with one of the world's longest-running and most complicated conflicts. Does the Minister agree that if these proposals represent a step towards negotiations and an acceptable agreement, we should give them fair consideration?

Dr Murrisson: It would be unwise to completely dismiss out of hand something of this nature, created and built by one of our closest allies, but that appears to be the position of those on the Opposition Front Bench. We need to get to a position where we have the start of a negotiation. That is, as I have said, baby steps, but if we can see a way forward to the start of a negotiation, that would be a good thing.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): This is not a plan. This is a scam. The Minister wonders why those of us with Palestinian family, but also anyone else who believes in the international rules-based order, are suggesting that our Government should reject it.

[Layla Moran]

This is an insult. The Palestinians were not consulted during its wide gestation. This is not the best of us. We should reject it outright.

I remind the Minister of our Prime Minister's words when he was Foreign Secretary:

"What we are saying is that you have to have a two-state solution or else you have a kind of apartheid system. You have to go for a two-state approach, that is the long-standing position of the government".

This plan is not the basis for a viable two-state solution. Does the Minister therefore accept that these are baby steps, to use his words, towards an apartheid system that we should reject outright?

Dr Murrison: I think the hon. Lady needs to be a little careful with her language, if I may say so. If I may quote the EU High Representative—this is important, particularly in the context of the hon. Lady's party and our incipient departure from the European Union—he said:

"Today's initiative by the United States provides an occasion to re-launch the urgently needed efforts towards a negotiated and viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict"

He is welcoming this—[*Interruption.*] Yes, he is. I could read out any number of comments made along those lines by international leaders over the past 48 hours. The important thing is that this may be the start of a process after a very long period of stand-off between Palestinians and Israelis. If that proves to be the case, I would welcome it.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I join the Minister in heartily congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) on his thumping victory on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I thank both him and my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) for the way in which the contest was conducted.

My right hon. Friend might want to remember what our manifesto said. It said that Britain would be

a champion of...the rule of law, human rights, free trade, anti-corruption efforts and a rules-based international system."

Yesterday we welcomed the release of a proposal—which we described as serious—that ignored the Palestinians' right to self-determination, the 1967 borders, international humanitarian law, and repeated United Nations Security Council resolutions, the last of which the United Kingdom signed up to in December 2016. I have to say to my right hon. Friend that this is an annexation plan. Annexation is going to start on 2 February—and there is the map.

Dr Murrison: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. Of course we welcomed the release of this plan, which has been worked out over several years. That is not to say in any way that we endorse its contents. Let me emphasise that our position, stated in our manifesto and elsewhere, has not changed. Indeed, that position has been reflected among most of our friends and allies in the region and elsewhere. According to President Macron,

"France welcomes President Trump's efforts and will carefully study the peace plan".

That is exactly where we stand on this matter, and that is not endorsement.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I am shocked by some of the comments that are coming from the Government Front Bench. Britain has a long history of sometimes standing up for what is right in the world, and sometimes shouting about what is wrong. This plan is wrong. It is an annexation plan. It takes 60% of Palestinian land, it will not lead to peace, and it does not give the Palestinian people rights over their security, their borders or their water, to name just a few. What we need is a true plan to look at a two-state solution. The Government should be shouting that this plan, if implemented, would be a flagrant breach of international law, and would not bring peace to Palestinian people or Israeli people.

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady has made her case very powerfully, but this is a plan. It is not in any way an agreement. We need to get back to negotiation between Israel and Palestine. This peace plan has been a long time in gestation. It is not agreed, and in order for it to work, it must be agreed between Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): All of us on these Benches welcome the Government's commitment to the vision of a global Britain post-Brexit, but if "global Britain" is to be anything more than a strapline, it surely means a commitment to an international order that is founded on the rule of law. My right hon. Friend has already said that the British Government would not acquiesce in the illegal annexation of land that is already illegally held. Can he confirm that he has communicated that position to the American Government?

Dr Murrison: Yes. Of course we have done that consistently. We have made our position clear consistently to the Americans and to others, and our position has not changed.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I think that the Minister's telling the only British Palestinian in this place to watch her language is regrettable. He should think about that, and apologise.

I was ashamed of the Prime Minister's support for the President's disastrous and self-serving deal of the century. It is disastrous because it sets in statutory stone 50 years of occupation and institutionalised discrimination, and it is self-serving because it distracts from his, and his pal the Israeli Prime Minister's, legal difficulties. When will someone in this Government stand up to the White House and condemn this ridiculous and unworkable plan?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman has made his views very plain. Our position would be that we need to get back round the negotiating table. If that provides a starter for 10 for some, that is a good thing. It has been well thought out; there is no doubt about that. He can doubt the intentions of President Trump if he wishes to, but I would recommend that he reads the document—[*Interruption.*] That is very good, if he has. He will therefore understand, although he might not agree with it, that it is certainly very well thought through. On that basis, it would be a reasonable start for negotiations—[*Interruption.*] We are not going to make any progress at all unless we get round the table and negotiate a solution in this matter.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Whether one likes it or not, this plan recognises the new realities, which are that the Palestinians have fewer and fewer friends and that every time there is something with the words “peace” and “plan”, they will be offered less and less land. I just want to check with the Minister: are the Government endorsing the plan, or are they simply welcoming a document relating to the middle east that has the words “peace” and “plan” on it?

Dr Murrison: We are welcoming the release of the plan, but we are in no way endorsing it. That is not really for us to do; it is a matter for agreement between the two principal parties affected by it. In this, we appear to be on exactly the same page as all the countries that I have read out, and, it would appear, as the great bulk of the international community.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): May I urge the Government to have the courage of their convictions and to stand up for what has been the long-standing policy of successive British Governments on the essential elements of a peace plan for the middle east? This proposal fails a number of the tests, and the Minister knows it. Surely he recognises that an attempt to impose something on one of the parties simply cannot be the basis on which negotiations can begin.

Dr Murrison: Yes, and that was essentially the burden of the Foreign Secretary’s statement on Tuesday: for this to work, it has to be negotiated between the principal parties. I have to underscore and reiterate the fact that our position has not changed in that regard. That is to say, as the right hon. Gentleman has heard many times before, that we want to see a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as a shared capital and a proper settlement for refugees.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that the UK will continue to call for an end to all actions and hostilities that undermine the viability of a two-state solution? Specifically, will he look to invest in track 2 negotiations, which is where the UK’s expertise could genuinely make a meaningful difference to securing peace in the region?

Dr Murrison: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I can tell her that we will go further than that. Although it is not a solution to the situation, which is intolerable, we are putting a huge amount of resource into the Occupied Palestinian Territories right now, through the Palestinian Authority and through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—UNRWA—in order at least to try to do our bit in stabilising what would otherwise be a completely impossible situation, pending a definitive solution that would restore peace to the middle east.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): The former Foreign Secretary, now the Prime Minister, had planned to convene a summit of European and Arab Foreign Ministers with the Trump Administration to lay out their red lines for the Trump Administration’s peace plan. Can the Minister of State tell us whether that summit ever took place? If not, why not, and what were our red lines?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I hope she has been watching closely the reaction of leaders, particularly in the region—from Saudi Arabia,

from Egypt, from the UAE and, yes, from Jordan. If she has, she will have noticed that, broadly speaking and in the round, they are supportive of the fact that the plan has now been published and they look forward to its being—possibly, potentially—the start of a negotiated settlement that would deliver on the imperatives that I have just repeated to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn).

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Will the Minister join me in condemning antisemitism in all its forms, both here in the UK and around the world, particularly when it is veiled in the cloak of anti-Zionism?

Dr Murrison: I will answer that question very succinctly: yes, of course, I condemn antisemitism in all its forms.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the potential for a peace plan, and we must accept that. Christians are being attacked, persecuted and killed across the middle east, so what is being done within the peace plan to assist and help persecuted Christians in the middle east directly?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman has a great deal of experience in such matters. He will forgive me if I do not answer for the peace plan, because it is not the UK Government’s plan. We can welcome its publication, and we can welcome the process that may follow, but we cannot be answerable for the contents of the plan.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): The US peace plan calls for a just solution for Jewish refugees expelled from Arab lands—my father’s family were forced to leave Libya shortly after the creation of the state of Israel—as well as a fair solution for the Palestinians. The plight of 850,000 Jewish refugees is key to understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Will the Minister welcome the recognition of the historical injustice against hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees?

Dr Murrison: My right hon. Friend is of course absolutely right. The refugee issue is sometimes not necessarily associated with Jewish refugees. I remember reading a good book on this subject called “Uprooted”—he no doubt has a copy—that explains the situation exceptionally well. Of course, any settlement needs to include Jewish refugees as well as Palestinian refugees.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): This is not a peace deal; it is an annexation plan. If another country wanted 60% of our territory and full control of our borders, natural resources and national security, we would not see that as a peace proposal; we would see it as a declaration of war. What will the Government do to enforce international law if annexation goes ahead?

Dr Murrison: This Government uphold international law. Our position on annexation is very clear, and I do not need to repeat it.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I welcome the prospect of negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians and note that the Palestinians are involved almost immediately. Will the Minister confirm that the

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

UK Government's position remains that all existing and future Israeli settlements in occupied territories are illegal under international law?

Dr Murrison: Annexation is clearly illegal. We continue to use every means available to ensure either that it does not happen or, if it does, that there is an appropriate international response. We uphold international law, and the law is perfectly clear.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister talks about baby steps towards negotiations, but does he not recognise that these are giant strides away from the talks we need? All of us who have visited the west bank know that the illegal settlements are designed to undermine the viability of a Palestinian state. Legitimising those settlements will therefore destroy any hope of a just peace. Can he not say so unambiguously and reject this plan?

Dr Murrison: What I can do is reiterate our position, which has not changed and which I have trotted out twice already this morning. This is not our plan, we welcome the fact that it has finally been published, and we hope that it may form the basis of negotiations.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for both the content and the measured tone of his statement, which was in some contrast to the words of the shadow Foreign Secretary. This plan is clearly not a final outcome, but it is a proposal. It is not a question of whether we endorse it, but progress needs proposals, and we should welcome it for that reason. Will he confirm that the British Government will do everything they can to continue to help facilitate progress based around the principles he set out and the two-state solution?

Dr Murrison: I thank my right hon. Friend for being a voice of reason amidst the clamour. This is not our plan. It is almost as if the UK Government had published it, but this is not a UK Government plan.

Emily Thornberry: You welcomed it—

Dr Murrison: We have welcomed the fact that it has been published, as the right hon. Lady knows full well. Since there is a complete stand-off between the parties at the moment, we need to get the parties back around the table with, I hope, the active involvement of America, which has a long history of trying to facilitate and broker agreements between the parties in this particular region. We need to get back to a position in which we can get a negotiated solution. This may well not be the solution, but it may be just about the start of it.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): This so-called peace plan should in no way be welcomed by the UK Government. It legitimises the annexation of Palestinian land and the building of more illegal settlements. As we know, that would breach international law and UN resolutions. I am not sure why the Minister is not condemning the plan, as he rightly should, under the principles of international law. Will he now condemn this peace plan?

Dr Murrison: With respect, the hon. Lady needs to read the peace plan. She will not find within its pages anything to legitimise annexation, which has been spoken about following the publication of this plan. I note that those who made those remarks are now rapidly winding back. I make it clear that the UK Government oppose annexation, which is contrary to international law.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right that we need to get back to negotiation, and the UK has an important role to play in that. Baby steps, as he calls them, need to be viable to develop into adulthood, and these, I am afraid, are not. When I last went to the region, the two-state solution was regarded by many as dead. How does he think a two-state solution is realistic when the Palestinians do not get even part of East Jerusalem and are confined to outside the city walls, and when there are no plans to remove those Jewish settlements that are illegal under the Oslo accords?

Dr Murrison: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I reiterate the point that this is not our plan, and we are not endorsing it. I suspect he will have gone through this, as I did last night, and made his own annotations about its faults and foibles, and it may well be a long list, but at least the plan is something on the table. At the moment we have no negotiations or talks at all. He will be familiar with both the west bank and Gaza and the terrible situation that people face in those territories, and he will want to do something about it. The only way to do something about it is to get back to political talks and negotiation.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Setting the terms of the plan so far in favour of one side without the participation of the other, and then attacking that side for not participating, is not a negotiation. It is a fait accompli, isn't it?

Dr Murrison: It is not a fait accompli because the parties have not agreed to the plan. The only way there will be agreement is through negotiation, and there are not even talks at the moment.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): There will not be any progress unless we accept the reality on the ground, which is that no democratically elected Israeli Government of any complexion will accept the division of Jerusalem or withdraw from the settlement blocs. Whether we like it or not, that is just the reality. May I urge my right hon. Friend to continue in the mainstream of European opinion, as he and this Government are, and cautiously welcome this as a basis for starting negotiations?

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a long-winded business, and I suspect it will go on and on for some time. I thank him for welcoming the fact that we have welcomed the publication of this plan. Our hope, alongside all our European friends and allies it would appear, is that this may be the start of a renewed process. In that light, we have to welcome it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Is there not a danger that all the countries that say they welcome the plan but do not endorse it will start sounding as if they are

hypocrites or two-faced? In the end, the only thing that is likely to achieve success in the middle east is if both sides of the argument feel they have an investment in a potential future and an element of hope. If they feel that all the countries of Europe, including the UK, are hypocrites on this, there will not be any hope.

Dr Murrison: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. It is right that the international community, particularly so soon after the publication of this thing, should at least welcome the fact that it has finally been published and urge both parties at least to have a conversation about the future. Ultimately, that is the only way we will get some sort of settlement that brings equanimity to a very troubled region.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Anybody who has visited the region recently and spoken to Palestinians and Israelis will have been struck by a growing sense of despondency about the peace process, with nothing happening at all. So does my right hon. Friend agree that the value of this intervention from President Trump this week is precisely in creating a catalyst for talks and discussions? Will he join Arab states in encouraging the Palestinian leadership to sit down, get around the table and have a proper discussion about peace?

Dr Murrison: My right hon. Friend is correct on that. I think this is why so many of our friends and partners across the world have been cautious and moderate in the language they have been using about this plan, using it as a prompt to urge both parties to get back around the table to try to find a way forward.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Does the Minister agree that this proposal, which offers Palestinians barren and inhospitable desert land, and a tunnel between the west bank and Gaza, is a fundamentally unserious one, which has been drafted without Palestinian input? What representation will he make to US counterparts about the urgent need to include Palestinian diplomats in a discussion about their future peace settlement?

Dr Murrison: I am certainly not going to get drawn into the detail of this plan, but I would say that in all the conversations we have had with our US friends and allies, and others, we have made it clear that a solution to this has to be negotiated and agreed by both of the principal parties to this dispute.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian property in the west bank is undermining the peace process?

Dr Murrison: I certainly can do that. We have lost no opportunity to condemn that behaviour. Every time we speak to our Israeli interlocutors we hammer this home: it is completely unacceptable and it must stop.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Any successful peace plan is likely to need land swaps based on the 1967 borders, but does the Minister accept that those swaps have to be agreed by both parties? When

looking at the map that is proposed for a Palestinian entity, does he not see fragmented bits of land, joined in some cases by a very narrow corridors? Does he not see a map that is completely unsustainable and one where those corridors could be cut at any time by Israel at a moment's notice?

Dr Murrison: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that any land swaps need to be agreed—that is self-evident. I am also surprised at how the map looks. It is a challenging map to examine and one has to understand the geography on the ground in some intimate detail in order to get to grips with it. Sometimes simple maps are the best, are they not? I am no cartographer, but the map that has been produced is quite a challenge to understand.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I share the Minister's position that to welcome something is not to endorse what is in it, and certainly not the aspects that run counter to long-held UK policy. But the plan contains a proposal for a new Palestinian entity to receive up to £50 billion of international investment. Would such a proposal increase the peace and prosperity in the region?

Dr Murrison: I certainly think there is a need for investment in the region, and opening up the region politically is, obviously, key to that—without that it is difficult to see how the lives of Palestinians are going to be lifted. That is going to require a great deal of money, but as we made clear at the Manama conference, with others, money is not the first step in this; the first step has to be political.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Does the Minister not accept that the imposition of this so-called “plan” is the worst possible context for any form of negotiation? Can he think of another example of an independent and viable state that is an archipelago of non-contiguous lands, where the state has no control over its coastal waters, its airspace or its security? If he cannot think of such an example, why should the Palestinians accept this as the basis for the beginning of talks?

Dr Murrison: The aim is clearly to have a peaceful settlement that enables a two-state solution. Clearly, that has to be a viable state and the hon. Lady has identified some of the characteristics of a viable state. We have not endorsed this, but we have welcomed its publication and we hope it will be the start of negotiations that will lead to a solution that both parties to this dispute can accept.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): There is a fundamental point on which the Minister needs to be pushed, which is whether he will make it absolutely clear from the Dispatch Box today that Britain still abides by all the international laws and UN resolutions that have ruled that the annexation of Palestinian land and the building of settlements is illegal, and therefore must be condemned, not legitimised in the form of this plan.

Dr Murrison: We stand by the existing UN Security Council resolutions, of which there have been 100 since 1946. They remain extant until they are replaced by others.

[Dr Murrison]

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister has said that it is a well-thought-through plan; how, then, can he make the case for the fact that the Palestinians have not been involved in the plan at all? How can that really be well thought through? Is that really the case?

Dr Murrison: Well, I think it has been well thought through. It has been three years in the making and is extensive. The hon. Lady makes her own point in her own way. It is not a UK Government plan, but we do welcome its publication as the potential start for negotiation between the principal parties.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): To welcome something that is not going to go anywhere is the equivalent of doing nothing. Surely, given this country's historical involvement in this part of the world, the Government should convey to the United States, as a critical friend, the message that the plan has no prospect of going anywhere. It is not going to bring the Palestinians to the table. We should be reiterating our policy and making that clear.

Dr Murrison: What I think we should be doing is encouraging both parties to get around the negotiating table and talk, which they are not doing at the moment.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): How can a plan that has not included one side, offers no concessions to one side and proposes as a destination a state without any of the real aspects of sovereignty as we understand it, be the basis for meaningful negotiations? Does this plan not risk prolonging the conflict? It will play into the hands of extremists who say that violence is the only way forward. I have to say that it is depressing to see a British Minister reduced to reading out what other countries have said, rather than sticking up for British policy, the British national interest and a real and meaningful peace.

Dr Murrison: The UK is not the only country with an interest in the region. Sometimes, we have an overblown sense of our importance. It is important that we work with partners towards a negotiated settlement. We are one of many. The comments that we have seen over the past 36 hours from our friends and allies in the region and further a field are very much in line with the remarks made by the Foreign Secretary on Tuesday. I think that is a comfortable place to be.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Minister spoke of maps and the difficulty of understanding the proposed map, which does not make clear the extent of the water crisis that already exists in the occupied territories and that in my view—I have seen other coverage of this—will only be exacerbated, with the implications for the Jordan valley. Will the Minister comment on whether he thinks the plan, which I know is not his, will either help or hinder the water crisis in the occupied territories?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, because she is absolutely right: in the context of this particular piece of geography, water is key. To be fair, if I can be, about the plan, it is called a “conceptual map”, which to me means that it is not a definitive map. It seems to me that in any talks that may now happen, water is going to be absolutely key to what eventually transpires, and the hon. Lady is right to make that point.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Act 2020.

Business of the House

11.18 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for next 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 a motion to approve a statutory instrument, 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 local government finance followed by a debate on transport. Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the official Opposition.

THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY—General debate on historical stillbirth burials and cremations followed by a general debate on the persecution of Christians.

FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting. The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill followed by motions relating to the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2020 and the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2020.

TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Bill, followed by Opposition half day (3rd allotted day—first part). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Scottish National Party.

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the police grant and local government finance reports.

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY—General debate: subject to be confirmed.

FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business. May I start by asking him to clarify the new system that UK Visas and Immigration has put in place? There is a central system, and I was told yesterday that, if I was to write a letter and then ring, I would not get a written response. It is right that if Members write to UKVI, they should get that written response. I would be grateful if he could clarify that.

There is clearly time in the business to update the House on any ongoing negotiations. I am referring, albeit subtly, to negotiations to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Anousheh, Kylie and other British hostages. Given that we have a debate on global Britain, I wondered whether anyone would update the House on that. It was raised last week by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq).

The Leader of the House has very kindly given us the dates of sitting Fridays up to January 2021. Can he confirm that this Session will end in May, and that there

will be a new Queen's Speech? Everybody is working to that timetable, so it would be helpful to have that confirmation.

I want to congratulate all the new Select Committee Chairs, but we wait for the machinery of Government to announce some changes, and we hope that that will happen inside this House, not outside it. Clearly, the Department for Exiting the European Union is no more as of 11 pm tomorrow. With parliamentary sovereignty in place, is the Leader of the House able to say which Ministers will be answering questions and appearing before the Exiting the European Union Committee, which still exists? No. 10 has said this:

"The negotiations on the future relationship with the EU will be led from a Taskforce Europe team within Number 10...reporting directly to the Prime Minister."

How will this taskforce be subject to any parliamentary scrutiny?

There is more taking back control to No. 10, rather than parliamentary scrutiny—which is why we are all here. The Government removed clause 31 from what became the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020. We would have had a vote on trade negotiating objectives, regular reporting during negotiations and a final vote on a final UK-EU trade deal. I thought that people voted in the referendum to take back sovereignty, so can the Leader of the House say why MEPs in Brussels have more say over the UK-EU future relationship than this House? Can we have a debate on parliamentary sovereignty generally and scrutiny of these negotiations specifically?

The Leader of the House will recall these words on Huawei's involvement in our telecommunications network. It is a "bad policy decision" that risks

"alienating our closest defence allies, and potentially putting at risk our communication system."

As someone said, was the Education Secretary stitched up for being right? Can the Leader of the House answer his own question? Will he also find time for a further statement on this decision, as, I think, negotiations are still ongoing? Discussions are still going on with No. 10. This affects our national security, and the Government appear not to have made the case—not even on their own side.

We seem now to have policy by press release. The Prime Minister announced a new talent visa, but no immigration Bill. He says that he wants to attract people of talent. We do, too—this country is brimming with talent that austerity has not allowed to flourish. It is a two-way system. We want the exchange that enables our talented people to work and live abroad. That is why Erasmus was so important. More than 17,000 students at UK universities study or work abroad. Earlier this month, the Government voted down the amendment on Erasmus, and yesterday the Prime Minister said that a statement was due, so can we have that sooner rather than later? It is sad that the Government do not want to be patriotic and invest in our own talent.

Finally, as we leave the EU, let us remember the following: the more than 3 million UK jobs linked to our trade with the EU, which the CBI has estimated to be worth 4% to 5% of GDP, or £62 billion to £72 billion a year; the right to paid holiday leave; maximum working hours; equal treatment for men and women; health and safety standards; and EU investment in climate finance

[Valerie Vaz]

for emerging countries. Let me say something about parliamentary sovereignty, for the record. It was set out by John Laws, in the case of the metric martyrs, which many people will know—he happens to be the uncle of someone who works in No. 10. He said that rights created by the EU must be incorporated into UK law and take precedence, but the legal basis of that supremacy rests with Parliament. Parliament delegated that power to the EU and could take it away at any time—Parliament was always sovereign. Just as the EU evolved, so it will again.

I hope that the Leader of the House will join me in thanking all the public servants who have worked in the EU, our elected representatives, commissioners and civil servants—those who have served their country and put the UK at the heart of Europe. We hope that peace, the security of our citizens and the co-operation of nearly 50 years will live on. Auld acquaintance will never be forgot.

Mr Rees-Mogg: If I may, I will begin with the specific question on UK Visas and Immigration. It is extremely important that Members get proper responses from all Government Departments, and Departments have strict guidelines on responding to Members that they must follow. I understand that there were issues when Members wrote as candidates during the election and did not receive full responses. It seems to me completely obvious that Members who have been returned should receive responses as Members, regardless of whether or not the House was dissolved at the point at which they wrote. I think that it would be bureaucratic folderol to say that they were not Members on the date the letter was sent, even though they are Members now. I will certainly ensure that the relevant Home Office Minister is aware of that.

The right hon. Lady, as always, quite rightly raised the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Since our last business questions, the Prime Minister has met Mr Ratcliffe. The British Government remain extremely concerned about the welfare of British-Iranian dual nationals. The treatment of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been appalling. It is something that should not be done by civilised nations that are part of the international community. The Government are in regular contact with her family and with the Iranian authorities, and we continue to push for a proper outcome and for her release, but this has taken much longer than anyone would have hoped.

As for the length of the Session, we have given dates up until Christmas, so we have been quite generous, really. We in Her Majesty's Government are doing our best to keep people fully informed, and I am sure that we will continue to do so.

I add my congratulations to those that the right hon. Lady offered to Members who have been elected to chair Select Committees. The elections were a very successful enterprise. I am pleased that the House has managed to get proper scrutiny up and running reasonably quickly and in accordance with our Standing Orders. We now wait to hear from the respective parties on their nominees for the membership of Select Committees. Everything is going ahead in a pretty timely manner.

As for the machinery of government changes, DExEU will indeed cease to exist on 31 January, and the schedule of questions will be announced in due course. The right hon. Lady must be pleased that these matters are going to Downing Street, because the Prime Minister is regularly accountable. It is not quite on the hour every hour, but every Wednesday at 12.30 pm the Prime Minister is here to answer questions.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Prime Minister's questions are at 12 o'clock.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, that is right. We all know when he is here: 12 o'clock on Wednesdays for half an hour, to 12.30 pm—you keep it running to time punctiliously, Mr Speaker. It means that anything that is going to No. 10 will have proper scrutiny weekly.

I am absolutely delighted that the right hon. Lady has been imbued with the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) over the decades about the importance of parliamentary sovereignty—dare I say that there is more joy in heaven over the one sinner who repenteth than the 99 who are not in need of repentance? I am glad that parliamentary sovereignty is now being taken seriously across the House, rather than being focused in that fantastic corner over there on the Government Back Benches, where I used to sit in happy times.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Or recline.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Or recline, indeed.

The right hon. Lady referred to talent. I am glad to say that this is a country full of talent and a Government led by very talented people, who are making great successes of the nation. She also mentioned the Erasmus programme. It is worth bearing in mind that the Erasmus programme includes countries such as Canada and Israel, and therefore is not an exclusively EU activity, so it is perfectly possible for us to be involved with Erasmus outside the European Union; statements will be made in due time.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Mr Speaker has indicated that he wishes business questions to run for approximately 45 minutes. Obviously not everybody will get in, so I encourage short questions and short responses.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): The health service is confronted with another baby deaths controversy in Kent, and a whistleblowing scandal in West Suffolk at the Health Secretary's own local hospital. When are the Government going to reintroduce the health service safety investigations Bill, which had its Second Reading in the other place before the election, had its pre-legislative scrutiny under my chairmanship in the last Parliament and is ready to go? One might say that it is oven-ready, so when does my right hon. Friend think it will be reintroduced?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is a Bill to which the Government attach considerable importance, as it would be a transformation in the way in which patient safety incidents

in the NHS are investigated, and would be a world first. The date for its return has not been set, but it will be brought forward in this Session.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) is attending the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe today—I am sure the Leader of the House will accept that, because of the importance of maintaining cordial relations with our friends and neighbours in Europe in the months and years to come.

I join the congratulations to all Members elected as Chairs of Select Committees, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—who should be right honourable by now—and my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil).

We are grateful for the time provided to the Scottish National party on 11 February. I hope that that time will be protected, as it is only a half day. There are still several Opposition days lying around from previous terms that I hope will be honoured in due course over this Session.

We are looking forward to the convening of the English Parliament next week, when the House resolves itself into the Legislative Grand Committee for England to discuss the NHS Funding Bill. The Leader of the House will see that SNP Members have tabled amendments to that Bill, because we deem some of its contents to be of interest to our constituents. I would therefore be grateful if he could explain what opportunity there will be for Members from Scotland to have their say on this important piece of legislation, which will have funding consequential for the Scottish budget.

Communities across Scotland will gather tomorrow to say au revoir but not adieu to our fellow members of the European Union. I just want to caution the Government about any kind of triumphalism about all this. Tomorrow is not the end of Brexit. It is only the beginning. As encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) when he was in the European Parliament, many in the European Union will be leaving a light on for Scotland, so that in the fullness of time we can use those lights to find our way back to Europe, as an independent member state.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Like the hon. Gentleman, I am very keen that we should maintain cordial relations with our friends in the European Union, but without being governed by them. That seems to me an extremely satisfactory way to be proceeding from now on. We do not want to be triumphalist about it, but I think that in a spirit of sympathy to Europe, it would be allowable for some of us at 11 o'clock on Friday to drink some French sparkling wine; I do not think that would be unduly unreasonable.

The Legislative Grand Committee will meet to consider the NHS Funding Bill, because it is a matter that relates exclusively to England and has been so certified, but amendments may be tabled in Committee and on Report, and, as SNP Members know because they used this unusual mechanism recently, even on Third Reading—although they cannot actually change the text on Third Reading, as that has to be done on Report. There are opportunities for amendment, and in the end all Acts of this Parliament require the consent of the whole House by majority.

I will just say one thing about leaving the lights on: I thought the SNP was very environmentally friendly, so I hope it is carefully investigating the carbon cost of this.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): I am very concerned about the drop in bus usage in my constituency. A lack of bus shelters too often puts people off using buses. What opportunities might there be to debate what can be done to level up some parts of Stoke-on-Trent with parts of London that have state-of-the-art, solar-powered and vandal-proof bus shelters that provide up-to-the-minute travel information?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This Government are taking the matter of bus transport extremely seriously and are going to devote some hundreds of millions of pounds to improving bus services across the country. My hon. Friend is right that that includes providing good shelters and up-to-date information, which encourages people to use the buses more often.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement. Will he urge his right hon. and hon. Friends in his business unit to get the appointments to the Backbench Business Committee done as soon as possible, as I also urge my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House to do? I understand that the Scottish National party has already made its nominations. We would love to get the Committee up and running as soon as possible so that it can help out the Leader of the House in determining business.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I entirely agree with that. We will work on this as fast as possible. We took up suggestions from the Backbench Business Committee for next Thursday, which would ideally be the Backbench Business day.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): May I urge my right hon. Friend to recall the cross-party concern about the misbehaviour of many online betting companies and the growing drive towards addiction as a result of that misbehaviour? Given that, will he encourage the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to call in the Gambling Commission, which now refuses to release the name of the individual who owns Betway? Nobody knows where its money comes from, and it seems absurd that in this circumstance we cannot now find out. It is time we got to the bottom of this.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend has been a formidable champion on this and played a crucial role in reducing the maximum stake for fixed odds betting terminals, which was of great importance to many people. I know that the issues he raises are of concern across the House. I have heard what he has said, and I will make sure that the relevant Department knows too.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Recently British Gas changed from the PayPoint system to Payzone. Despite assurances from British Gas that post offices in South Shields would be equipped to accept these payments, they were not. This left many vulnerable people across my constituency without heating or hot water. Will the Leader of the House seek some clarification from his Government colleagues on how they can help my constituents to get some recompense?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is an important issue that affects many of us. I have indeed written on behalf of my own constituents about this matter, because the number of places to pay has been reduced significantly in North East Somerset as well. The issue the hon. Lady raises is one the Government need to look into to see how it is being dealt with. We must keep on raising it until it is made possible for people to pay their bills easily and in a way that ensures that they can keep their heating running.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Given the spiralling cost of repair work to the Elizabeth Tower, can we have a debate in Government time about the wider R and R programme so that the huge budget that has already been allocated to it does not spiral out of control as well?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Indeed. Restoration and renewal is a House responsibility rather than a Government one, and therefore it is only right that, with a new House of Commons, new Members should be able to express their views and to have a full understanding of what is happening with the project. It may well be that the Backbench Business Committee will consider a debate, but I have certainly heard the request for a debate in Government time.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Wonga mis-sold millions-worth of debt to lots of very poor people up and down the country. It was forced to pay compensation to those people, but now, because the company has gone bust, the average amount of money that people are going to get is just 4.2% of that compensation. In other words, if they were meant to get £1,800, they are going to get £72. Surely that is unfair. Should not the Government set up a compensation scheme to meet the full figures now?

Mr Rees-Mogg: With all these matters relating to Government expenditure, there is limited taxpayers' money—the Government cannot pay for everything, and it will be a question of priorities as to whether this compensation is paid or whether money goes to other deserving and important causes. There is not unlimited money available.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Can we have a statement on Nigeria before Thursday's debate, so that we can understand whether the exponential increase in Christian persecution there is a consequence of the country's Government losing control or, more sinisterly, being in control?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is no satisfying some people, including my right hon. Friend. We have the debate on Thursday, but in saying that, I do not want to underemphasise the importance of the issue, which is a very troubling one. It is one that the Government take very seriously, and the scale and severity of violations of freedom of religious belief in not only Nigeria but many parts of the world is something that the Government are taking up. The debate will be an opportunity for everybody to raise their concerns and for the Government to make a proper response.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I recently asked a written question about the Government's LGBT action plan in 2018, and specifically the promise to

bring forward legislation to make gay conversion therapy illegal in this country. I have not had a firm answer yet. I am sure the Leader of the House appreciates that this issue is personally offensive to many of us in this place. Can he give me some assurance on when this will come before the House and when we will know what the Government intend to do?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that, because I very much see it as part of my role to be a facilitator for Members across the House when replies are not received both in a timely manner and in a way that answers the question that has been raised. I cannot answer her question personally—it is not within my orbit of responsibility—but I will ensure that the relevant Minister is aware of the need for a prompt and full answer.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on football governance and the way that footballing authorities represent the interests of fans? The expulsion from the Football League of Bury football club in my constituency has been disastrous for my town both economically and socially, and it is not fair that the footballing authorities have done nothing to protect the interests of lifelong Bury fans, who are distraught at the loss of their football club. I would not wish to see supporters of other clubs treated in the same way as Bury fans.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for the enormous amount of work he has done on that. Even those of us who do not know much about football, which is a class I fall into, know that football clubs are at the heart of their local communities and play an important role in social cohesion. He is absolutely right to champion his local football club. In this instance, I encourage him to seek a debate in Westminster Hall, which is the best place to start this discussion.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I wonder whether the Leader of the House knows anything about rugby, because the Six Nations starts this weekend, with the defending grand slam champions, Wales, kicking off against Italy. The television rights for this 120-year-old tournament are up for renegotiation soon, and the Government are refusing to put the Six Nations on the A-list of listed events. Can we have a debate about listed events and the importance of protecting our sporting heritage?

Mr Rees-Mogg: To be honest, cricket is about the only sport I know much about, though it has faced the same issue regarding rights, which is an important one. There is a balance for the sports to decide as to whether they want the extra revenue they get from being entirely commercial, or whether they want the extra exposure they get from being on terrestrial television. While we are on cricket, may I congratulate the England cricket team on their fantastic performance in South Africa, which was a joy for all to behold?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Next week, I intend to introduce a private Member's Bill to create a bank holiday on the Friday closest to 23 June every year, to be called "United Kingdom day", so that the country can celebrate sovereignty and the Union of our

four great nations. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week saying whether the Government will support that proposal, be neutral or oppose it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Oddly, that falls under my responsibility as Lord President of the Council because bank holidays come from royal proclamations. I wonder, however, if I might steer my hon. Friend. Would it not be nicer, if we are going to ask for a new holiday in June, to have, as some other countries have, a Queen's birthday holiday? That is rather more in keeping with our traditions than the slightly—I do not know—republican sounding “UK day”.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): People in the communities of Blaydon, Winlaton, Greenside and Ryton in my constituency continue to have their lives made a misery by litter escapes and bad smells from Blaydon Quarry landfill site. It is plain unacceptable. Can we have a debate in Government time on the adverse impact of landfill sites on local communities?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do accept that litter in all its forms is a great blight on communities and that landfill sites that overspill can be particularly problematic. Because it is such a constituency-specific issue, this is a matter to raise in the first instance in an Adjournment debate.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Whether it is the new Siemens train factory in Goole, the rail we make at the steelworks in Scunthorpe or the increased capacity on our railways—or, indeed, the new HS2 college in Donny—a positive decision for HS2 will bring huge benefits to my region. Can the Leader of the House please tell us when we are going to get the statement outlining the decision in favour, I hope, of HS2?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Prime Minister, who is a high authority on this matter, said in Prime Minister's questions on Wednesday that a statement would be coming out shortly.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The House of Lords is populated by retired or rejected MPs, as well as being the only legislature in the world in which clerics sit—aside, of course, from that other beacon of democracy, Iran. Will the Leader of the House make a statement setting out why he thinks an unelected, unaccountable Chamber is appropriate in a democracy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can think of another country where clerics have considerable sway, and that is of course the Vatican, which is ruled by the Holy Father, with considerable authority. The House of Lords is a revising Chamber, and as a revising Chamber it plays an important role in our constitution, but it is absolutely right that, under the two Parliament Acts, this House has seniority and has the ability to insist on its will, if necessary.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Two years ago, the conventional armed forces narrowly escaped devastating and irreversible cuts because they had been trapped in a combined intelligence, security and defence review within a limited financial envelope. To avoid this

happening again, will the Leader of the House obtain a statement from the Government that the next defence and security combined review will take place before, and not after, the comprehensive spending review?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is one of the most well-informed and distinguished figures in this House on matters of defence, and he served with considerable distinction as Chairman of the Defence Committee. I think his direct application to Ministers will probably have the effect he desires.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I was recently contacted by my constituent Yuko Moore, who has lived and worked in the United Kingdom for 13 years and was granted indefinite leave to remain. She is hard-working and is a valued worker in the care sector. Yuko has been told that she will need to purchase a biometric residency permit, and that she will need to do so every five years at a cost of £248 every time. This charge needs to be dropped for people who have lived and worked in this country for many years. May we have a debate on this Government's hostile attitude to incomers and the fact that we will continue to live with its impact for many years to come?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady raises a matter that is no doubt of concern to many MPs when these charges come through. There are Home Office questions on Monday 10 February, and I would encourage her to raise it at that point. There has to be a balance and a fairness between the charges that are made to fund the immigration system and ensuring that people who have a right to remain—an indefinite right to remain—are not unfairly charged.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Is it not about time that we had a debate on the Church of England and sex? No sooner had my Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019 become effective, and many happy couples have got hitched since new year's eve, than the Church of England issued an edict to say that it does not approve of sex within civil partnerships—same-sex or opposite-sex. Not only is that wholly unrealistic, but it is deeply offensive in relation to the status of children born to civil partners. I know my right hon. Friend takes his inspiration from the Church of Rome, rather than from the established Church, but does he not agree, dispassionately, that the Church of England has lost the plot?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I never criticise the Church of England as I am not a member of it. In the Catholic Church these subjects are not a matter for debate—we merely get told by the hierarchy, which does simplify matters to some extent. Given that my hon. Friend wants to ask questions, there are questions to the Church Commissioners next week, and I am sure that the person who responds will be delighted to hear them.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): A report this week shows that bus journeys in the north-east have fallen by 17% since 2009. That is not because of improvements to our rail infrastructure; it is because of excessive prices and slashed services. For £1.50 I can get across the whole of London—30 miles—but only four stops up the road in Newcastle. May we have a

[*Chi Onwurah*]

debate about improving bus services in the north-east? The Leader of the House says that bus services are important to the Government, but we see no way of taking back control so that we can improve and properly fund them.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I reiterate the point I made earlier: there is a £220 million fund to transform our bus services through the national bus strategy, which is a significant amount of money, but the hon. Lady's point is well made and does not fall on stony ground. There is a widespread feeling that bus services have been the poor relation in the transport system, particularly outside London, and people expect a better service. The Government are providing funding to help with that.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Residents in Pilsley in my constituency are indebted to Sheila Baldwin, and others, for collecting 600 signatures to oppose the closure of the local health centre by Staffa Health. A lot of the consultation process was done online, and Sheila does not have access to the internet. May we have a debate about online consultations, and about how to ensure that residents in villages, particularly rural villages, are able to take part in consultations on closures?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend makes a good point that not everybody is online, and I commend him for the campaign with which he has been so closely involved. That is a model for how MPs ought to stick up for their constituents. Trying to ensure that those who are not part of the online world are able to make representations as easily and as well as those who are is important. Manuscript petitions can be presented to the House of Commons every evening, and I have often found that a worthwhile thing to do.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House schedule time for an emergency debate on late-cancelled operations? Chris Gibbons is a constituent of mine. He lives with severe pain and is scheduled to have a knee replacement operation, but it has just been cancelled for the seventh time. Some of those cancellations have happened when he has been in hospital getting ready for the operation. When the Leader of the House gets to his feet, will he start by apologising to Mr Gibbons? When Mr Gibbons goes in for his eighth scheduled operation, will the Leader of the House say that it will happen?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises a concerning issue, and all constituency MPs worry on behalf of their constituents when operations are cancelled. That cancellation has happened seven times, and of course I apologise to the hon. Gentleman's constituent. That is the least I can do, although I am not sure that my apology will be a great comfort to him.

Peter Kyle: Can you guarantee the next one?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot guarantee the next one as I do not have that authority. That is a matter for NHS England, rather than for the Secretary of State, and it is certainly not a responsibility of mine personally. The NHS has a constant battle to improve on this issue. The

percentage of cancelled operations is low, but knowing that is not a great deal of comfort to the person whose operation has been cancelled.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): The market town of Knaresborough in my constituency is a strong community of 15,000 people. This week, the last bank in the town announced that it will close in a few weeks, and the nearest bank will be a few miles away. That is a troubling development, so may we have a debate to discuss the impact of bank branch closures and how people can access financial services, whether for business or personal use?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That issue is raised regularly at these sessions, and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is meeting a number of Members of Parliament to discuss it. The closure of banks is a commercial decision, but it is important that people, especially those in rural communities, have access to financial services.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Now that the Government have decided they are going to invest in the north, may I ask the Leader of the House to make a statement on how English MPs from the regions can go about scrutinising the Government's plans? In light of the fact that Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish MPs have that function through their Select Committees, is it not time to bring back Committees with a regional focus?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is regular opportunity to question Ministers at departmental question times and in a succession of debates. There were indeed regional Select Committees, but as far as I am aware they were not very successful.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate about ophthalmology and the contribution made by opticians to public health? My local opticians tell me that the fees they receive from the NHS have not risen, even by inflation, for nearly 20 years. Programmes such as diabetic eye screening have in my area been awarded exclusively to a single private provider. It is making their lives hard and, in some cases, threatening the viability of these valued local businesses.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises an important and interesting point. Opticians can, through eye tests, find out important things about people's more general health. That is part of the very valued role they carry out. I am bound to point the hon. Gentleman in the direction of the Backbench Business Committee, because I think a debate on this issue may well have widespread support.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May I add my voice to calls for a debate on bank branch closures? Lloyds Banking Group announced dozens of branch closures yesterday, including one in Holmfirth in my constituency. At a time when the Government are investing in rejuvenating our high streets, we need to debate Lloyds Banking Group, which is making £2.2 billion in statutory profit and can afford a remuneration package of £6.3 million for its boss. Surely, it should be investing in community banking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his important question. As I said, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is meeting MPs to discuss that matter. It is important that people have access to banking services, but it is ultimately a commercial decision for the banks.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): On behalf of constituents who are contractors, may I ask the Leader of the House again for a debate on the IR35 change, which is fast coming upon us in April? There is much concern out there about the scope of the review. It needs to be paused and looked at again.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot really add much to what I said to the hon. Lady the last time. A review is being carried out. This is a matter of great concern to constituents across the country, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right that people need to know what tax they will be expected to pay before the beginning of the tax year in which they will be expected to pay it.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Many Carshalton and Wallington residents are angry that the Liberal Democrat council is planning to introduce controlled parking zones across large parts of the constituency. Some are appropriate and needed, but many are not and many people cannot afford the permits. May we have a debate on the implementation of controlled parking zones, in particular the cost of permits, so that residents cannot get ripped off by incompetent councils?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It seems to me that my hon. Friend raises a very important issue. There is nothing more annoying, nor does it bear down on people in a more irritating way, than pettifogging rules being introduced by incompetent councils in search of moneygrubbing schemes to get money out of hardworking taxpayers.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): This week the Greater Manchester Co-operative Commission delivered its report, which was accepted in its entirety, to Mayor Andy Burnham. May we have a debate in Government time on the value of the co-operative sector to the UK economy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: One of the issues about things being devolved is that the authority then rests there rather than necessarily coming immediately back to the House for debate, but it may well be suitable for an Adjournment debate.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Many people want convenient local access to high quality end-of-life care. May we have a debate in Government time on social care reform and how it might help to provide localised end-of-life care?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend will know that the Conservative manifesto committed to trying to set up a cross-party commission with the aim of establishing proposals for social care, and end-of-life care is an important part of that. I hope that when that commission is established, he will make representations to it to ensure that his concerns are fully reflected.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): In yesterday's debate on homelessness, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government appeared to dismiss the statistics that I gave him, which

were that the number of universal credit claimants in council properties who have fallen into rent arrears was 67.4%, and that universal credit claimants are more likely to be evicted by a ratio of 2.9:1. May we have a debate in Government time about the impact of universal credit on the number of evictions and how we can encourage Secretaries of State to stick to the facts?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I was not present for that exchange. We are lucky that in this House, we have a first-class Library service, which is phenomenally good at checking statistics. It may well be worth while asking the Library experts to dig into these statistics to see what the accurate figures are.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): One of the more popular measures in our manifesto was the abolition of some hospital car parking charges. It therefore came as a great shock to me to hear that APCOA, which runs the parking control at Northwick Park Hospital, is without notice or consultation dramatically increasing the parking charges, especially for staff, and taking away many of the staff permits that are available to them. May we have a debate in Government time about abolishing car parking charges? That would be popular across the country.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is a manifesto commitment, and it will be introduced. I am afraid APCOA will get its come-uppance when that happens.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The *Financial Times* fears that there will be another pensions scandal, potentially affecting 160,000 people with defined benefit pension schemes. The Financial Conduct Authority thinks that there could be problems with the transfer advice given by 76% of firms. This is an £80 billion market, so can we have a statement from the Treasury to try to get to the bottom of this scandal?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Anything relating to pensions is extremely important. A pensions Bill will be introduced in the House of Lords fairly soon, so these matters will be discussed on the Floor of the House in due course.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Rugby Gymnastics Club has produced gymnasts who have gone on to compete at national level; and it has 1,000 youngsters attending classes and 300 on a waiting list. It has been operating for decades in an old industrial building that is, frankly, not fit for purpose, but it has an ambitious scheme to develop a new purpose-built gym. At the eleventh hour, it has been told that it has to make a significant financial contribution to biodiversity offsetting. The Government are about to conduct a review of the planning system. In it, will they distinguish between commercial value and development with a social value, such as that of our highly valued gym club?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is brilliantly championing an excellent initiative in his constituency that maintains social value for the people of Rugby. I think the council ought to be referred to the national planning policy framework, which makes it clear that local planning authorities are expected to balance social, economic and environmental considerations in a way

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

that is appropriate to their area. That is already in planning guidelines, and I therefore encourage him to keep on reminding the council of its obligations.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Last summer, the Government announced a £3.6 billion town fund and identified 100 towns that were to benefit from it. I was disappointed that Ellesmere Port and Neston—

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): And Little Neston.

Justin Madders: I was disappointed that those towns, and Little Neston, were not on the list, so I began tabling written questions about the basis on which successful towns were selected. I got a list of criteria, and I asked for the data that underpinned it, only to be told this week that that information was not available because the policy was still being developed. That prompts the question: how could towns have been selected for a fund if the policy was still being developed? We need a clear and unambiguous statement from the relevant Minister about that.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Policies are in development the whole time, and if we always waited for the complete development of every policy, nothing would ever happen.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): As we leave the EU, may we have a debate on products made in the UK that up to now have had restrictions on them? I am proud that the village of Stilton is in my constituency, but despite a local historian finding evidence that Stilton cheese was originally made in the village, EU rules and bureaucracy have prevented the cheese from being made locally.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Geographical indicators are a matter of considerable controversy, with some people arguing very strongly for Yorkshire rhubarb, and others concerned about Stilton cheese. My hon. Friend makes a great campaign for a village in his constituency. It always seems difficult if you cannot use your own name for something.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): A constituent of mine has been through hell and back with her abhorrent ex-partner, who is father to her four children. He has delayed and obfuscated dealings with the Child Support Agency and now the Child Maintenance Service with appeal after appeal, made outrageous and false allegations that simply do not bear repeating in this House, and self-published a book on their divorce, full of slurs. She was horrified to learn recently that the CMS was going to write off more than £40,000 of historical debt. Could we please have a debate on the CMS and how absent parents can still dodge financial responsibility?

Mr Rees-Mogg: If I did agree to a debate I would probably upset the various forces that exist, but I will say, as I have said before in this House, that the CSA and its successor body have, in my experience as a constituency MP, been one of the least satisfactory bodies that I have dealt with.

Ian Mearns indicated assent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee is nodding, and I think his Committee would be a very good starting point.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The Oarsome Foursome is a team of three women from my constituency and one from Devon who are on the final leg of their transatlantic row to raise money for and awareness of local charities. They set out on the day of the general election and they will conclude their row tomorrow, on Brexit day—I am sure those dates are purely coincidental. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating them and wishing them well on their final leg, and may we have a debate on the important role that those raising money for charity play in our national life?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can give satisfaction to half of my hon. Friend's question, but not to the full part. I am delighted to congratulate the Oarsome Foursome on their fantastic achievement and charity-raising objectives. I do not think I can promise a debate in Government time, but I think an Adjournment debate to celebrate their achievements would be a jolly good idea.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Barnsley Council has suffered the worst cuts in the country, yet research this week by the Local Government Association suggests that a review of the local funding formula could take another £4.5 million from Barnsley council by 2021. Can we have a debate in Government time on how we can have a fair funding deal for all local councils, not just those in the leafy Tory shires?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am not sure that I accept the entire premise of that question, but next Wednesday there will be a debate in Opposition time on local government finance, and on Wednesday 12 February there will be motions relating to local government finance reports, at which these issues can be aired.

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): What timescale does my right hon. Friend have in mind for the re-establishment of the Liaison Committee, and does the Chairman of that Committee have to be selected from the current Select Committee Chairs?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Committees are in the process of being set up, and the Government and House authorities have done well in doing that pretty swiftly. The Liaison Committee will follow in accordance with that process. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point about the Chairman. In the last Parliament, the Chairman was from the Committee, but that is not a requirement of Standing Orders. It could be somebody else.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In the past few months, many of us have seen a wave of knife crime sweeping across our constituencies, particularly London, east London and my constituency. The issue has been raised by Members on both sides of the House and from all parties. Although we have had relevant debates, surely we should have regular statements by the Home Secretary, because this problem is not going away. If anything, it is getting worse.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is a doughty champion for his constituents and he is right to raise the issue of knife crime, which is troubling, particularly in London, as he rightly says. There will be Home Office questions on 10 February. The Government are going to take on 20,000 extra police and are encouraging more stop and search, which does seem to be very effective in reducing knife crime.

Karl McCartney: We all in this House like to think that all Members are equal, but it would seem that some Members are more equal than others. I declare an interest. In 2017, more Government than Opposition Members lost our seats—there were 33 of us—and we received one week's salary for each year of service. Mysteriously, just before the 2019 general election—at which more Opposition Members lost their seats—it was decided that each departing MP would receive two months' salary. Does the Leader of the House believe in fairness?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is not a decision made by the Government. The House of Commons decided to allow an independent body—the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority—to make the decision. My hon. Friend has made his representations. The House of Commons Commission has regular meetings with IPSA, and his point will be raised with it on his behalf.

Points of Order

12.9 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Weighing just 4½ stone, the body of Errol Graham was found eight months after his employment and support allowance had been stopped. The Department for Work and Pensions subsequently said that an independent serious case panel would look into Mr Graham's case to judge the Department's failures in relation to his death. However, it has emerged that the panel will consist only of senior civil servants from the Department itself, and it is unclear whether its conclusions will be made public. The lack of scrutiny and independence is unacceptable. Given the public interest and the seriousness of the issue, Madam Deputy Speaker, can you advise me on how to ensure that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions comes to the House and makes an oral statement on the issue at her earliest convenience?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her wish to raise this matter. She has set out her case clearly. However, as I suspect she will realise, this is not a point of order for the Chair. If she wishes to pursue the matter further, she may wish to seek advice from the Table Office, but obviously Ministers will have heard what she has said about this distressing case.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for calling me earlier in business questions. It is a session that Back Benchers greatly value, as it is the one opportunity in the week when they may be able to raise matters. I understand the time restrictions applying to our business on Thursdays, but during the session that we have just had, the Front-Bench exchanges took 16 of the 45 minutes that you had allocated, and it was due to a brilliant effort on your part that so many Members could contribute in the remaining time. Could anything be done to ensure that more Back Benchers who wish to contribute to business questions are able to do so?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that there is a feeling that it is quite helpful for colleagues to have a rough idea of when business is starting so that they can be fairly certain of when they need to turn up for debates. I think many colleagues agree on that. So that is why there are firmer time limits for statements and urgent questions. However, I am sure that Front Benchers will take account of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made about the importance of getting Back Benchers in as well. Obviously, business questions are a very important part of the week—I accept that—and we did manage to get most people in today, which was because there were shorter questions and shorter answers. I think we should bear that in mind for the future.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given that the Select Committees are soon to be established, will you use your good offices, through the Speaker, to ensure that every Committee that wants one has the chance to employ an apprentice to help it in some capacity? The Education Committee

[Robert Halfon]

has an apprentice, but I think that if all Select Committees employed them, it would send a very good signal in relation to building an apprenticeships and skills nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not actually a matter for the Chair, but obviously the right hon. Gentleman has put on record his views about Select Committees and apprentices, and I will certainly pass them to the Speaker and other appropriate authorities.

BILL PRESENTED

ENVIRONMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Theresa Villiers, supported by the Prime Minister, Michael Gove, Secretary Stephen Barclay, Secretary Andrea Leadsom, Secretary Robert Jenrick, Secretary Grant Shapps, Secretary Alister Jack, Secretary Simon Hart and Secretary Julian Smith, presented a Bill to make provision about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; for statements and reports about environmental protection; for the Office for Environmental Protection; about waste and resource efficiency; about air quality; for the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards; about water; about nature and biodiversity; for conservation covenants; about the regulation of chemicals; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 3 February, and to be printed (Bill 9) with explanatory notes (Bill 9-EN).

Global Britain

12.14 pm

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I beg to move,

That this House has considered global Britain.

As the clock strikes 11 tomorrow night, we will start building the UK's future as a sovereign trading nation. I should make clear that there are many aspects of global Britain that have nothing to do with trade. The Prime Minister will be leading an integrated defence, security and foreign policy review that will examine all aspects of our place in the world. The Foreign Secretary is spending today with his counterpart from our most important ally, the United States. The Government are committed to exceeding the 2% NATO defence spending target, and to spending 0.7% of GNP on development. Today, however, I will restrict my remarks to one aspect of the story, and that is trade.

Global Britain will be a beacon for free enterprise, free trade and free people across the world, and we will light that beacon championing the values for which the UK has long been known. From our abolition of the corn laws in 1846 to helping to found the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1948, the UK has long been a global leader in shaping the rules-based system, but from 1973 onwards that role has been increasingly curtailed. Tomorrow we will begin to reclaim that global leadership.

It is more than two centuries since our great political economist David Ricardo outlined the idea of comparative advantage, demonstrating how free and open trade benefits everyone, but it is an idea that still illuminates our country, and we have an opportunity to take that message out and across the world. Why is that important? First, it is the right thing to do. Believing in freedom is about more than economic theory. It is about believing in our freedom to set up a business, choose what we buy, and chart our own future. In its essence, free trade is about expanding that freedom across borders. It is the catalyst for sharing ideas, products, services and the innovations that improve all our lives. If we believe that people have the choice to access the best goods and services, we must also believe in free trade.

Secondly, that opportunity is important because Britain's global leadership is sorely needed. Protectionist measures are on the rise across the world, increasing by three times the rate at the onset of the financial crisis. Brexit is the opportunity for this country to turn the tide, and to be a global champion of free, rules-based trade with the World Trade Organisation at its heart. That is not only morally right, but in the interests of our country. It is forecast that 90% of global growth will come from outside the EU. The world is bursting with opportunity—opportunity that Britain will seize with both hands.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Leaving aside our contrasting views on Ricardo and the corn laws, I believe that my right hon. Friend and I share a distaste for the vapid, elitist supranationalism that the EU represents. Will she consider the possibility of a preferential trading arrangement with our Commonwealth allies, as suggested by the

former President of Nigeria? That would build on the bond which already exists in Her Majesty's realm and beyond.

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend has made a very good point. The Commonwealth makes up a third of the members of the WTO, and I am determined that we will work with Commonwealth partners not only to reduce tariffs, but to promote the rules-based international system that will benefit all those nations.

As I heard during a recent visit to Stoke-on-Trent, ceramics producers currently face a 28% tariff to export their fantastic crockery to the United States. We export nearly £8 billion worth of cars to the US every year, but, again, we face tariffs. British beef and lamb have been banned from entering the US for more than 20 years. More free trade with our partners, reducing those tariffs and barriers, will play an integral part in our agenda to level up the country.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): May I follow up the point that my right hon. Friend has just made, very eloquently? CANZUK—consisting of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and ourselves—has the potential to play a considerable role. What are the Government's plans to strengthen our CANZUK relationship in respect of trade and free movement, as well as other issues of mutual interest?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When we entered the EU, those close relationships with allies such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia fundamentally became less close. We have a huge opportunity, as we leave the EU, to build better relationships. We have already named Australia and New Zealand as two of our priority trading partners, and we want to work with Canada, particularly on accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, so that we can build up those strong relationships.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): Does the Secretary of State recognise that the UK does not, in fact, face a stark choice between maximising trade with either the European Union or the rest of the world? It is perfectly possible for the UK to maximise trade with the rest of the world through the European Union and through UK leadership in ensuring that the EU is open to the rest of the world. This false choice between the two could lead to the UK losing out on a range of opportunities.

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We want to have a great trading relationship with the EU, and we want to have a great trading relationship with the rest of the world. Our ambition is to ensure that 80% of UK trade is covered by free trade deals within three years, and that will mean lower tariffs for British producers sending their goods into the EU and also right around the world.

This is hugely important for levelling up our country, from the potters of Staffordshire and the sheep farmers of Wales to the robotics manufacturers in the north-east. By lowering tariffs and striking advanced digital agreements, we will give a boost to local economies, which will increase the number of jobs, increase wages and promote

growth in those areas. That is the way we are going to level up our country: through enterprise and trade bringing more opportunities.

We are ambitious about securing a pioneering free trade agreement with Japan, which is already our main source of investment in Asia, employing more than 150,000 people across the UK. There are also fantastic opportunities to expand our trade with Australia in areas as diverse as defence, education, digital and infrastructure. These opportunities with the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand are significant and will bring real value, but there is also an opportunity for us to become part of world-leading trade arrangements such as the CPTPP, partnering with 11 of the fastest-growing Pacific economies with consumer markets worth over \$6 trillion.

We have the opportunity to make great free trade agreements across the world, and global Britain can once again become the ideas factory of the world, building the networks, the trust and the confidence that will underpin the success of British businesses in markets of the future. That is why we recently held the Africa investment summit, breaking down barriers to trade, building business links and forging new relationships in a continent that includes more than half of the world's 15 fastest-growing economies.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): It is good to hear such a doughty defence and exposition of some classical and enduring truths about the importance of free trade, not just to this country and everybody in it but to the rest of the world. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one small but symbolically significant thing we could do is to ensure that free trade is extended to our overseas territories? They are 14 fairly small territories scattered around the world, but each is potentially a trading post for Great Britain, and this could be of benefit to the residents of those territories as well.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, and of course we want to extend those trading relationships with our overseas territories as far as we can.

I am pleased to say that, as we leave the European Union, we will be launching a new GREAT ready-to-trade campaign, featuring the Union flag and showcasing a modern, confident and successful Britain. We will have billboards and press and digital ads in 18 cities across 30 countries outside the EU, and we will be encouraging investors and buyers worldwide by showing that the UK is ready, willing and able to trade. These efforts are key to our agenda to unite to level up our country, delivering opportunity and unleashing the potential of every part of the United Kingdom.

However, trade is about more than just exports and investment. It is also about shaping the sort of world we want to live in. Let us be honest, there is a battle raging at the moment across the world: a battle between protectionism and free trade, between unfair trading practices and the defence of intellectual property, and between those who wish to restrict human freedom and those who seek to advance it. Let nobody be in any doubt which side the United Kingdom is on.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the opportunities we will have from tomorrow is to allow developing

[Mr Peter Bone]

countries to have tariffs removed so that we will get cheaper products and their economies will expand? It is trade, not aid, that is going to solve the problem, and the EU has held us back on that.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right. Of course we are rolling over all the existing trade preference schemes with those nations, but as we leave the EU, we have opportunities to be more flexible. We have an opportunity to add new goods and to ensure that there is not a cliff edge for those developing nations, so that they do not see those trade preferences eroded when they get to a certain level of development. I completely agree with my hon. Friend that it is enterprise in this country that will help us to level up Britain, and it is enterprise across the world that will help us to level up world economies, taking more people out of poverty.

Working together with our friends and allies such as the EU, the United States and Japan, we will defend the frontiers of freedom, opportunity and prosperity for people right across the globe. We will engage at the G7 and the G20 and in the Commonwealth to move forward with WTO reform, update the rulebook and strengthen transparency. We are ambitious not just to defend freedom's frontiers but to expand them. Just as we led the way in opening trade in goods during the past two centuries, as global Britain we will seek to do the same for services. The UK is the world's second largest services exporter. The Office for National Statistics has estimated that two thirds of UK service exports are traded remotely, so we will be looking for advanced digital and data chapters to help businesses right across our country to succeed. Investment in the UK tech sector grew faster than any other country in the world last year, according to research by Tech Nation. We want to build on that potential, with future FTAs setting a global benchmark to take advantage of innovations in data, digital collaboration and the digitisation of trade.

We are determined to level up, to deliver opportunity and to unleash the potential of every part of the United Kingdom. We will promote the future of free trade in a world of rising protectionism. Tomorrow, we will demonstrate that Britain is back and we are ready to trade.

12.27 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The system of rules that has been at the core of world trade for the past 70 years is at breaking point. Corporations such as Google, Amazon and Huawei have arrogated to themselves enormous power. They are able to stand up to sovereign Governments, if not always their own, and to undermine fiscal and public policy. Countries such as China are emerging from non-market economy status with labour and utility costs that enable them to dump subsidised products on to western markets that undercut our domestic producers. The response from the USA has been increased protectionism, imposing arbitrary tariffs on aircraft, steel, aluminium and—my personal non-favourite—Scotch whisky, the impacts of which colleagues will be debating later today in Westminster Hall. At the end of last year, the American President made good on his promise to undermine the WTO by refusing to ratify the appointments to the appellate court. These actions go to the heart of the multilateral rules-based order.

None of this is meant as a criticism of Government. It is merely to set out the context against which the prudence of Government action must be assessed, because it is against this background that our country is tomorrow pulling out of the largest and most powerful free trade grouping in the world and, paradoxically, doing so in the name of free trade itself. It has therefore never been more important for this Parliament to articulate its support for an open and fair rules-based global trading system that creates wealth and jobs in a way that protects workplace rights and environmental standards and ensures that vital sectors of our national economy are protected from unfair external competition.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Gentleman knows that I share his distaste for monolithic multinational companies that do not play by the rules, but the EU has been singularly ineffective at dealing with them, as he illustrated in his opening remarks. Why, then, does he think our departure will not give us a better opportunity to deal with exactly the problems he outlines?

Barry Gardiner: The right hon. Gentleman mistakes me. I am not seeking to reopen the debate about the EU. We are leaving the EU tomorrow, and we must forge a positive and constructive future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you feel any sense of déjà vu in what I believe is the fifth debate entitled "Global Britain" in the past two years, then for my part it will only be in asking the Government to set out a coherent strategy as to what that phrase is going to mean in practice. In previous debates, I heard calls from Government Members to bring back the royal yacht and talk of something called empire 2.0, but that does not constitute a strategy. To ask the Government for their strategy is not to talk Britain down or to act against the national interest; it is simply to ask that we work together as grown-ups to devise a new relationship with our closest trading partners and to agree a set of priorities for our country's future relations with others in an increasingly fraught geopolitical context.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I represent a city that still has a big steel industry, and 75% of our steel exports go to the EU. Does my hon. Friend agree that securing a good trading partnership with the EU is imperative if we are to protect the UK steel industry at an extremely challenging time?

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. She will know about America's imposition of section 232 to impose tariffs, with the excuse being that its steel industry was necessary for national security. However, I accept that the Government say they want to negotiate a zero-tariff, zero-quota free trade agreement with the EU. We need to do that, and we certainly need to do it for the steel industry, which my hon. Friend represents.

Perhaps those who have the audacity to ask for a plan ought to be prepared to provide suggestions, so in that spirit, let me be clear that the Opposition will champion the United Kingdom as a leader on the world stage that uses its position to tackle injustice and the imminent climate catastrophe. That means that we want to invest in future technologies and next generation industries, foster innovation and grow jobs in the economy, and to

do so in a way that helps our trade partners to do the same. We do not see trade as a zero-sum game of winners and losers. We see open and fair trade as a way of increasing global wealth, along with global justice and equality.

At a time of global turmoil and escalating trade wars, it is imperative to have a strategy that ensures that the UK is not helpless against a triple assault: the dumping of subsidised products into our markets, which undercuts our producers; punitive protectionist tariffs imposed upon our exports by our would-be partners; and potential disruption to our trade with the EU, which is still by far our largest trading partner. To that end, our relationship with the European Union must be the priority. We need a free trade agreement that not only protects our existing trade with zero tariffs and zero quotas, but ensures minimum future disruption in both goods and services. We cannot and must not allow a situation to arise whereby our businesses face tariffs on their goods to the EU, alongside onerous and complex administrative burdens, border inspections or delays to the supply chain.

Will the Minister address whether the Government intend to remain part of the pan-Euro-Mediterranean cumulation regime? If not, what is their assessment of the impact that that might have on UK industries and of how it might affect third countries with which we have concluded roll-over agreements and that have already included cumulation regimes in their own subsequent treaties? Producers must not be doubly impacted by a surge of cheaper imports from overseas, particularly where they are manufactured to standards lower than our own or in markets that are distorted by unfair or illegal practices.

The Secretary of State knows that she is introducing what has been called the

“weakest trade remedies regime in the world”,

and industry confidence was knocked still further by interim most favoured nation tariff measures that propose to abolish tariffs on up to 87% of imports. The EU and US are introducing safeguard measures that could see tariffs on our exports and increased diversion of dumped goods on to our market, wiping out foundation industries and the thousands of jobs that they account for in steel, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) said, in ceramics, which the Secretary of State talked about, and in major producers such as the automotive sector. I ask the Minister of State, Department for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), to set out in his reply to the debate out how the Government will protect our manufacturers, producers and farmers from a flurry of such imports under future trade agreements.

Bob Seely: The hon. Gentleman is talking about dumping. Where does he believe that the high-tech sector and Huawei fit into that, given the soft subsidies provided by China to help the company muscle into 5G communications?

Barry Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman tempts me, and I have a great deal of sympathy with his position. I believe that the decision that the Government have reached on Huawei is already a risk too far, so I share that view with him. Of course, he is right to point out

that the Chinese Government’s subsidy to Huawei is just as damaging in that sector as subsidies for steel or aluminium.

Future trade agreements could undermine rights and standards, could change the nature of work and the protections offered to workers, such as leave arrangements and parental leave, could reverse environmental protections, and could compromise data privacy and our capacity to regulate in the public interest. Trade agreements could also see our public services being locked into greater privatisation and different pricing models. I say “could” because I am trying to be generous, since Government Members have sought to assure us that no such thing will happen on their watch, but that takes us to the heart of things: if that is so, why are they refusing to allow any degree of scrutiny or engagement in the process?

The trade Bill was supposed to be one of the flagship Bills underpinning global Britain. The Government boasted that it would set out the framework under which future trade agreements would be concluded, but it has been delayed. It has been kicked into the long grass. In fact, it actually came out of its eighth and supposedly final Committee debate two years ago tomorrow. In Committee, we made every effort to legislate for proper democratic oversight of trade agreements. How unreasonable we were! We asked for consultation with industry, a published mandate agreed by Parliament, transparency of agreed texts, scrutiny, debate and positive ratification, but we were blocked.

In the other place, their lordships valiantly reinstated the democratic safeguards and, despite all the Government’s attempts at obfuscation and frustration, their lordships actually managed to introduce significant amendments to the Bill. No wonder it has now languished down the other end of the building for almost a year. In the meantime, the Government have signed a raft of trade agreements—not the 40 originally promised for a minute after midnight on 29 March last year—many of which try to mirror the existing terms of the third-party agreements with the EU. Those trade agreements have been subject to little public scrutiny, with the Government taking advantage of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 process to ratify treaties without giving Parliament the opportunity to debate them.

New Members may be unaware of the vagaries of CRAGA, under which an international treaty is automatically ratified after it has been published and laid before Parliament for 21 sitting days, so long as neither House has resolved against it. How do we resolve against it? The Government have to make time or provide an Opposition day for such a vote, but they have no compulsion to do either. That means Parliament can be presented with a fait accompli—so much for the return of sovereignty. International treaties are possibly the most binding law we pass in this place. They commit our successors in international law and cannot simply be repealed by a future Parliament in the way primary legislation normally can.

Let us examine what is happening under CRAGA. One such agreement currently pending ratification, having been laid before Parliament on 20 December 2019, is the UK-Morocco association agreement, which purports to cover Western Sahara. Western Sahara is categorised as a non self-governing territory under chapter 11 of the UN charter, and it has been under military occupation

[Barry Gardiner]

by Morocco since 1975 after Spain surrendered the colony. The Sahrawi people have been denied the referendum that would allow them to exercise their right to self-determination.

The European Court of Justice has twice ruled, in 2016 and 2018, that Western Sahara is a “separate and distinct” territory from Morocco under international law, and that no agreement with Morocco can be applied to the territory of Western Sahara without the consent of the Sahrawi people. The group internationally recognised as the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people has rejected every proposal that the EU’s trade agreement with Morocco should apply to them. In fact, a coalition of 93 Sahrawi civil society groups has confirmed that the people of Western Sahara reject the inclusion of their territory in any agreement concluded by Morocco.

Our own High Court ruled just last year that the territory of Western Sahara is separate from Morocco under international law and that the UK Government are acting unlawfully by failing to distinguish between the territory of Morocco and the occupied territory of Western Sahara.

The proposed UK-Morocco association agreement is thus contrary to international law and our own law, and it should not be ratified by Parliament until all references to Western Sahara are removed. This is what happens when there is no process of prior consultation, mandate-setting, scrutiny, transparency or debate as part of the ratification process.

Other recent treaties that replicate economic partnership agreements concluded between the EU and countries in central and southern Africa, for example, force market liberalisation measures without allowing for any modernisation or incubation capacity for industry in those partner nations. That effectively locks in economic dependency and prevents the broadening of their economic and industrial base, which is essential to achieving their development goals.

The impact on chicken farming in Ghana, Cameroon and Senegal has been well documented. Dumped chicken products from the EU, farmed with subsidy support under the common agricultural policy, have decimated local chicken production, raising genuine food security questions for these least developed countries.

Is this the global Britain that Conservative Members aspire to be: compounding economic hardship, legitimising oppression and actively supporting regimes that flagrantly abuse human rights and international humanitarian law? I do not think so, but it is what will happen unless the Government openly and frankly outline a detailed strategy for global Britain, and unless Parliament is allowed to fulfil its constitutional role of holding the Government to account.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): What is the Opposition’s policy? The hon. Gentleman is outlining a policy of the European Union. The Labour party wanted to join the customs union, which would have implemented exactly that policy. Is that protectionist and slightly weird policy towards the rest of the world still the Labour party’s policy?

Barry Gardiner: I will try to take the hon. Gentleman’s question seriously, because it has a serious core. We have moved on from the debate about the European

Union, and we must move on, so it is now about setting the right course for global Britain. That is what this debate is about, and we should not simply roll over the bad things in the EU’s trade agreements and economic partnership agreements. We should set out a new way to engage with such countries that is not exploitative in the same way as the previous treaties. I hope that answers his question.

Mr Bone: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Barry Gardiner: No, because I have just answered that very point.

Mr Bone: You can’t answer it, can you?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Barry Gardiner: We cannot forget that this Government have continued to support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with arms sales, despite the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and despite the Court of Appeal ruling that such exports must cease. The Secretary of State had to come before this House to apologise for breaching the Government’s undertakings to the Court of Appeal and to the House of Commons. Perhaps she might be able to tell us the outcome of the Department’s inquiry into how many breaches of those undertakings there were and how they came about. I will happily give way to her if she can. If she cannot, can the Minister of State, Department for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), when he sums up, at least inform the House of when we might expect the outcome of that report?

I am reminded that we are also waiting for further information on the Department’s investigation into bribery and corrupt practices involving British companies overseas, especially those supported by taxpayers’ funds through UK Export Finance. Can we have an update on that investigation, too?

Earlier this week, it was revealed that Airbus has entered a deferred prosecution agreement in relation to allegations of corrupt practices overseas. This is not the global Britain that we should be projecting: a nation willing to sell arms and equipment to countries with a track record of violating international humanitarian law, where they may be used against innocent civilians, deployed in efforts to oppress citizens or exported through corrupt practices.

It is not just in the arena of international trade that the global order is under threat. NATO, too, is coming under increased strain. There are wrangles on costs and burden sharing, and member states are purchasing weapons systems outside the alliance.

Later this year, the UK will host the crucial United Nations framework convention on climate change—COP26—in Glasgow. This is a truly global responsibility but, sadly, it will also be the moment when America finally pulls out of the Paris agreement, in accordance with the notification it gave two years ago. It will also coincide with the result of the US presidential election. Many countries that have been earnestly engaging in the Paris process, seeking to reduce their own emissions, may come to question their engagement if America continues to be absent from the process.

The pattern of global power is shifting dramatically and swiftly. It is turbocharged by big data, the fourth industrial revolution, artificial intelligence, robotics and the internet of things. Above all, geopolitics will be affected by the energy transformation as the world moves towards a net-zero carbon economy.

From coal and whale oil to crude and shale, the geopolitical map has been moulded by the need to control energy supplies. Distribution pinch points such as the Suez canal and the strait of Hormuz have been flash points for conflict, and the projection of global power has relied on the ability to maintain security of energy supply. The inevitability of this shift is not simply due to the rapidly declining cost of renewables, or even the health and climate problems associated with fossil fuels.

Renewables, in many forms, are widely dispersed in most countries, promoting domestic self-sufficiency. They are not stocks that are used and then depleted; they are flows that are constantly recharged and so require less transportation and have no choke points. They lend themselves to decentralisation of production and consumption, and they can more easily be deployed at a local community scale. They also have marginal costs that approach to zero. So just as the geographic concentration of coal, oil and gas moulded our political landscape since the industrial revolution, the dispersed nature of renewable energy will erode those traditional patterns in a new global world. It is not clear that the Government have thought through the geopolitical implications of this energy transformation: which countries are likely to forge ahead and leapfrog the old technology; and which will fail to transform their subsoil assets of oil and gas into surface assets of human social and political capital quickly enough. It is often said that the stone age did not end because of a lack of stone, and nor will the fossil fuel age end because of a lack of oil, gas or coal. It will end with a lot of stranded assets that could pose severe financial risks that a global Britain must guard against.

The Government have sought to congratulate themselves repeatedly on our domestic progress towards net zero, but this has been achieved through the systematic exporting of our carbon emissions and an explicit policy of supporting activities overseas that we no longer support at home. I therefore welcome what the Prime Minister said:

“there’s no point in the UK reducing the amount of coal we burn if we then trundle over to Africa and line our pockets by encouraging African states to use more of it.”

He is right, and that is why we stopped UK Export Finance funding for coal back in 2002 and why we stopped official development assistance finance for coal back in 2012. What I want to hear from the Minister is an update, the logical corollary of what the Prime Minister said, which is that there is no point in the UK reducing the amount of fossil fuels we burn if we then trundle over to Brazil or Africa or India or anywhere and line our pockets by encouraging those countries to use more oil and gas.

UKEF has helped to finance oil and gas projects that, when complete, will emit 69 million tonnes of carbon a year. That is nearly a sixth of the total annual carbon emissions of the UK itself. Global Britain cannot be Janus-faced, with domestic virtue masking the international promotion of the very policies we say we

want to prevent, freeing ourselves to embrace a net-zero future while locking other developing countries into fossil fuel dependency.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): In the past 25 minutes, we have heard a lot of virtuous noises about renewable energy which we can all agree with. We know that the hon. Gentleman is against defence and security exports, against the US and against Saudi Arabia. He is against a whole number of things, and global Britain in terms of trade seems to mean for the Labour party “lining our pockets”. What is the Labour party’s vision of the role of the UK in the world? Does he not see enormous opportunities for us in working with continents such as Africa and Asia?

Barry Gardiner: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has sought to intervene in that way, because that quote about lining pockets is from his own Prime Minister, so I not think he does himself any credit. The fact that he has not listened to the positive things that I have been saying is his problem, not mine.

UK Export Finance plays a significant role in enabling fossil fuel projects by removing risk and sending safe signals to investors—these are the wrong signals. The Government’s dangerous approach risks leaving the UK taxpayer on the hook, financing stranded assets as the world rapidly moves away from fossil fuels. That is the point: this is a problem for us and for our economic security in the future. That is precisely what Mark Carney, Bloomberg and many others in the financial taskforce have tried to point out.

Two years ago, I called for the UK to end all fossil fuel projects supported by UKEF and to focus on our renewable technologies instead. Will the Government recognise that that is what a confident, outward-facing, global Britain needs to do? The UK has not yet depleted entirely its stock of fossil fuels, but its future does not lie so much in their further exploitation as in our capacity to use digital technology, smart grids and big data to place ourselves at the vanguard of this energy transition.

Global Britain cannot be backward looking. We must look forward to new opportunities and the repositioning of global powers. We must harness our unique skills and capabilities, and leverage them to take advantage of emerging economies and emergent technological solutions. We need a coherent industrial strategy that ensures a diverse economic base and a skilled workforce capable of meeting the emergent opportunities of a very different but precarious world. We need a proper, robust, independent, trade defence measure, and we need a Government that defend British interests and stand up against unfair practices overseas, including tariffs imposed on the likes of ceramics, which the Secretary of State has talked about. We need a democratic approach to trade agreements that have the early buy-in of affected stakeholders, businesses, trade unions, civil society, devolved Administrations and the elected representatives of the British people.

We cannot seek to make progress on the new issues affecting trade, digital economies and cross-border data flows, the treatment of bundled goods and services, the enforcement of intellectual property rights and so forth until we move forward. We must demonstrate the effectiveness of the rules-based system, work to progress

[Barry Gardiner]

and re-establish the appellate body of the World Trade Organisation, but we must also reform its structures to deliver the global order that is more just and more equitable.

12.55 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The title of this debate seems to be shorthand for the United Kingdom taking up its separate and equal status among the nations of the world, and everything that that means. As we approached this debate, people might have been asking, “What would it look like if Brexiteers had thought in advance about Britain’s global future? What would it mean if we had had a comprehensive analysis of every area of relevant policy that would change as we left the EU? What would it mean if we had actually drawn a picture of what Britain’s future would look like if it was global?” What if we had set out:

“Why the EU needs to Change

The Change we need

How Britain would gain influence outside an unreformed EU

How Britain would prosper outside an unreformed EU”?

What if we had then brought it together in a substantial conclusion.

I do not suppose, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you will allow me to read 1,030 pages into the record, but for anyone who thinks there was no plan, and that Brexiteers had not thought through what it would mean to leave the EU and where we wanted to go, I encourage them to Google—or use their preferred search engine to search for—“Change, or go” by Business for Britain, which was published before the designated period of the referendum began. I am very proud of that document. I recently revisited it to see what it said about trade policy, and I think it stands the test of time. I am sure it contains something I will not agree with, something outside the boundaries of the manifesto, but anyone with a fair, objective mind should understand that we have always been clear about where we wanted to go.

This really matters, because ideas inform action, and both ideas and action are guided by values. At the heart of the difficulties we have faced recently is the fact that too many people have not understood our values. Brexiteers, people like me, are liberals of the old kind: open and tolerant, and believers in a diverse society, one that makes progress. For a long time, I was in favour of the European Union as it was, including, at one point, the euro. Why did I change my mind? It was because of Gordon Brown going off and signing that Lisbon treaty on his own, trying almost to hide what he was doing. I came to realise that democracy was under threat. When I recall how I felt at the time of the Lisbon treaty, watching the European constitution being hammered through, positively against democracy and with a refusal of a mandate, I remember fear and anxiety. I remember that I was concerned for the future of the country.

I therefore listened to the concerns of our opponents—the opponents of Brexit—expressed in the past few years. I have listened to them with considerable sympathy. Today it is incumbent on all Brexiteers to manufacture consent for what we are doing, to recognise that we have won: we have the Prime Minister we wanted and the policy

we wanted, and the majority in the House of Commons necessary to give the Prime Minister the power necessary to put that through.

The Prime Minister is a centrist. Anyone objective, looking at our manifesto and our programme for government, will see that he is willing to intervene in the economy, that he wants to be outside the EU but that he is open, liberal, tolerant and turning to the world. I am therefore making an appeal today for grace and patience, for people to be kind to one another, particularly as we approach this celebration. It is difficult to be kind to people when they have been trying to delegitimise election results and referendum results, including the recent election: I heard people talking about first past the post, seeking to delegitimise the result. It will not do to be trying to delegitimise the constitutional arrangements that have served us very well. It is difficult to be graceful to people when they are demonising you, in one case saying that Brexiteers—indeed, the European Research Group—were worse than Nazis. That is a ridiculous comment, yet demonisation has been common. It will not do for leaders of our society to be constantly seeking to demoralise the public, but that is what we have seen. No more—no more demoralisation, no more demonisation of opponents and no more attempts, please, to delegitimise legitimate results.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason he is so right is that the outcome of the general election, which endorsed the result of the referendum itself, is a tribute to the British people, who made the decision that we should be returned to this House in the numbers that we see?

Mr Baker: Absolutely, and I shall come on to the question having been asked and answered.

Currently, journalists are asking me how I feel about tomorrow, the day of our leaving the European Union. It is, after all, the conclusion of what I have worked for for a good 10 to 12 years of my life—I got into politics because of that fury about the Lisbon treaty—so I should be elated. I should be rejoicing, but I am reminded of Wellington:

“Believe me, nothing except a battle lost is half so melancholy as a battle won.”

I approach tomorrow in a spirit of some considerable melancholy. I very much regret the division that this country has faced. I very much regret the cost of coming so far—the things we have had to do in British politics to get to this point. I very much regret the sorrow that my opponents will feel tomorrow as some are rejoicing on the streets.

I know that we are going to celebrate. I will celebrate—I will allow myself a smile and that glass of champagne and I will enjoy myself—but I will celebrate discreetly and in a way that is respectful of the genuine sorrow that others are feeling at the same time. That means not that I am giving in—it does not mean that I am turning away from what I believe—but that I recognise that all of us on the Government Benches who have won the argument now have a duty to be magnanimous. I urge that on everyone, inside and outside the House, even as we press forward. There are some who take an attitude of “no quarter” after the events of the past few years, and I say to them no, enough. We have to forgive and turn away from what has happened in the past, because

we need to create the future that we can all enjoy and be proud of in this country. It is not a future based on past grievances; it is an open and expansive future that embraces the infinite value of every other person, even when we disagree with one another.

I do not wish to make a speech about disagreeing gracefully—perhaps on another occasion—but I do want to pick up on what the Secretary of State said about the battle of ideas raging around the world. She is absolutely right. It is a subject about which I have talked before, and if anybody is interested in my analysis, it is in the pinned video on my YouTube channel. A true conflict of ideas is going on right now—a widespread crisis of political economy—and when we listened to the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) talk through his ideas, some of the difficulties and conflicts about how we go forward in the world were evident in what he said.

I am not going to be critical of what the hon. Gentleman said, but one point that I shall draw out is that so many people, including him, have made a plea for us to comply with the rules-based international order. I want us to do that. I want us to build up the World Trade Organisation—a great multilateral organisation that does not involve having a supreme court with wide-ranging powers to deliver free trade—but I say gently that if we comply with the World Trade Organisation rules, we cannot discriminate against food that is safe to eat, yet there are Members of this House who make both pleas: they plead that we ban American food that is safe to eat at the same time as making a plea for complying with WTO rules. People will have to make up their minds as to what they want to do. I want to respect international institutions—the things we have carefully built up to pursue human flourishing through liberty under the rule of law, not only nationally but internationally.

Mr Fysh: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we work together as a House to make sure that we do not take tariff reduction off the table, because if we are to achieve some of the ambitions that the Opposition outlined earlier, we need the ability to do deals with others, which requires us to be less protectionist in our own markets?

Mr Baker: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, before I came to the House—before I expected to get into the House—I started a think-tank called the Cobden Centre. I consider myself to be an old English Cobdenite classical liberal. I believe that human flourishing will be best advanced by the policy on which my hon. Friend and I agree—one of liberalisation of both tariffs and non-tariff barriers. We should be promoting human flourishing through that deeply rooted sense of liberty that I know the Secretary of State fully believes in.

The battle in which we are engaged is, in a sense, the same old battle we have always faced. It is a battle between a belief in managing the lives of other people and a belief in liberty. Are we to be merely conservative, clinging on to the institutions of the past, or are we going to be what I would consider to be genuinely liberal? While respecting traditions that have worked, are we going to be genuinely liberal and progressive, recognising that human progress comes not through state planning and foreseeing every possible difficulty well in advance? That has never worked. It might sometimes

make a contribution, but as a general principle it has not worked. Or are we going to recognise that everyone errs? Like entrepreneurs, are we going to recognise that things can and do go wrong? Are we going to have good-quality error correction mechanisms, which mean that in government, as in the market and as in science, when errors are made, they are rapidly corrected? Not only will progress in the world happen fast, but it will keep accelerating. We need the mechanisms to ensure that errors are not entrenched—not entrenched across the whole of Europe and the world—but corrected fast.

In concluding, I wish to turn to a speech made by Ronald Reagan in 1964 called “A Time for Choosing”. It is always a time for choosing. He talked about the long journey that mankind makes

“from the swamp to the stars”.

He said that

“this idea that government is beholden to the people, that it has no other source of power except the sovereign people, is still the newest and the most unique idea in all the long history of man’s relation to man.”

He went on:

“This is the issue of this election: whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves.”

The question has been asked—not just once, but four times. It was answered in a referendum; in a general election in which both main parties had leave manifestos; in European Parliament elections in which the Brexit party came first with, for want of a better term, a harder proposal for Brexit than the Government had adopted; and the question has just been asked and answered in a general election with a result that none of us could have foreseen. It is time for the whole country and the whole House, magnanimously on the part of those of us who were victorious, to accept that it is time to move forward gracefully, to believe in ourselves and our capacity for self-government, and to go forward and flourish.

1.7 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Well, it was a fine speech, in parts, that the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) just made, and I say that with all sincerity. He ended—I can tell—with a quote from President Reagan, who I can only assume is a hero of his, and, indeed, of many of the colleagues who surround him on the Government Benches, but I prefer what the German Federal President Steinmeier said, which was that the politics of the European Union are based on the revolutionary idea that one’s opponent has a point. The hon. Gentleman brought that to this debate, because he did have a point, of sorts. What he said about how his side owns the victory is important; indeed, as a party that advocates Scotland’s independence, that is a lesson for us as well. These things do matter.

I remember that the day after the referendum, on Parliament Square, outside this building, a young girl held up a sign with the Europe flag on it that said, “I want my country back”, a phrase often used by people on the other side of the Brexit divide. There is a feeling of loss, and I will take at face value the way in which the hon. Gentleman extends the hand, but that does not mean that I have to accept everything that he asks the

[*Stewart Malcolm McDonald*]

House to accept, because the clash of ideas does matter, and only a fool would not understand that there is a Scotland dynamic in this. Indeed, a Unionist should understand that better than anyone else.

I accept that the Prime Minister and the Conservative party have received a mandate to take England out of the European Union, but it is an arithmetical fact, adumbrated in all the electoral events that the hon. Gentleman just outlined, that that mandate does not extend to Scotland. I can accept that we had the referendum on independence in 2014, but facts change, circumstances change, and people's minds change, too. I ask the hon. Gentleman—in all seriousness because he clearly has some clout on the Conservative Benches—to ask his colleagues in Government to engage their brains more fully than they have done to date in the Scottish dynamic of the constitutional conundrum that we are in and that will only intensify.

Mr Baker: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making so much of my speech his own. What I say is that I hope I am not asking anything of him that I would not give myself. I said that I would accept the referendum result. I would have stood down in the general election of 2020, and I would have left politics. He is entitled to fight on, but I just say to him that the Prime Minister was right to say that there was a referendum in Scotland and that it should be accepted. It was stated that it would be a once-in-a-generation referendum. Of course, facts change. That is, I am sorry, to add nothing to the debate. I just ask him to accept his own referendum result.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I would not be in this House if I did not accept the 2014 referendum result. There would not be this huge number of Scottish National party Members of Parliament if we did not accept the 2014 referendum. As Ruth Davidson herself said, it is entirely right, honourable and indeed expected that the Scottish National party should continue to advocate for the very policy that it is in existence to try to deliver. There is nothing undemocratic or dishonourable about me and my colleagues advancing that cause.

None the less, even with accepting that the Brexiteers in the House have won—I can accept that—who, no matter what their Brexit position, can fail to have been moved by the scenes in the European Parliament yesterday, when parliamentarians from across the continent joined hands and sang that great Scots music hall poem, “Auld Lang Syne”. It is a song and a poem of friendship and of solidarity across the continent of Europe. What a contrast to the high hand of UK Unionism that we have seen just this week. This is what I mean when I say to colleagues on the Government Benches to please engage their brain.

The Scottish Government published a very serious document, seeking to alleviate the pressures on that part of the United Kingdom with regard to the movement of people. Scotland's problem is people leaving, not people coming. It is inconceivable that the UK Government could even have read that proposal before they rejected it out of hand. I feel like they are doing my job for me, because in parts of my constituency—admittedly, it is a yes voting constituency, but it has always had the highest

Tory vote in Glasgow—the people on whom they are relying, who are part of the coalition they need to keep the Union together, have not necessarily painted their faces blue and run into the forest declaring support for independence, but my goodness they want to have a conversation with my party in a way that they did not in the 2014 referendum. I ask colleagues on the Government Benches just to reflect on that, and on the fact that every single compromise that was offered by the Scottish Government and by the Scottish National party in this House over the past four years has been rejected out of hand—every single one of them.

I accept that the European Union—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), whom I am coming to, is yawning at this point. I accept that the European Union is the great devil for some people, but we just do not see it like that. The European Union as a project was created as Europe stood at the gates of hell and all of the history that went before it. Where there was Nazism and communism, it displaced those ideas and opened up economies and opened up markets. It allowed the clash of ideas in free and fair elections to take place all across the European continent. It still has a job to do in some parts of it.

The Secretary of State prayed in aid the Government's trade strategy. The European Union, a place in the world where once there were warring navies in the waters and warring air forces in the sky, now has trading, shipping and exchanges of ideas and of commerce that I thought Conservatives would have welcomed, but perhaps I am at risk of re-running the old argument.

Stephen Farry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. In responding to a lot of the very strong libertarian views on free trade that have been advocated by those on the Government Benches, does he recognise that, in fact, the European Union represents, albeit imperfectly, the most advanced example in human history of economic integration and free trade? Furthermore, in recognising the perspective of Scotland, Northern Ireland has its very particular remain perspective, too. The Global Britain brand that has been put forward, albeit a very convenient and simplistic concept, does not take into account the fact that Britain is not the same as the UK, and that Northern Ireland is excluded from that branding.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Ah, well, the hon. Gentleman, who is new to the House, will have to get used to that. Those on the Government Benches have a habit of forgetting that the UK is a political state. It is a union of nations across these islands, even if they do not govern as such. He is, of course, correct. Let us take freedom of movement as an example. It is one of the greatest instruments of economic freedom, of peace and of the exchange of ideas that has ever existed, yet Minister after Minister fall over themselves to get to that Dispatch Box to decry freedom of movement. It is the very instrument that this country was enthusiastically setting up within the European Union. Of course, we should keep freedom of movement, and if the United Kingdom does not want to keep it, then I ask it please to think of the Scottish context, and work with us to deliver something that will help our economy, which is something that the Government keep telling us that they want to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you will indulge me very briefly, I want to acknowledge the contribution that my own party has made to the European project over a great many years, starting, of course, with the great Winnie Ewing. She is the only person in Scotland ever to be elected to all three Parliaments—the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and, of course, to this place in a historic by-election in Hamilton in 1967. There was also Alan McCartney, Professor Sir Neil MacCormick, Ian Hudgton, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith), and, more recently, Christian Allard, a French Scot representing Scotland in the European Parliament, Heather Anderson, who was appointed only earlier this week and, of course, Dr Aileen McLeod, who gave a fantastic speech yesterday, outlining our ambitions to be back in the European Union, and hopefully quickly.

Turning to the trade issue briefly, when the Secretary of State was at the Dispatch Box earlier, she responded to an absurd intervention from the hon. Member for Wellingborough, who seemed to blame the European Union for some kind of restriction that meant the United Kingdom could not do more in terms of international aid. The Secretary of State tried to lay on an almost Churchillian defence of free trade and economic freedom. It is the same Secretary of State, as the shadow Secretary of State pointed out, who, eight weeks into the job, had to come to Parliament to apologise for the fact that the Government had broken not one, not two, but three court orders banning weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. She was eight weeks into the job. This was only about four months ago. It is surely inconceivable that she should still be at that Dispatch Box today. We know that there is a reshuffle coming at some point, so who knows if she will still be there, but my goodness if that is a candidate for International Trade Secretary, she is in no position to come here and expect us to buy into her agenda on proper free trade that genuinely helps alleviate poverty and abides by the rules.

Mr Bone: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I apologise if he thought that I was yawning at his speech. It was just the fact that I have heard it so many times before. Does he accept that one of the advantages of coming out of the European Union is that we will be able, at our own bequest, to lower tariffs to developing countries?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Let us see what comes forward. Sure, I am all for that debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) is much more qualified on these affairs than me. I will welcome it only if it is a genuinely good plan. If it is a good plan, we will be the first to welcome it. None the less, I have to say that, given who the International Trade Secretary is and given the short history that she has in office on these types of affairs, I am not exactly expecting very much.

The Secretary of State also mentioned the upcoming integrated defence and foreign policy review. We have had a number of miniature defence reviews over the past few years. It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us whether this will be a proper strategic defence and security review, or will be fiscally neutral—a bit like the modernising defence programme?

Think about the context in which this debate is happening. Earlier this week we heard the Government announce their Faustian pact with the Chinese Communist party over Huawei. The announcement comes from a position of great weakness. It is gullible Britain, not global Britain, that I see from this side of the House, and the sooner the Government are honest about it, the better.

I have a few other questions. More broadly, what exactly is the China strategy? We talk a lot about Russia, and rightly so—I note that the Minister who covers Ukraine is here, and he knows of my interest in that part of the world—but what is the China strategy?

What is the strategy to fix the utterly broken instrument that is the UN Security Council? It is supposed to underpin security, freedom and the international rules that keep us safe and allow free trade, but it has become largely redundant. Will NATO, which faces all kinds of strife, internally and externally, be included in the integrated review?

Will there be some kind of assessment of our capability? Tories love nothing more than thumping their chests and reminding us that Britain spends 2% of GDP on defence. That is wonderful, but what does it mean for our capability? That is where the debate really needs to go.

We need to hear more about the Government's supine response to the Trump Palestine-Israel plan, which we had a brief exchange about this morning. The Government could not quite bring themselves to wholly disown the plan. Admittedly, it is not their plan, but it strikes me that they are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea on this. It is time to show some muscle, to be honest and to stand up for international law. If we are against the annexation of Crimea—we are right to be—we should be against the annexation of Palestinian land, and I would like the Minister to make that clear when he sums up.

To conclude, the Conservative party—and, by the sounds of it, the Labour party—might have given up on this country being a member of the European Union, but Scotland certainly has not. We will always be open to Europe. We will always be a place where Europe and the world can come and have a conversation—hopefully we will do more than that—and keep contributing to Scotland. The challenge for my party, and for my country, is to live up to the maxim that Winnie Ewing set out in 1967, when she said:

“Stop the world, Scotland wants to get on.”

Well, we want to get on and do more, and the saltire will not be drowned out by any of this global Britain nonsense.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Stuart Anderson to make his maiden speech.

1.22 pm

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to start by honouring my predecessor, Eleanor Smith, who sat on the Opposition Benches. She did great work in championing the NHS in Wolverhampton and representing the people

[Stuart Anderson]

there, and she was the first black woman to be elected to Parliament from the west midlands. I wish her every success in her future endeavours.

I am delighted to be standing here as the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West. It is an honour that I do not take lightly, and I am determined to ensure that I fulfil the opportunity with everything I have. I will be devoted in serving the people who voted for me, and for those who did not, I will serve them in the same way.

The story of Wolverhampton starts in 985 AD, when it was founded by Lady Wulfruna. It grew from strength to strength right the way up to the 19th century, when it was known as a global leader in the manufacture of locks and all kinds of iron goods. There is so much more that could be said about the great history of Wolverhampton, but we might miss the gems that are there today. My constituency is home to the great Wolverhampton Wanderers—the Wolves, as they are known—and I look forward to watching them beat other Members' teams as they continue their current success. We have an excellent university, which welcomes people from all over to the heart of our city. We also have an outstanding local newspaper, the *Express & Star*, which is the largest privately owned newspaper in the country—even the Prime Minister has undertaken work experience there.

But the real prize in Wolverhampton is the people. They are some of the most genuine and straight-talking people you will meet. I experienced both those qualities on the campaign trail, sometimes wishing that the straight talking was not quite as direct, but I always knew where I stood. We have a multicultural, multifaith population, ranging from Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and many more. In Wolverhampton you can walk past a church, a gurdwara and a mosque all on the same street, and see the communities living and working together hand in hand. That is testimony to the great people of Wolverhampton.

The motto of Wolverhampton is “Out of darkness cometh light.” That is very apt as I move on to the next part of my speech, which is about how I came to be here, against all the odds. My childhood started very normally. My mum was a nurse and, like many other kids in my school in Hereford, my dad was in the SAS. When I was only eight years old, his life was tragically cut short. My mum had to bring up three boys on her own. She brought us up in a loving and caring home, and I want to honour her for that. But life as a single parent was not easy, and often she had to go without food just to make sure us boys could eat. I went to what was probably the worst school in the area, where I learnt far more about life than I ever did about education.

At the age of 16 I left school with no qualifications and signed up to be a soldier. I joined the finest regiment in the British Army, the Royal Green Jackets, and became a rifleman. I was still only 17 when I was shot in a training accident, tragically by a friend with a faulty weapon. When they finally got me to hospital, I was told that I had suffered a high-velocity gunshot wound, that I would lose my foot and that, if the bullet had travelled, my leg would have to be amputated up to the knee. I did what every hardened soldier does: I cried and asked for my mum.

They managed to save my foot, through four major operations and a month in hospital. While lying on that hospital bed, full of morphine, I was told that I would never walk without the aid of a walking stick, that I would never run again, and that my military career was over. I chose not to accept that. I made a decision to shut out any pain, both physical and mental—a decision that would haunt me for many years to come.

I spent almost a year in rehabilitation, learning to walk again and then to run. Eventually, against all the odds, I returned to full active service in the Army. For the whole year of rehabilitation, no one sat down and asked me how I was doing or what the impact had been. In fact, as soon as I was fit enough I was sent to Northern Ireland, during the troubles, for my first operational tour. I served in many locations around the world during my time in the Army, including Bosnia and Kosovo. While I was proving to be an effective soldier physically, those who knew me best knew that I was suffering emotionally. We never spoke about it or showed emotion—it was a sign of weakness—and we most certainly could never ask for help. Although it was wrong, I found that alcohol blocked the pain in my head and allowed me to escape reality.

After leaving the armed forces I became a bodyguard. I have had some great experiences, including protecting a Prime Minister and Government officials in Baghdad. I got to see a lot. I was excelling in what I did. From the outside I looked like I had it all together, but inside I was broken. The decision that I had made to shut out my pain when I got shot meant that I struggled to feel anything emotionally. I was numb. The more I progressed, the more the pain hurt. I was going through life in a virtual coma. I would spend evenings in my garage on my own, drinking, looking at a brick wall, wishing my life would end. I remember that my first thought in the morning, when I opened my eyes, was one of dread that I had not died in my sleep.

Desmond Tutu once described hope as the ability to see light in the darkness. I got to a place where I had no hope. Enough was enough and I finally decided to end my life. As I was in the process of doing it, I had one thought that stopped me: I did not want my children to grow up without a father, as I had done. I couldn't do it. I felt a failure at not being able to take my own life. There was no escape from the life I was in. I was stuck.

In my mind, my life was over; I had been dealt a bad hand, and that was my life. I thought I would try to do something good for my kids. I never wanted anyone to have to experience my life, let alone my children, so I decided to take them to church. There are many reasons why people come out of despair. When I was trying to do something right by my family, I found faith. For the first time in many years, I could see a hope and a future. As the Wolverhampton motto says, “Out of darkness cometh light”, and I could see light out of the darkness. Over many years I learnt to face reality, and with my amazing wife, and great family and friends, my life has changed. I am grateful for every day that I have, and enjoy life to the full. Those who know me would testify to that.

So why politics? That is a question I have battled with for many years. I never voted prior to 2015, and my views of politicians and the decisions they made in this House could be described at best as negative. I have been on operations and stood alongside my colleagues,

some of whom are no longer here because of decisions I attributed to this House. This was never my first option, but I was faced with a choice: I could moan about these decisions, I could ignore them, or I could try to make a difference. I chose the latter, and history will decide if I achieve this.

I have experienced global Britain. I have protected people in 50 countries around the world, and had the privilege of experiencing life. I have seen some of the best and worst of humanity—what people can do for each other, but also sadly what they can do to each other. I bring to this Chamber an unusual experience that I will use to help shape how we move forward. I want to champion social justice, and to see that families do not go without food, that people do not sleep rough or suffer in silence, and that they are helped when they need it. I basically want our children to grow up in a country of which they can be proud. I know how my life was transformed, and I want to inspire people to believe that they can see change in theirs.

We have promised a lot and we have a lot to deliver. Failure to deliver on our words will mean that all this has been for nothing, and the people of Wolverhampton and this country will be no better off. If we become a Government of action, we will change the very fabric of society for good. I have served my country before with pride, and I will do so in this Chamber.

1.32 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the maiden speech of the new hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), who told us his powerful life story. He illustrated so personally the cost and damage of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the struggles he had overcoming it. Bringing his experience to this place was so powerful, and I look forward to hearing more about his commitment to his constituents and to this country that he spoke about so eloquently.

This debate is about Britain's place in the world. I know from what Government Members have been saying today and what they have said previously that they will spend much time and many contributions in the Chamber on this topic, covering UK trade deals and foreign relations, and defining what the UK thinks and what the UK will do. But how much time are the Government spending on reflecting on the other side of that coin—on how the UK is viewed by the rest of the world? How much time will this House spend discussing that? I cannot be the only Member of this House who over the past four years, when travelling to other countries for work or on holiday—or when meeting overseas visitors here—has been asked incredulously, “What is going on in your country? Why does the UK seem so determined to undermine its international reputation and economic position?” The overall impression of these people is that Brexit has undermined our standing and reputation across the world, and that is certainly the impression that I and many of my colleagues get.

There is one aspect of the issue that does not make sense to other people, especially to other European people. The leave campaign and the rhetoric of many leavers over the last four years has been full of sentiments about the UK “being done to” by the EU. Yet Seb Dance MEP pointed out clearly on last night’s “Newsnight” that our

elected MEPs have actually had far more ability to initiate and amend legislation than a Back-Bench Member of this House. Sadly, Seb is no longer able to have that influence on behalf of the UK in the Brussels Parliament.

Some leave campaigners—not necessarily Conservative Members present today—have even suggested on social media over the past months and years that by leaving the EU, Britain could once again be great, ruling half the world as we once did. Too often, I heard Conservative Members be quite relaxed in saying that economic and reputational damage was a price worth paying for what I would call the illusion of freedom. What national-level politician anywhere else in the world would expect respect from their voters when admitting to that level of defeatism?

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): What is illusory about finally having the ability to control our borders and our own international trade policy?

Ruth Cadbury: Because it is illusory, and I will keep pressing that point, as my colleagues, including those on the Front Bench, have done.

The mantra “get Brexit done” informs this Government’s rhetoric and the style I suspect they will be adopting going into the trade negotiations. As we heard earlier from the Secretary of State, they have a list of future deals—with the EU, the US and many other countries—that they imply will be quick and easy. You do not need to know much about negotiation to know that it is never quick, but a slow and deliberative process. International trade negotiations and deals take an average of about seven years to complete, and we are talking about eight months—not even a year—to complete a deal with the EU. It also does not take a rocket scientist to know that the larger and more powerful party will always come out with more at the end of the negotiations. By leaving the EU we are no longer an equal member—in fact, a relatively strong member—of the single biggest economic trade bloc in the world. We will be the fifth, sixth or seventh most powerful country and economy in the world, and we will be a long way behind the EU, the US and China in the size of our economy and therefore our negotiating power.

The Labour party, and many UK businesses trading with or in competition with other markets, fear that the Government’s aspiration for quick and dirty deals will undermine our standards, businesses and public services—the very things that many voters thought they were protecting when they voted leave. The “get Brexit done” party is talking about quick negotiations that, as far as I can see, will undermine so much. Such negotiations risk losing what we have achieved as fully participating members of the EU for the past 40 years, including high-quality food and safety, consumer and environmental standards, and workers’ rights. The climate emergency is now at the top of the international political agenda, and is another important aspect in which we risk losing out as we drop down in the pecking order through the international trade negotiations.

By leaving, we undermine any hope of a close relationship and co-operation with the EU in the future, compared with what Seb Dance described as the strong role we have just left at the top of the table. We heard a quote from Ronald Reagan earlier today, but I am going to quote another hero—or perhaps I should say heroine—of

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

the Conservative party, Margaret Thatcher, who said in 1975, before we joined the EEC:

“If Britain were to withdraw, we might imagine that we could regain complete national sovereignty. But it would, in fact, be an illusion.”

I very, very sadly and reluctantly accept that the UK is leaving the EU at 11 pm tomorrow night. But I and my hon. Friends will continue to demand the power to scrutinise and vote on trade deals so that we can make sure that UK values, and UK businesses and their interests, are at the centre of all future trade deals. It is shocking that the Government removed the power of Parliament to do this in the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020. Labour Members expect parliamentarians to be at the centre of all future trade deals. The reason we want this is to protect our global and our national environment, and to protect our consumer standards and our workers’ rights, but most importantly, for the future of life on earth. Climate change, as I said, must be at the centre of all our trade negotiations. The UK should decarbonise export finance. As my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State said, current projects supported by the UK export system, when complete, will dump 69 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. The Environmental Audit Committee said in the previous Parliament that this is

“the elephant in the room undermining the UK’s international climate...targets”.

I also concur with the shadow Secretary of State about the atrocity of awarding export licences in respect of arms sales, products used for torture, and other controlled exports. This undermines further our reputation as a morally credible partner across the globe. Labour has called for robust enforcement of export licensing criteria in respect of arms sales and other controlled exports. Personally, I would like the UK to diversify out of the arms industry altogether and put those skills, technologies and jobs into productive technologies in areas such as renewable energy generation.

Do Government Members really want to take the UK back to being the poor man of Europe that I remember from my childhood, or will they share with us in a more positive vision for the UK’s place in the world based on the values that helped to shape Europe after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin wall—openness, democracy, compassion, and protection of the world’s precious resources and environment?

1.42 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (*Ruth Cadbury*).

May I first pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (*Stuart Anderson*), a fellow Green Jacket, on the maiden speech? The Green Jackets were famous for many things, but one of the most important things they did was to turn the red tunics into green, which meant that they were less vulnerable on the battlefield—something that is very good indeed, and occasionally warranted here as well. I am really pleased to see him wearing his regimental tie and taking his place on these Benches, and to congratulate him on a very powerful and passionate message. He spoke about being on the brink of despair, going through

that, and his journey back. He is now able to share that. I hope that many veterans across Britain will hear his story and be stronger for it, recognising that there are people there to help and there is a life after being in the armed forces. Not everybody is affected in the way that as he was, but he has absolutely turned his life around, and it is fantastic to see him here in the Chamber today.

I know that my hon. Friend speaks with experience, commitment and passion on defence matters, so perhaps I could urge him to stand for the Defence Committee in due course. That segues me nicely into saying—if I may, with your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker—thank you to the House for the honour of being elected Chair of the Defence Committee. I pay tribute to the other candidates who stood in this contest, all of them very passionate about defence in their own ways.

I welcome the Secretary of State’s opening statement in this important debate on global Britain. Marking out a vision of where our country needs to go in these difficult and turbulent times is very important. For those of us who have been in the House a little while, the past three years have been a bit challenging in terms of working out where Britain should be going. We have been a bit distracted by other issues. Whatever one’s views on what happens on 31 January, it is absolutely clear that we can now provide a determined direction of travel for this country. We can send a message to people across the world that we have stopped arguing about something that we had huge disagreements over and that, whatever our previous views, we are on track to move forward.

In that guise, we perhaps lost a bit of confidence. It is worth reminding ourselves of the strengths that Britain has when it comes to financial services, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, oil and gas, life sciences and creative industries. We are European leaders, if not global leaders, in policing, intelligence, and, of course, the military. We play our role not just in Europe but across the world. I hope that now that we have the decision of Brexit behind us, we can pursue that, as we heard the Secretary of State say.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the shipping sector—the maritime sector—is also of huge importance, as we are a global leader in this country? Leaving the European Union but also being able to create 10 new free ports will add to that dominance and supremacy.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some 90% of our trade still goes by ship. However, not all shipping lanes are as free as they should be.

Talking about global Britain leads to a desire to speak about trade and the economy. That is important, but I am going to focus on security, because, as the first line of the original 2010 strategic defence and security review reminds us, economic security and national security are interdependent of each other. If we do not have national security, we cannot build the economy in order to prosper. If we invest in defence, it is not just for the defence budget—we are also increasing our prosperity, from which all other budgets then benefit as well.

There is perhaps some optimism on the Conservative Benches following the general election, and a sense of determination. We have a mandate and we have the energy to, we hope, be in office for a number of years,

and to craft where Britain should go over the next decade. However, that decade is going to get more dangerous and more complex than at any time since the cold war. The character of conflict is changing. It is moving from arguments and battles over terrain to the digital domain as we become ever more reliant on the digital economy. We have seen the rise of Russia. We have seen what Iran is up to. Extremism has not disappeared. We pat ourselves on the back that somehow we have got rid of the caliphate in the middle east, but extremism continues. We saw during the interruption in the general election that terrorism remains rife. Those challenges are dispersing and getting more complex, and they are challenges to our economy and our prosperity.

There are two issues very much at the forefront that we need to focus on, perhaps in the longer term, one of which is climate change and its consequences. One in four of the world's population will come from Africa. They are not producing the jobs there that they need, and that will lead to huge migrational challenges. Some 80% of the world's population lives within 50 miles of the coastline. If sea levels rise, where will those people go? How will those economies be affected? How will Bournemouth be affected—my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Minister as well?

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

Mr Ellwood: On Bournemouth? I would be delighted.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Well, there is a man who has read the global strategic trends document of the Ministry of Defence. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that this is important for his constituency, but it is also important for Scotland, particularly the north of Scotland, because if we do not deal with it properly, the rules that currently govern the South China sea will, all of a sudden, govern the high north and the north Atlantic—and that, as I am sure he would agree, would be a disaster.

Mr Ellwood: I agree with the hon. Gentleman—who is now my hon. Friend, as we will hopefully work more closely on national defence issues for the United Kingdom. He makes an important point about these being issues that we need to tackle. When it comes to defence, there is an immediate knee-jerk reaction to speak about platforms—have we got enough of them and so forth? That is important, and we do no doubt face some challenges, but it is also about capabilities.

I go back to the fact that the character of war is changing. We are in constant conflict and competition. Why bother invading or, indeed, attacking a country when it is possible to digitally impose problems for any town, city or community from afar, through a laptop? Elections are being interfered with, and there is not even an international organisation that countries can go to and say, “My election has been interfered with by another state. Please can you take action?”

The second issue is to do with the rise of China. It has a President who has got the job for life, and in our lifetime China will become more dominant economically, technologically and militarily than the United States. It is setting its own rules on how it does business, which poses some huge challenges for us. We need to have an

adult conversation with China to better understand it and ask, “What are the rules that we should be following?” We talk about the erosion of the rules-based order, but who is willing to step forward and say, “I’m going to challenge that—I’m going to defend the rules-based order or upgrade those rules, because they are out of date”? Let us not forget that many of them were created in the Bretton Woods conversations after the second world war. China was excluded, and it reminds us of that all the time. It needs to be included in a conversation with international organisations, whether it be the UN or the OECD, so that the rules and standards that we follow are observed, because they have not been.

China is doing its own thing, and we see that in the big debate we have just had over Huawei. Whether it is Huawei, Tencent or China Telecom, all those companies are obliged to provide sensitive information to the state. We do not know the relationship between Huawei and the Chinese army. We have no idea what the intelligence services do with that information. That is why concern has been expressed vividly in this House about the relationship that we have chosen for our 5G roll-out.

We were not in the room when that decision was made in the National Security Council. Experts are there to give the Prime Minister advice. My message to the Government is: we have taken that decision, but can we put a time limit on our use of Huawei or, indeed, any Chinese companies? Can we develop our own western capability, so that we can wean ourselves off the use of Chinese operations? We cannot predict the security that we will require in the future, or even today.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate him on his appointment as Chair of the Defence Committee. More and more we are seeing Chinese companies coming in and buying up companies carrying out research here in the UK. Because there is not enough Government funding, even where we are developing our own technology those companies have to seek funding elsewhere, and that is where they are getting it.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right. There is an uneven playing field that needs to be addressed. Why is it that Facebook, Amazon and eBay cannot operate in China, but Alibaba, Huawei and others can operate here?

The scale of China is simply enormous. Alibaba is the size of eBay and Amazon put together. Huawei sells more mobile phones than Apple. The scale of it and the injection of cash from the Chinese Government is colossal, which is why we need to have a serious conversation. Given the importance that America, Australia and New Zealand place on this, we need a solution. I know that Huawei's involvement is in the non-core elements of the 5G network and has been capped. But we made the F-35 stealth fighter—that was essentially the Five Eyes community coming together to make state-of-the-art equipment. Let us do the same with 5G. We should not just turn to Cisco, Ericsson or Nokia and say, “Please catch up with Huawei.” They will not be able to do it. We need the Prime Minister to talk with President Trump and say, “Over the next five years, let's create the 5G and 6G capability that will allow us to have our own identity.”

[Mr Ellwood]

If we do not, I predict that there will be a splintering of the internet. The rules that China is adopting and enforcing for its own people and for countries that use its technologies mean that there will be two operations and two versions of the economy. We cannot be caught on the wrong side of the argument in history, so we must develop our own western capabilities.

Richard Graham: My right hon. Friend has made a number of great points about technology and how we and our Five Eyes partners need to develop a serious alternative. Does he also agree that there is a danger in the House sometimes of criticising almost everything that China does? To give one small example, when the Chinese automotive company Geely bought the London Taxi Company, it converted the engines to electric and is now exporting them to France and the Netherlands from the UK. It is a good example of what Chinese investment can achieve that is positive for the UK.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right, and I pay tribute to him for his knowledge, expertise and desire to educate the rest of us on the importance of what China is doing. There is a lot of duality in what China provides. It is providing some of the greenest capabilities in the world, but it is investing more in coal—it is building hundreds more coal-fired power stations at the very time when we need to wean ourselves off coal.

Militarily, I am also concerned. China's space budget alone is £7 billion a year. Twenty years ago, its military budget was the same as ours. Today, it is five times that amount. Its navy grows by the size of our Navy every single year. Those are my concerns in the longer term, and that is why we need an adult conversation with China, to work out what international rules we should be following.

Finally, I turn to the review that we will conduct. This is a pivotal moment for the UK to recognise and take stock of the threats that we face. We need a sober assessment of how the world is changing and an honest review of our own capabilities. Our battle tank is 20 years old; it needs an upgrade. Our aircraft carriers are fantastic, but no further investment in the Navy means that the rest of the surface fleet has been depleted. In the Gulf war, we had 36 fast-jet squadrons; today we have six. We need confirmation of our capabilities and our aspirations. What role do we seek to play on the international stage? We then need to commit to what is needed to get there, which will require an increase in our defence budget. We need to upgrade if we want to play that role.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on succeeding me as Chair of the Defence Committee? I thank him belatedly for the courage he showed when, as a Defence Minister, he argued at the Dispatch Box that we needed to spend more on defence. I urge him, in what I can assure him is an influential new role for him, to make sure that the new combined defence review takes place before, and not after, the comprehensive spending round. Otherwise, the same thing will happen that happened with the national security capability review, and there will be a fight between the intelligence services on the one hand and conventional forces on the other.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's kind comments, and I look forward to a smooth handover. I have a lot to learn from him, and he has done a great job as Chair. He makes a valid point: if the review is to be a fair assessment of our capabilities, we must ensure that it is not tied down by the limitations of any Budget.

I conclude by saying how passionate I am about defence, and I am delighted to take on the role of Chair of the Committee. I want to make it clear: we are managing the threats we face at the moment, but they are getting bigger and more complex, and we need to upgrade our capabilities. I believe we can win the argument for further investment if we take the nation and Parliament with us. Potholes and the NHS get more money because this place makes the noise. I will lead the charge to educate as many people as possible and say, "This is what we should be doing with our armed forces. This is how we can stand up on the international stage. This is what we must do to lead in an uncertain world." That is what Britain should be doing in the future.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Stephen Flynn to make his maiden speech.

1.58 pm

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to start by saying what an honour it is to follow the maiden speech made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) Member for Wolverhampton, South-West earlier today. It was impassioned, compelling and utterly fantastic, to put it simply.

I wish to start in what I feel is the most appropriate fashion possible, and that is with a few thank yous. The first thank you is to my close family and my close friends for the unwavering support they have given me over many years—in particular, my wife Lynn, who at this moment in time will be sitting watching on television with our six-and-a-half-week-old son. She sent me some very interesting messages just before I rose here. [HON. MEMBERS: "What's his name?"] Leo. Yes, a fantastic son. In all seriousness, I would not be here without her support—her unending support.

The second thank you I wish to make is to those SNP activists in Aberdeen South who pounded the streets on my behalf in some downright awful weather, just off the North sea. They are second to none, and they were ably led by the wonderful Doug Daniel.

The third and perhaps the most important thank you that I wish to make today is to the people who voted for me—the 20,388 individual voters in Aberdeen South who cast their vote for the SNP candidate in that election. It is important to highlight that that number of votes is the largest number of votes in favour of any single candidate for Aberdeen South since 1979, and I will work every day as hard as I possibly can to repay the faith they have put in me.

At this juncture, I think it is important that I adhere to tradition and pay tribute to my predecessor. I am not quite sure who between the two of us was more disappointed that we did not actually get to head off against each other at the ballot box in the election.

However, I think it is important that we do pay tribute to his work on animal welfare, and certainly the commendable work he did to push through the ban on upskirting in England and Wales. I also wish his staff all the best for the future.

As the third Member of Parliament for Aberdeen South in the last five years—less than five years—the House will be familiar from previous maiden speeches with many of the wonderful assets that my city has to offer, but it would be remiss of me not to big up the granite city: the famous granite city with the golden sands. I hope my colleagues are listening because, just before the turn of the year, a report came out that once again highlighted that Aberdeen remains the No. 1 place to live and to work in Scotland. There is a reason why it is the No. 1 place to live, and that is not just the wonderful communities we have but the wonderful natural assets we are fortunate to have on our doorstep, be that Greyhope bay, the Deeside way, Duthie park, Hazlehead park, Kincorth, Gramps and Cove harbour—to name but a few.

Ultimately, however, places are not defined by the landscapes; they are defined by the people. We are so fortunate in Aberdeen South to have so many wonderful community groups, community centres and local charities that do so much fantastic work, with the likes of Inchgarth community centre, Future Choices and Cove Woodland Trust, which I have got to know extremely well in recent times. The work that they do makes Aberdeen the place that it is. Aberdeen is not just the No. 1 place to live; it is also the No. 1 place to work, and the employment opportunities we have are so plentiful, be it in the burgeoning and thriving life sciences sector, the food and drink sector or, indeed, the tourism sector.

There is also an industry in Aberdeen that I am sure Members in the House will be overly familiar with, and that is of course our global energy sector. It is at this point that I want to reflect on the debate today on global Britain, because of course Aberdeen is a global city. It is a global city already: we export in Aberdeen. Aberdeen & Grampian chamber of commerce has some brilliant literature on this, which highlights the fact that we export at this moment in time to 120 countries around the world. Our expertise is international, and that is important because we have achieved that magnitude of exports while being a proud European city. The European Union has in no way held back the success of my constituency and my city, and that is why we voted—voted overwhelmingly—to remain in. I believe it is why I have been sent to this place, and I will make it my impassioned cause for Aberdeen and Scotland to once again be returned to the European Union.

There is an inherent irony in the fact that Aberdeen, a global city, is likely—is projected—to be the hardest hit city in the entire UK as a result of this Government taking us out of the European Union. As we stand here and debate global Britain, the global city that drives the Scottish economy and has a huge part to play in the wider UK economy is going to be detrimentally impacted by the policies of this Government. You know, that sums up Brexit: there is no logic. We will not forget, and we will not forgive this Government for what they are about to do.

At this juncture, I also want to reflect on the fact that the notion or fantasy that we are hearing about global Britain and taking off the shackles is a convenient

decoy for the Government, because it allows them not to discuss their record back home: a decade—a decade—of austerity. What has that decade of austerity meant? In Aberdeen, it has led to a situation whereby if people live in a wealthy part of town, they will live for 15 years longer than those living in the poorest part of town. It has meant that food bank usage has risen by over 2,000%, and in November the local *Press and Journal* reported that in our city women in receipt of universal credit are having to sell sex in order to put food on the table for their children. That is the reality of 10 years of Tory government, so I say to Members opposite: Scotland rejects your austerity and Scotland rejects your Brexit, just as Scotland rejected your Prime Minister.

We are at a crossroads, and the reality is that only one group of people can be trusted and should be empowered to determine the path that Scotland now takes, and that is the people of Scotland. I will conclude by saying that Scotland's future should, must and will be put in the hands of the Scottish people once again.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Shaun Bailey to make his maiden speech.

2.7 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I start by congratulating you on your role. It is great to have you in the Chair for my maiden speech. I cannot say I have a favourite in the Speaker's team, but it is nice to see you in the Chair.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). While we may not agree on a lot of things, he speaks passionately for his community, and the people of Aberdeen South can be assured that they have a real champion in the hon. Gentleman.

It is hard not to praise my predecessors, and I want to start by praising my immediate predecessor, Adrian Bailey. Adrian sought hard to serve the community over 20 years. He was a dedicated MP, and I wish him and Jill all the best as they go off to their retirement.

Of course, I cannot mention my constituency of West Bromwich West without talking about the legend that is Baroness Boothroyd. I had the really good fortune to bump into Baroness Boothroyd in the Tea Room, and she has given me some instructions. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you get an instruction from Baroness Boothroyd, you do as you are told. I have been told that I have to give her updates and reports on how the constituency is doing and, in her words, I have “got to look after them”. I made the promise to her, and she can be assured that I most definitely will.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please do relay the message to Mr Speaker that he does not need to worry: we are not looking to make it two out of three in having Speakers from West Bromwich West just yet—well, not in this Parliament anyway.

Thinking of strong women, it has been the women in my life who have really inspired me to come here. I think really of my mum, who is at home watching today. My mum is a fighter; she is a survivor. She survived terrible domestic abuse when I was younger. She saved me and

[Shaun Bailey]

my sister. She taught me that no matter what you do and where you come from, if you work hard, you aspire and you dream, you can do it—and you have to speak up for those people who cannot speak up for themselves. She is the inspiration for my being here, and I want to thank her today for driving me to come here.

My constituency is called West Bromwich West, but that is a bit of a running joke. We think that when the Boundary Commission came up with the name, it was probably about 4 o'clock on a Friday and everybody wanted to go home, because I do not represent much of the town of West Bromwich. Instead, I have the honour of representing three towns that neighbour it. Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton are three proud communities, each with their own history and heritage, but united by one thing—they will tell you as it is.

Oldbury has a proud industrial heritage, based mainly on steel and iron production that goes back some 400 years. It played a vital role in world war one by producing tanks at the Oldbury Carriage Works, and it was the site of the first ever branch of Lloyds bank. It also has an interesting sporting history—as I am sure hon. Members know, I am thinking of that bastion of English football, Tividale football club. Tividale has had an up and down history over the past 60 years, but the team are now stronger than ever. I am looking forward to getting down there and working with them to put their agenda forward over the next four and a half years.

Another delight of Oldbury is our Balaji Hindu temple, which we think is the largest temple of its kind in Europe. It is based on the Tirupati Venkateswara Hindu temple in Andhra Pradesh, and Dr Ratnam, Raaj, and the rest of the team there do incredible work crossing community lines and bringing people together. It was a pleasure to attend the first anniversary of the Gandhi peace centre at the Balaji Hindu temple, and its committee asked me to extend an invitation to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the rest of the Speaker's team to visit. I assure you that they have the best pakoras and masala tea in the black country.

Tipton also has a proud industrial heritage, based predominantly on coal mining and steel. We also have some famous black country personalities, one of whom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) will know, is Steve Bull of Wolves and of Baggies fame. No one can come to Tipton without trying the amazing food at Mad O'Rourke's Pie Factory. If you are ever in the area, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will more than happily take you there myself.

Wednesbury in the north of my constituency is a market town with a proud heritage that dates back to about to 1004, and St Barts, our 16th-century church, gives fantastic views of the black country. Heavy industry dominated Wednesbury for the best part of 500 years, and there are still elements of that today. It was predominantly coal mining, but pottery as well at one point. Wednesbury's history is now even brighter with investment from the Future High Streets fund that hopefully will transform our high street, and the expansion of the West Midlands Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill, which has been championed by my friend, our fantastic Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street. That will ensure that my constituents remain connected

with the rest of the region, and the town's future will be even brighter in May when it returns two Conservative councillors.

Four years ago, my constituents voted overwhelmingly to change the relationship that the United Kingdom has with the rest of the world, and despite what others may say, my constituents knew exactly what they were voting for. If any Member of the House thinks that my constituents did not know what they were doing at that time, I suggest they come to my constituency—I will personally take them there—and my constituents will explain to them, in the most articulate and reasoned way, why they made the decision they did, and why they would do it again.

This country is now presented with real opportunities. The Government's enthusiasm to strike trade deals across the globe, combined with data from the International Monetary Fund that today suggested that about 90% of world output growth could be generated outside the EU, presents a great opportunity for areas such as mine. We want a new industrial revolution in the black country. I welcome the Government's commitment to ensure that such opportunities are spread across the United Kingdom, and I reiterate that this must be a global Britain—not a global England, global London or global M25 but a global Britain that respects all four nations that make up these islands and the communities and cultures that form the bedrock of our societies. We must ensure that areas such as Wednesbury get exactly the same opportunities as Westminster, and my community is relying on us to get that right.

Unemployment in my constituency currently stands above the national average, as does the number of those claiming unemployment benefit. Wages are lower than the regional and national average. My constituents need this to work. Many of my constituents have lost faith in this place, because it has talked at them and not spoken for them. In my area, groups of people have acted with a born-to-rule attitude for half a century, and it was good to see that finally in December, those same people were sent packing.

In conclusion, I am in no doubt that this country is heading on a new and exciting path. There are opportunities out there for it to progress, develop, and take its place at the heart of the international community. Communities such as mine have sent me here to ensure that they share in the dividends of that new world, and that those dividends are not just handed out to a privileged few. People in my community are fighters and grafters. They are fundamentally good people, who deserve nothing more than to be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. I am excited for the new world in which we are embarking, and I say this to all of my constituents: I will ensure that we are never abandoned again.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is a pleasure to call Bell Ribeiro-Addy to make her maiden speech.

2.15 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): I am pleased to follow fantastic maiden speeches by the hon. Members for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) and

for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), as well as that by the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), whom I congratulate on the birth of his new baby.

I am truly humbled and grateful to the people of Streatham for electing me as their Member of Parliament, as well as to my family, the hard-working members of the Streatham Labour party who pounded the streets every day, and all those who voted for me. I do not take this job lightly, and it is a personal honour to represent the community in which I was born and raised, and in which I continue to live today.

Over the past few weeks many new Members have boasted about their constituencies. I have been to many of those great places, but Streatham is undeniably the best. My constituency also covers parts of Balham, Clapham Common, Tulse Hill, and my birth place, Brixton Hill. There really is no place like it for its history of activism, community and faith. We have the longest high street in Europe, and an array of independent shops that is represented by our fantastic Streatham business improvement district. We hosted the first ever supermarket in this country. We have one of the oldest train stations, although Southern railway is not much to go by now, and one of the last working windmills was on Brixton Hill. We also have the iconic Lambeth town hall.

Let me say a few words about my predecessor. In 2010 I was so encouraged that a young black man who, just like me, was born and bred in Streatham could soon be our MP, that I went out and campaigned for him. I was paired with a young woman that day, and she reminded me—I was quite sceptical about party politics at the time—that although I was angry about tuition fees and the war in Iraq, many party members and MPs were just like me and thought exactly the same thing. They were able to be members of the Labour party, and I could be too. That evening I went home, opened up my laptop and joined the Labour party, and the rest is history. I thank my predecessor, Chuka Umunna, for getting me out campaigning that day, although he may not think much of it now, and for his amazing service to the people of Streatham.

There is one Member of this House who I must mention: our shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I never dreamed that I would get the opportunity to work for a living legend, a trailblazer, and the first black woman to enter Parliament, and for a black woman in politics there could be no better mentor. There is also no better person to put someone off wanting to get into politics, because I have seen the abuse that she faces, which has personally affected me. I see the way that some Members of the House treat her. I love her; you don't have to like her, but you will respect her. I understand that we are here because of her, and Members such as Lord Boateng, Bernie Grant and Keith Vaz, and I am proud to be part of the most diverse Parliament in history. Indeed, there are so many of us that people are struggling to tell us apart, and we hope they fix that really quickly.

Alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, my right hon. Friends the Members for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) have been an inspiration. They stand for a principled, unfaltering

stance on opposing war, cuts and racism over decades. They have consistently supported peace, Palestinian human rights and LGBT rights, and they have opposed austerity, racism and bigotry, regardless of whether that was popular at the time, and regardless of being hounded by the reactionary press, or whether something would win in Parliament. To me, they are socialist heroes. They have always been where I aim to be: on the side of the oppressed, not the oppressor, and always on the right side of history.

I am proud to be the daughter of Ghanaian migrants, and they are even prouder than myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) are jointly the first women of Ghanaian heritage to sit in this House. The support we have received from the Ghanaian community in the UK and globally has been immeasurable. Ghanaian Brits boast many notable names including Stormzy; June Sarpong; the editor of *Vogue*, Edward Enninful; and too many others to count. But as I am often reminded, the most important British-Ghanaian to ever walk this earth is of course my Mum.

I cite my heritage not just because it is important to me, but because it underpins my experience in this country, my country, and my fear as racism and other hate crimes are on the rise. Today, we are debating global Britain. There is the saying that, "If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going." It strikes me that as a country we cannot begin to fulfil the idea of global Britain until we first address the historic injustices of the British empire, injustices including slavery and colonialism; first, because it is the right thing to do, but also because we may soon find ourselves out in the cold if we do not.

While we spent years debating Brexit and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) said, engaging in monumental self-harm, India surpassed the UK to become the fifth-richest economy in the world: India, a former British colony, where this country presided over a bloody partition, the Amritsar massacre and the Bengal famine. Countries in Africa, such as Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, are among the fastest-growing economies in the world; countries that Britain deliberately underdeveloped, stole resources from and brutally enslaved their people. Madam Deputy Speaker, were you aware that in the mid to late 1700s, over 50 Members of this House represented slave plantations? Members of Parliament just like me enslaved people that looked just like me.

I am someone who believes firmly that the only way to tackle an issue is at its very root, and the racism that I and many other people in this country face on a daily basis has its root in those very injustices. Not only will this country, my country, not apologise—by apologise I mean properly apologise; not "expressing deep regret"—it has not once offered a form of reparations. People see reparations as handing over large sums of money, but why could we not start today with simple things like fairer trade, simple things like returning items that do not belong to us, and simple things like cancelling debts that we have paid over and over again?

I believe the reason for that is that we only apologise to our equals. We only make amends with our equals. So I have to ask: how can I be equal to every other Member in this House, when this is how this House treats people who look just like me? While billionaires

[*Bell Ribeiro-Addy*]

and large corporates find creative ways to dodge their taxes, do you know who doesn't? Most immigrants. They are the same immigrants who are vilified as the Government enforce their hostile environment and the 3 million EU nationals, many of whom live in my constituency—another Windrush scandal in the making.

I recently discovered that after the slave trade, this country—our country, my country—took out a loan of the equivalent of £300 billion to pay off slave owners. We only finished paying off that loan in 2015. That means that for decades the descendants of the enslaved and the colonised have been contributing to paying their oppressors. That means that members of the Windrush generation who were invited here to work paid their taxes to pay off a debt to those who brutally enslaved their ancestors. For their troubles, some lost their homes and their jobs, were separated from their families, detained, deported and dehumanised, and are now being denied the dignity of a proper civil compensation scheme.

Let us not forget the people of Grenfell Tower: 72 people dead and many more traumatised by the loss of their loved ones and the loss of their homes, a community scarred for generations. This Government failed them on their promise to rehouse them in the aftermath of the catastrophe and have failed to remove flammable cladding. They all need justice as equal citizens, and that means bringing those responsible to face the law.

I could not let my maiden speech pass without touching on the scourge of knife crime, because the area of Streatham is particularly affected. I agree that we need more policing and more community policing, but we cannot arrest our way out of this situation and we cannot seem to stop it. We need real investment in youth services and real investment in preventive measures, but most of all we need to be frank with ourselves. If you live in my area and you are a young black man who is caught or arrested with drugs, it is a very different outcome for you. But apparently if you admit to taking drugs in this House, you may find yourself a candidate in the Conservative party leadership contest and nobody seems to care or places the same level of responsibility on you. Now, I am not judging. I believe we all need to look at drug reforms, but I also believe there needs to be more equality in how people in this House are treated and the people we represent are treated.

We find ourselves in historic and unprecedented times. It is clear that we cannot carry on our old ways. Half of the wealth of the world is hoarded by the top 1%. We are more connected than ever, but fake news has ended up as an ally of the powerful. We live in a world where, across the pond, there is a leader who cages migrant children. To our shame, our Government this month voted down refugee children's rights. This country welcomed Kindertransport children fleeing the mass murder of millions of Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis. I stand with Lord Dubs who was one of those children and who now opposes the heartless policy of the Government. I was proud to speak on Holocaust Memorial Day against the scourge of antisemitism and all forms of racism that allow fascism to thrive. I want to make it clear that with fascism rising across Europe, we must all say, "Never again" and mean it, but that charity needs to begin at home and it needs to begin in this House.

The case for being more internationalist could not be clearer. Fires are burning in the Arctic, the Amazon and Australia. In Indonesia, just like in parts of Italy and Britain, flash floods and heatwaves expose people and places to unimaginable risk. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North led this House to declare a climate emergency, but the Government have carried on as if it is business as usual. Brexit, coming tomorrow, looks set to weaken environmental protections, unless climate breakdown is confronted. What future the people on our planet have hangs in the balance.

This time of crisis is a test of the Government's leadership and our duty to protect our citizens. Good leadership will create jobs, with a green new deal tackling economic insecurity and ecological crisis in one fell swoop. What leadership is it if we allow the Government to bury their heads in the sand as if the neoliberal pursuit of the profit for the 1% matters more than living within our planetary means in the interests of the 99%, citizens in constituencies like mine in Streatham? Our planet does not have time for the Government to check in with Donald Trump and the fossil fuel industry about what we should do. The next generation needs real action on the climate crisis. From Britain came the industrial revolution. It is now time for us to lead the environmental revolution.

My road to Parliament was not by the well-trodden route of power, privilege, connection or wealth. I was energised as a student activist to stop the fascist BNP and to help stop the deportation of one of my fellow students. So I am very proud to have been appointed shadow immigration Minister and continue that fight today. My path is not the statistically trodden path of a young black girl from a council estate on Brixton Hill and that needs to change. It needs all of us to make sure it does.

2.28 pm

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) for her maiden speech. She clearly holds her views with real passion, and we will hear more from her over the years. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends who have made maiden speeches today: we heard my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) and, if I may say so, the particularly brave and personal speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson). If there is a common theme, I believe it is that the mothers of this nation can be very proud of all of their offspring in this House this afternoon.

As we leave the European Union and make our own way in the world, I want to talk today about the Government's role in backing British business. Although there is an important role for Government, and I will explain what I think that can be, we should place it in context. Despite the gyrations of this House, which until this summer resembled Dr Doolittle's pushmi-pullyu—the animal that, as hon. Members will remember, had two heads and no tail—I can report that British business is in terrific shape. Exports are up, and we are the world's 10th largest exporter despite not even ranking in the 20 most populous countries. Our economy has grown for nine straight years, and it is 20% bigger than it was in 2010. Not only is employment at a record high in my lifetime, but the rate of unemployment is lower

than it has been for 45 years. We are the leading destination for foreign direct investment on the continent of Europe—bigger than France and Germany put together.

I am new, Madam Deputy Speaker, so perhaps you and other hon. Members will forgive me, but I am mystified as to why the House will, rightly, unite to celebrate our nation's many sporting victories, but success on the global economic playing field yields not even a grudging acknowledgement from the Opposition. Although I accept that statistics can sound dry and abstract—sometimes they are—we do not have to look far to turn them into real sales, real jobs and real successes. Take Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, which is on the edge of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan). It recently reported the highest ever sales in its 116-year history, and, on the back of that, more expansion into new markets, more investment and more jobs. Or consider the equally local sparkling wine producers of West Sussex, who now regularly beat French producers of a similar product in the world's league tables.

In fact, in sector after sector, British firms are leading, or among the best in, the world. Next week sees the launch of the Solar Orbiter spacecraft, which is literally designed to fly to the sun. Its mission will take eight years, during which time it will have to withstand a temperature range of almost 700° C. That solar system-busting technology was built not in Silicon Valley, Shanghai or even Singapore, but here in the UK at Airbus in Stevenage. We wish it great success in its endeavour.

British businesses are thriving in all the fastest-growing sectors in the world: quantum computing, aerospace and automotive, artificial intelligence, genomics, battery and electric mobility, and many more. But there is always more we can do, and if we want to help British business—the Prime Minister has talked about making the UK the best place in the world to start, grow and run a business—there are three things that we should do. We must have the ability to trade with the biggest and the fastest-growing markets in the world. Brexit is an important enabler, but this is about much more than trade deals. The best and most productive way of growing British exports is not to squeeze a little more out of the 250,000 firms that are already exporting, but to help the 90% of British businesses that do not currently export at all to do so. That is about market access. It is about boots on the ground, year in and year out. Her Majesty's trade commissioners are some of the most productive public servants that this country is privileged to employ, but there are only nine of them, and we need more. We need bigger and better—not nine but 900, or perhaps even 9,000 of them.

We need a joined-up aid policy. I welcome the recent success of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development at the African investment summit; I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke) will speak more about that later. We need a modern industrial policy that is as much about knocking down barriers as it is about picking winners. We need every Department to see itself as having a role in supporting businesses. We need frictionless access to talent, with the Home Office not just processing visas but speeding up the border queues at Heathrow airport. I support the creation of an economic super-Ministry that can act as a concierge to enterprise and a one-stop shop for smaller businesses, bringing together

Companies House and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and servicing businesses digitally with a single identification.

We need a fiscal and governance framework that actively supports business. We do not always have to compete on the lowest rate, but we need something that is fair and stable, and that changes in response to developments in technology and consumption patterns. We need simplicity, reliability and predictability.

Finally, we need a competition policy that is rooted in the global world in which many of our British firms compete, and that does not prevent some of our most successful businesses from achieving their place in the domestic market and competing internationally on the world stage.

2.35 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate on the eve of our departure from the EU. I congratulate the many Members who have spoken. I say to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), who is just leaving, that we share many things. Although we do not share a party, we share a surname; we share the experience of spending time in Bosnia; we share a faith; and we share a commitment to social justice, which was wonderful to hear about. His speech was very brave and very moving, and I thank him for it.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) on his speech and on the birth of his new baby. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) on a lively, engaging and passionate speech, and I congratulate my near neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy), on her speech, which covered so many issues that are important for our constituents and local residents, but also for our place in Britain and the world.

Global Britain is important to the residents of Putney, Southfields and Roehampton. More than one in 10 residents are from other EU countries, and many more are from other countries around the world. As a constituency, we feel global and outward facing, so I am glad to hear many references to Britain being an outward-facing country even though we are leaving the EU.

I would like to distance myself from the scenes of the Brexit party waving their flags in the European Parliament yesterday. I thank the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for mentioning that this should be a time of kindness, and for the acknowledgement that some Members and residents feel sorrow at this time. I welcome his comments about healing our divisions, and I hope that we will share more such sentiments across the House. Many Members and residents in Putney feel that what is going to happen tomorrow is an act of self-harm. We hope that we will see better times, but we are feeling sad at the moment. I associate myself with the comments of the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, who said:

“We will always love you”.

We will always love the EU, working closely together but in a different way, from tomorrow onwards.

Global Britain should not just be about enhancing the UK's international prestige and influence on the world stage. A global Britain in 2020 needs to defend

[*Fleur Anderson*]

multilateralism and the rules-based international order from the threats posed by those who seek to refine them. We need to promote our core values and not use the act of distancing ourselves from protectionism as an excuse to move away from our values of human rights, democracy and environmental sustainability. We must not detach our discussions about global Britain from trade, trade democracy, trade justice and our leading role in international development and the achievement of the sustainable development goals. I want to focus on those areas.

On current evidence, the Government's approach to trade does not take seriously our global responsibility to tackle the imminent threat of climate change, to defend human rights and to ensure trade democracy and transparency. Removing child refugee rights from the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill was not a good start, and I think doing so sent the wrong signals to the world. We have yet to see what will come up in the immigration Bill. I know that the Government say that that subject will be dealt with in the Bill, and I want to be optimistic. It is in that vein, and following that thread, that I will make my following comments.

I am concerned about our post-Brexit trade objectives. We still have next to no information on the Government's trade objectives after Brexit. Despite repeated calls from organisations such as the CBI, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Trade Justice Movement, there has yet to be a sustainability impact assessment of post-Brexit trade deals, or any indication of how the Government see trade policy tying in to the broader industrial strategy and to environmental and social objectives. We have been given no clear indication of what the process will be for parliamentary scrutiny of post-Brexit trade deals.

There is already a huge democratic deficit in what is one of the most important processes in our country's history. Future trade deals with the US leave us exposed to the risk of products being sold here that have been produced in the US under less environmentally friendly practices. We must take this opportunity to level up our game and not give in to a race to the bottom.

In a few weeks' time the Government will attempt to roll the EU-Morocco association agreement over into UK legislation, despite widespread concerns about the ongoing Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and the human rights of the Sahrawi people. Again, the Government are seeking to roll it over with as little scrutiny as possible. This is another example of trade agreements putting economic opportunism above human rights and international law. Is this what we want global Britain to look like? This cannot be the outcome of free trade.

What needs to be done? First, on fair trade, the Government need to work with organisations such as the Fairtrade Foundation and civil society organisations, co-operatives and trade unions to ensure a fair trade Brexit. For instance, future trade policy should ensure that economically vulnerable people do not find themselves paying new import duties on their sales to the UK; assess the impact on poorer countries of trade deals struck with wealthier countries; and make it easier for developing countries to sell their high-value products,

not just base products, to the UK. We should also ensure that our trade policies are in line with our commitments to the sustainable development goals.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. She has mentioned co-operatives and linking economic and social justice. On microfinance in Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus's Grameen bank helps women in particular to get start-up loans for businesses. Does my hon. Friend agree that such initiatives are a way forward and that our Government should engage more positively with them?

Fleur Anderson: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. I have spoken to women in Bangladesh about ways in which trading policies can be fair. Even those with very small incomes can engage in the global trading system. If we make that our aim and goal, it can be done right from the start.

My second point is that the Department for International Development should be kept as an independent Department. This is a very live issue at the moment. It should not be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Working together, the FCO and DFID give us significant clout globally, which we are in danger of diluting if we merge the two Departments. DFID is considered one of the most effective aid agencies in the world, saving lives through health, immunisation, water, sanitation, education and climate programmes, and by empowering communities to do that. This must be led by a Secretary of State with permanent Cabinet representation and a place on the National Security Council.

We should also increase our environmental commitments to achieve a net zero future. Our now independent membership of the World Trade Organisation and our hosting of COP26 later this year provide a massive opportunity—I want to be as optimistic as I can about leaving the EU—to take global leadership of environmental trade policy and to outdo the EU in the implementation of environmental standards. However, that has to begin with getting our own ship in order. We need to take a more joined-up departmental approach to trade and climate change, and end the culture of siloism. We need to undertake environmental, gender and climate impact assessments before entering trade negotiations, which is why we as a House need to know what is going on in those negotiations. All too often, free trade can have a significant, detrimental impact on women in particular, which is why I mentioned gender impact assessments. We should ensure that all stipulations in future trade agreements are designed to meet our own climate and environmental targets, and we should seek legally binding climate commitments in trade deals, rather than too often ineffective environmental chapters.

Trade deals should also be subject to increased scrutiny, as the shadow Secretary of State for International Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), has said. The Government seem to be making every effort to avoid proper debate on and scrutiny of our trade deals, and they are completely opaque in their objectives. They are hiding. The entire process needs to be reformed and subject to proper oversight, if our trade policy is going to reflect the sort of global Britain that we all want.

Tomorrow we leave the European Union and its regulatory framework. With the Chancellor already having confirmed that there will be no alignment with EU regulations, global Britain is now being defined in our trade and development policies. Are we prepared to enter into trade deals with regimes such as that of President Bolsonaro, who has pursued an aggressive policy on environmental deregulation, for which the Amazon has paid the price? Are we going to continue selling arms to human rights abusers and states violating international humanitarian law? Are we going to continue to let UK-based companies divert rivers and destroy indigenous communities in their own overseas operations? This cannot be the kind of global Britain we want to see.

To conclude, Brexit, tackling global poverty, achieving the sustainable development goals and taking urgent action on the climate crisis all bring huge challenges, but we must meet them with a very British commitment to fairness, by protecting rights and promoting peace, justice, equality, sustainability and prosperity in all that we do on the global stage.

2.47 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It is an honour to follow the well thought-out speech by the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson). It has also been a privilege to be in the Chamber to listen to the maiden speeches by the hon. Members for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), and by my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) and for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson).

Speaking in this debate on global Britain the day before we leave the European Union, I feel a sense of pride and relief. I do not mean nationalistic pride, as some suggest was the motivation for those who, like me, campaigned for Britain to leave the European Union. I mean pride that democracy has won and that this Government are delivering on the result of the 2016 referendum.

Having been a candidate in a certain by-election that took place just two weeks after the elections to the European Parliament, I have first-hand experience of how unforgiving the electorate can be on this issue. I also have a sense of relief that Britain can now move on—yes, move on politically, but also move on to reclaim our role as a global free trading nation. However, as many Members have said today, that comes with global responsibilities. I want to highlight three elements: the role that we can now play in strengthening ties with the Commonwealth and how that can deliver for Britain, why the UK should deeply appreciate the contribution of our overseas territories and dependencies and we must never forget their importance for this country, and why being outward-looking and globally ambitious can deliver for my constituency and the rest of the UK.

As a newly elected Member of Parliament, I have joined the all-party parliamentary group for Australia and New Zealand, the British-Canada all-party parliamentary group, the all-party parliamentary group for the Commonwealth, and the CANZUK all-party parliamentary group. CANZUK is an acronym, referring to closer theoretical, political and economic ties between Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, of course, the UK.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that we should have the closest possible ties with our friends in the Commonwealth. Does he agree with me that we should prioritise our free trading relationship with the United States, one of our closest friends in the world, so that the special relationship can endure?

Paul Bristow: Of course we should value our relationship with the United States, which is indeed a special relationship and should indeed endure. As I have said, however, I think we should look more broadly to the Commonwealth. No other countries in the world share as much, socially or economically, as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. We all share the same Head of State, have highly developed economies, share a common-law legal system, co-operate under the Five Eyes agreement for defence and security, share the same parliamentary systems, speak the same majority language, embrace human rights and western values, and even share common ancestry through historical bonds. With approval rates of 68% in the UK, 73% in Australia, 76% in Canada and 82% in New Zealand, CANZUK is an idea whose time has come. As the UK leaves the EU, I encourage Ministers to work with their counterparts in the other countries and explore that concept.

Let me make two suggestions for how we might make a start. First, the UK might join or at least develop closer links with the Trans-Pacific Partnership trading arrangement. Secondly, we could start to become more flexible in relation to the visa arrangements that currently exist with, for example, Canada under the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, and introduce a sort of professional mobility visa. I know how difficult these arrangements can be, as the former owner of a professional communications company who wanted to employ who he wanted to employ. Let us look into visa arrangements with CANZUK countries that might benefit from intra-company transfers, investment visas and independent professionals.

Central to the goal of revitalising the UK on the world stage is the wider Commonwealth. We must prioritise these historic relationships. The Commonwealth should no longer just be seen as a “nice to have”, but should be considered crucial to the Government’s vision of an outward-looking global Britain. The Government are pursuing the biggest strengthening of the diplomatic network in a generation, opening up 14 new and upgraded posts including, crucially, nine Commonwealth posts. That will include 1,000 new jobs, and it shows that the Government are on the right path towards solidifying the crucial relationships with our friends in the Commonwealth.

I also want briefly to show my support for the UK’s territories and dependencies, whose importance to this country should not be downplayed. The UK should be proud of the way in which they have succeeded in developing their own economies and becoming mostly self-sufficient, without requiring financial help from the UK taxpayer.

Last week I went to a meeting at which the representatives of each territory and dependency had a chance to speak. I left feeling very impressed by their ambition and loyalty to the UK, and very much more knowledgeable about them. One comment left a strong impression, and I thought it worth putting on the record in the House.

[Paul Bristow]

What price would a country like China or Russia pay for a geographical network of territories of great strategic importance and with loyal local populations, like the one that the UK has and enjoys? Let us show those territories how much we value them.

I once coined the phrase “Think Brexit, think Peterborough” as a way of trying to get local people and businesses in my constituency to think about the opportunities presented by Brexit, but perhaps I should now say “Global Peterborough”. We are on the east coast mainline railway heading north, and will soon be just 40 minutes from London. We are also on the A1, the main north-south artery. Our east-west routes are strong. We have been a headquarters for global international brands, and my city is diverse with communities from across the world. We are a British city, but we are also a global city, and we can take advantage of that to step forward on to the world stage again.

The UK’s place as Europe’s top destination for foreign direct investment has been sustained. It has held that position since 2003. Between April 2017 and March 2019, the Department for International Trade supported 3,118 individual investments in the UK and 120,000 new jobs. The UK has attracted more projects, new jobs and investment than any other European country, and now it is time for Peterborough to take its fair share of that.

Peterborough has many EU citizens including, historically, a big Italian population and more recently a large number of eastern Europeans. I am confident that the Peterborough Conservatives will soon elect our first Lithuanian councillor when the magnificent and hard-working Ruta Dalton wins in Gunthorpe ward in the local elections this May. We are one city, and that is as a result of the big and valuable contribution that our European populations in Peterborough have made.

I am pleased that the Government’s settled status scheme will help to secure EU citizens’ rights in this country. So far, there have been 2.7 million applicants, and 2.5 million have been told that they can stay after Brexit. Just six have been rejected on the ground of criminality. This quick and easy system will be of great comfort to my constituents in Peterborough. The message is loud and clear: we value your contribution and we want you to stay.

It is time to be confident for the future of our country and to think globally and think big. I often say the same thing when I talk about my city, but the same applies to our country, so let us move forward with optimism and build on and deepen our historical relationships with the Commonwealth. It is also time for businesses to be confident and seize the new exporting and trade opportunities. The Government cannot do it for them, but we are here to help and support them as we enter a new chapter of our country’s history.

2.56 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I want to speak in this debate on global Britain about what this means to our country’s commitment to achieving the 2030 global goals: the 17 sustainable development goals that leaders of the world came together and agreed at the United Nations in 2015. As I prepared my speech for the debate, I reflected on my previous work in the developing

world, and I asked myself this simple question. When our developing country partners in Africa, in the Commonwealth or in global institutions such as the World Trade Organisation hear the phrase “global Britain”, what does it mean to them and what do they hope to see from a global Britain in 2020 and over the next five years? I believe the answer to that question has three parts, but with shared prosperity through inclusive, sustainable economic growth as the common thread running through them all.

First, our partners in Africa hope most of all that global Britain means a new chapter in our economic partnership with the continent as we leave the European Union, deepening our ties and leveraging the potential for trade, investment, technology and aid-for-trade to transform economies and lift millions out of grinding poverty. With the Prime Minister’s leadership, 2020 has begun on the best possible note with the UK-Africa investment summit—the first of its kind—in London last week. I congratulate the Government on the success of the summit, which brought together Governments, businesses and international institutions and made it clear that Britain intends to be an open and collaborative partner to nations around the world.

Thanks to its rapidly growing population, Africa will be home to a quarter of the world’s consumers by 2050. That is exciting news for British businesses looking to connect with new customers and build strong export markets across the world. Locking into that export potential is a compelling opportunity for many up and down the UK, and is especially pertinent as we shape our own independent trade policy outside the EU. My right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary has previously remarked that Brexit means that Britain will be able to turbocharge relations with Africa. That is a statement I very much agree with. Our strengths, including our record as a leading source of private investment in Africa, mean that we will always be at the front of the queue to support the growth and development of that continent. That matters to my constituency, because we can create more local jobs by creating opportunities for local businesses to export to emerging markets. A good example in Stafford is JCB, which exports generators from its manufacturing plant in Hixon to numerous countries in Africa.

By bringing together British and African businesses, we can harness the huge potential of the continent. The UK has already signed trade agreements with 11 African countries, and the Government have said they are committed to making it easier for African and UK businesses to trade and invest. African countries currently receive less than 4% of global foreign direct investment, so I was pleased that the Government said that they are listening when African nations say they want mutually beneficial partnerships that move beyond aid and attract quality investment to drive green, sustainable growth and to create jobs. We must not only build on the African investment summit, but work with our African partners to develop a new economic partnership over the next decade.

To help us to define this new blueprint, earlier this month the Overseas Development Institute and the all-party parliamentary group on trade out of poverty, of which I am proud to be a vice-chair, tabled a proposal with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) for the Prime Minister to establish a joint UK-Africa prosperity commission. It should

look at establishing the most pro-development trading arrangements possible between African countries and the African continental free trade area, which goes live in July, covers 54 countries, and will be the largest FTA in the world, with a market of over 1 billion people.

We should also achieve our target of becoming the largest investor in Africa and improve the investment climate and infrastructure for doing business and trade in Africa for businesses large and small. We should also scale up our “aid for trade”, making sure that we have impact at scale and pace through by the footprint of UK-backed initiatives, such as TradeMark East Africa, across the continent. Such initiatives have already shown that they can deliver benefits nearly three times greater than just cutting tariffs on trade between African countries in initiatives like as the African continental free trade area. The proposal for a joint UK-Africa prosperity commission has great merit and deserves the most serious and urgent consideration by the Government. What could be a better way to make global Britain a reality for Africa?

Next, our partners in the Commonwealth, who will gather in Rwanda in five months’ time for the Heads of Government meeting, hope that global Britain means the UK will continue to rejuvenate the Commonwealth and remain a force for good in the global economy that began at the London summit in April 2018. In London, the 53 Commonwealth Heads of State took the historic step of launching the new Commonwealth connectivity agenda to realise the huge potential of the Commonwealth for expanding trade and investment, particularly for the many developing country members in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

Global Britain should present an opportunity at the Commonwealth summit in Rwanda to redouble our commitment to delivering ambitious results for the connectivity agenda in areas where the Commonwealth has the greatest potential. That could include boosting digital economic connectivity and electronic commerce, making trade in goods easier and faster by streamlining red tape and harmonising standards, ensuring that we leverage the diaspora as an engine for investment across the Commonwealth, and empowering women through trade such as scaling up the Commonwealth SheTrades initiative.

Finally, our partners in the World Trade Organisation, who will also gather in June this year for the 12th ministerial conference in Kazakhstan, also hold special hopes for global Britain as the UK becomes an independent member of the WTO. The WTO is a central pillar of the global economy and a rules-based trading system on which the prosperity of developing countries depends most of all. The UK has a key role to play in the WTO as a champion of an open, rules-based system that works for everyone and leaves no one behind.

At the 12th ministerial conference, the UK, as global Britain, should lead on building consensus and agreement in the organisation for new rules to discipline those who overfish to further protect the world’s oceans and blue economy; to expand the WTO’s work on e-commerce, investment and small and medium-sized enterprises, with particular attention to the needs of developing countries; for detailed reporting on implementation of the women and trade declaration made at the last ministerial conference in Buenos Aires in 2017; and for a proper action plan for the next two years.

This is not just a new year but a new decade, and there is no better time to consider emerging opportunities for Britain. Our exit from the European Union is a chance for us to reassess our standing in the world and to renew our relationship with neighbours, near and far. The Government must continue to make it clear that we want closer trading partnerships with the Commonwealth and with African nations, and the UK must continue to ensure these countries get the investment they want. As we chart a new course for our country, investing in the economic power of Africa’s burgeoning and youthful economies will play a vital role in the success of global Britain.

3.6 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I join fellow Members in congratulating the hon. Members for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) and for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) and for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey). They are all fine additions to the House, and it is an honour to follow them in this debate.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), who I believe was the first Member to address global Britain specifically on a humanitarian level, which I hope to follow in my speech.

Those who heard my maiden speech last week will note that I spent a great deal of time extolling the virtues of an outward-looking Britain that does not shrink from its obligations in the world. I will now expand a little further on that speech.

Tom Hunt: Does my hon. Friend agree it is vital that our ports, which will play a bigger role than ever before, should be supported with the rail and road infrastructure they need?

Anthony Mangnall: It is as if my hon. Friend heard my previous intervention. I totally agree that an improved infrastructure network will allow us to decentralise capital from our city centres into our rural communities, thereby ensuring that we are a united country with opportunity throughout.

This country has always made its mark. It continues to do so now, and it is my express hope that it will continue to do so in future. I will focus my remarks on three elements: my constituents and local businesses; the national level; and, finally, the humanitarian element. All three elements have shown innovation, ability and value to this country. This House and the other place have had a positive impact on the world through our humanitarian projects and our ambitions for environmentalism and conservation.

This House has a long and proud record of finding ways and opportunities to make our mark on this country and across the world. A global Britain is one that is not just focused on trade but is dedicated to standing against the injustices of the world, to helping those most in need and to standing up for the international rules-based order when others have vacated that space. We have a continual duty to fill that void.

The hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) said that global Britain lacks definition. To my mind, global Britain is an outward-looking, sovereign nation that is in control of its own destiny and is able to intervene without the restrictions of the European Union.

[Anthony Mangnall]

I am proud to have in my constituency a vast array of businesses and enterprises of international acclaim. Their contribution to my communities and their value to my local economy is enormous. Brixham fish market, the largest fish market by value in England, uses cloud-based technology from across the world to allow buyers from across the UK and Europe to purchase the finest British fish. That combination of traditional marketplace ethos and using new technology to reach all areas of Europe and beyond shows how we are respecting the past and embracing the future.

It is the future that many of us are here to debate. The ambition of my town of Brixham does not rest on its past achievements; like many Members in this House, it is looking forward. This is seen in the harbourmaster who explained to the Prime Minister recently that an investment of £15 million in a northern breakwater arm might result in further investment, further portside growth and an expanded domestic fish market, which will no doubt incorporate further exports to the EU and to Europe, benefiting local employment and that business. It is also seen in the team at Brixham Trawler Agents, who are already helping to drive up our domestic appetite for that fish, demonstrating that coupling a domestic and international focus can pay dividends locally, nationally and internationally. Only with a global outlook can we hope for our rural economy to thrive and expand.

Although I intend to spend much of my time in this place speaking about fish, I would like to move on to a few other subjects. During the election, the Secretary of State for International Trade was kind enough to visit my constituency to see Valeport, which creates oceanographic, hydrographic and hydrometric instrumentation. This small but growing firm in the centre of Totnes encapsulates this country's appetite for ingenuity and innovation. Be it in technology designed to innovate by monitoring the patterns of seal migrations, in machines that observe sea levels in the fight against climate change or in technology used for naval programmes, this is a firm of potential almost unrivalled anywhere in the world. Valeport's export market is growing rapidly, and I know its global ambition will be supported by the Department for International Trade in the coming months and years.

Through our commitment to increasing tax relief for firms investing in research and development, we can ensure that British products are on procurement lists the world over. We should all celebrate that, but we can always go further. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, we do not rank in the top 15 countries for research and development spending, and the Office for National Statistics ranks us 11th in Europe. So I hope many Members of this House will agree that we can do more, giving us greater freedom and opportunity for our businesses to innovate, create and research. I hope we will thus be able to encourage greater levels of foreign direct investment and to have a renaissance of British produce and technology permeating every industry and country across the globe. That is not fantasy; it is a reality that is readily available, and it is one we must seize.

Let us consider the example of our food and drinks market, which only recently the Food and Drink Federation recognised as exporting more than £23 billion-worth of

produce. I am happy to see that so many Scottish National party Members are currently debating the future of whisky exports in a Westminster Hall debate. These are opportunities we can seize as we move forward and look ahead. I welcome what we have done so far. We have the clout and the market share; now we must recognise the opportunity potential before us to drive up those export figures. The "Buy British" campaign is just the start. We must ensure that our meat markets are recognised as the finest in the world, just as French wine might be recognised for its quality—we must adopt a similar mentality.

I started off by saying that my remarks were going to be about not only trade but the services that we have on offer. The English in Totnes language school helps bring people from across Europe, through the Erasmus scheme, and from across the globe to learn English. It benefits our local communities, our towns and our high streets, and we have an opportunity to expand that beyond the current Erasmus scheme to look further afield. I look forward doing that as the local Member of Parliament.

My real-world experience before coming to this place was in the maritime industry. I worked for two shipping companies, Braemar ACM and Poten & Partners. Both firms taught me a great deal about international business. Perhaps more importantly, they demonstrated UK dominance in the maritime sector and shipping sector. That fact is not often discussed, and I mention it today not as a boast but as reminder to all in this House that we must protect and develop this area in the years to come. After all, this industry contributes £18.9 billion in turnover, an increase of 41% from 2010, and £6.1 billion in gross value added, an increase of 38% from 2010. It directly supports 181,300 jobs and indirectly supports 682,000 jobs in this country. It is estimated that the UK shipping industry helps to support a total of £45 billion in turnover in this country. That is a remarkable figure, and I hope many in this House will work me to support that in the coming months. London remains that global capital in shipping services, home to brokerages, legal services and insurance outfits, with capabilities that are almost unrivalled across the globe. Those services are domiciled here because of what this country can offer—such as domestic stability and global access—and in part because of our maritime history and culture. That does not change on 1 February.

I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is not present to translate the Latin that I am about to say, but the words "dictum meum pactum"—my word is my bond—are understood across the shipping sector, and I hope they will be understood across every trade deal that we are to sign in the coming years. We must create a culture of ambition in our country to ensure that we are always expanding our reach and striving for what is best for our country and for the international rules-based order.

I hope the House will forgive me if I move on briefly to the humanitarian debate that this House and the other place have had over the past few years. My own experience has been in helping the creation of the prevention of sexual violence in conflict initiative that the right hon. Lord Hague and Baroness Helic championed in the other place. I look forward to working on the issue with Members from all parties. I hasten to add that this year there will be a conference, on which I

know the Foreign Secretary is keen to make an announcement. That gives us a great opportunity to show our reach: with 150 countries signed up to our initiative, it echoes the sentiments of those who recognise the UK as a force for good.

A truly global Britain is one that looks beyond the balance sheet of import and export numbers and recognises the impact that we can have to right wrongs, protect individuals and lead on matters that might not always appear to be in the national interest. Whatever debate we have about our aid budget in the coming months, I hope that the House will recognise that what is in the national interest will not always match what it is right to do. I hope that the latter will always take precedence over the former and that we will stand up to be a truly global Britain.

3.16 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate and a real pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), whom it is good to see in his place. I should also acknowledge the many excellent maiden speeches that we have heard in this debate.

Tomorrow marks the day when we will leave the European Union. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), I approach tomorrow primarily with a sense of relief—relief that after three and a half years of wrangling, delay and uncertainty, we have reached the point at which we are about to deliver on the 2016 referendum result.

Mr Bone: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. I wonder whether he has noticed that on the Opposition Benches there is not a single Labour Back Bencher, not a single Liberal Democrat Back Bencher and not a single SNP Back Bencher. They used to make a song and dance about Europe; where are they?

Steve Double: I am tempted to say that perhaps they heard that I was about to speak, but I suspect that is not the case. I share my hon. Friend's regret, because that is a sad reflection of the level of interest among other parties in the important matter of Britain's place in the world after we leave the European Union.

As I was saying, it is with a sense of relief that we will leave the European Union at 11 o'clock tomorrow evening. For me, that is primarily because it is absolutely essential that, having given the British people the decision to make as to whether we stayed in the EU, it is imperative that we deliver on the result. It is sad that it has taken us three and a half years to get here, but through great determination on the part of many in this House and the great determination of the majority of the British people, who have consistently given us the message that they meant what they said in 2016, we are now at the point of being able to deliver on the referendum and will be leaving the European Union.

Having reached this point, we are left with a clear choice: we can embrace a positive view of the future of our nation outside the EU, or continue the debate that we have been having for the past three and a half years. After hearing some of the contributions from the Opposition Benches, I am slightly concerned that too many in this House seem to want to continue the same

debate, even though we have now reached the point of leaving. The best thing for our nation right now is for everyone in the House to embrace the fact that we are leaving, have an optimistic and positive view of our future outside the European Union, and get on with the job of delivering what the British people want and ensuring that we make the most of the opportunities we have.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I think the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber when I spoke earlier. The United Kingdom is a multinational state. I wish his nation the best Brexit possible, as it is in my nation's interests that his nation gets it right, but may I remind him that the conversation is very different in Scotland? He is a Unionist. He should know better than this.

Steve Double: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his predictable intervention. Let me remind him that in 2014 the people of Scotland voted to stay in the United Kingdom. This was a decision that the United Kingdom made as one country, and the majority of people in the UK voted to leave the European Union. As a member of the United Kingdom, Scotland is part of that decision and that process.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I agree with everything that he is saying. He talks about "we" and about our nation, but does he acknowledge that, as part of that British family, the overseas territories and Crown dependencies must not be forgotten in any future free trade agreement? I refer in particular to Gibraltar, which is leaving the EU along with us tomorrow evening at 11 o'clock. Will he make sure that everyone understands that we have a responsibility to our territories and dependencies as well?

Steve Double: I am very grateful for that intervention, and I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. One of my hopes is that as we leave the European Union, we can perhaps turn some of our focus more starkly to our overseas territories, which, perhaps in recent years, have felt a little ignored. Leaving the European Union gives us the opportunity to strengthen our relationship with our overseas territories and make more of them, because we will be free from the shackles of the European Union. I absolutely agree with what he says.

It is absolutely vital that this House does now adopt an optimistic and positive vision for our country as we leave the European Union. I have found that since the general election every business I have spoken to now has a much more optimistic and positive view of what we can achieve as a nation as we leave the European Union, and we in this House need to adopt that same attitude.

Leaving the EU presents us with a number of opportunities. We have heard a lot already in this debate, including from the Secretary of State, about the opportunities for free trade and the opportunities that having our own independent trade policy will bring. There is the opportunity for us to have our own immigration policy. I believe that we can have a fairer, more compassionate, more effective and better immigration

[*Steve Double*]

policy that works for our country and is not tied into the discrimination that the EU policy of free movement has forced on us

As someone who represents a constituency that has a number of fishing communities, I believe that leaving the common fisheries policy will present a great opportunity for us to revive our fishing industry and make sure that it gets a fairer share of the quota. Overall, I like to think that as we leave the European Union we have starkly contrasting choices of what our country could be like: it is the difference between being an oil tanker as part of the European Union, or a speedboat as an independent country outside the EU. No longer will we be tied to 27 other nations and need their agreement before we can do anything. We can be much more flexible, and much quicker to respond to global events and to demands that the world places upon us. That, for me, is in a nutshell how I see the opportunity of our leaving the European Union. We can be much more responsive and much more flexible in today's ever-changing world.

I am sure that Members of the House would be surprised if I were to speak on this subject without specifically referring to Cornwall. I absolutely believe that Cornwall can play a significant role in ensuring that we deliver on the vision of a truly global Britain outside the EU, but that is not new. Throughout its history, Cornwall has played a significant part in delivering on global Britain. Today many people see Cornwall as a place for holidays, ice creams, pasties and perhaps fishing, but our history is about our being a major contributor to Britain's global standing.

First of all, Cornwall has not only excelled at mining but has exported around the world. We have contributed our Cornish expertise and ingenuity to many places, particularly to many Commonwealth countries, and to North and South America. In Cornwall we define a mine as a hole in the ground anywhere in the world with a Cornishman at the bottom of it, because so many left after the decline of the tin mining industry that they formed a diaspora around the world.

There is good news, however, because Cornwall has an opportunity to become a global player in the extraction of precious metals once again.

Anthony Mangnall: Does my hon. Friend recognise the value of a great south-west partnership, with all the counties of the south-west being able to attract foreign direct investment and act as a regional bloc?

Steve Double: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments and agree with him, but only up to a point, because I would be failing my constituents if I did not say that there is still a proud independent streak in Cornwall. The partnership with Devon and the other counties in the south-west goes only so far, particularly when it comes to the order in which we put cream and jam on a scone.

The recent identification of large deposits of lithium in Cornwall presents a great opportunity not only for Cornwall but for the whole UK, which could have its own secure domestic supply of what will be one of the most in-demand and crucial elements of our future. The more we need batteries for electric vehicles and other forms of energy storage, the greater the demand

for lithium and other elements will be. In today's ever-changing global climate, we cannot overstate the importance of having our own domestic supply of significant amounts of lithium, not only to supply the car industry and other industries in this country, but to export an element that will be in huge demand in the years ahead. I do not think that can be ignored. Cornwall is ready once again to contribute significantly to global Britain through the extraction of precious metals.

Another way in which Cornwall's history links to our future is in telecommunications, which in recent days has been mentioned a lot in the news, and indeed in this House. Many Members might not realise that Cornwall was once the most well connected place on the planet, for in June 1870 the final section of the submarine cable between Great Britain and India came ashore at Porthcurno, a small cove in the far south-west of the county. Just a few days later the first ever telegraph message from Bombay was sent to Britain via that cable. That station went on to become the world's largest submarine telegraph station, and it remained a training centre right up until the late 1990s. Even back in the 19th century Cornwall was right at the heart of connecting the UK to the rest of the world. Cornwall is once again ready to play that part.

Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear me mention Spaceport Cornwall, which we are ready to roll with. We are still hopeful that, as planned, we will be launching satellites from Cornwall's spaceport next year, once again playing a key part in helping the UK stay connected to the rest of the world and fulfil the vision of global Britain.

In summary, I believe that great opportunities lie ahead as we leave the EU tomorrow night. I believe that it is incumbent on us to take a positive stance, to have a positive vision of the part that the UK can play globally outside the EU as an independent, free-trading nation once again, and to ensure that we provide the positive lead that I believe our country needs us to play.

3.29 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I would like to compliment everyone who has made a maiden speech today, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson). His was a particularly good speech until he mentioned the Royal Green Jackets being the best regiment in the Army, at which point I started feeling nauseous.

I want to speak about the value of the United Nations to global Britain because we never, ever discuss the United Nations, and it is an invaluable arm of our foreign policy. I am somewhat biased because I was once part of the organisation as a United Nations officer in 1992-93. Let me say one thing about wearing a blue beret: when I put it on, I felt it was rather special. It was not just national but international. I remember telling a Bosnian Croat commander who was blocking my way in Bosnia, "Get out of my way; I represent the United Nations." To be honest, I felt that was a huge moral authority.

Of course, we are no longer a great power. Any vestiges of that disappeared in 1956 with the Suez debacle. At that time, we were rapidly decolonialising and the events of 1956 probably accelerated that process.

Bob Seely: I very much respect what my hon. Friend says. I am just nervous about this, “Oh, we’re terribly unimportant nowadays” argument. We are not a superpower and have not been since the 1950s. China is the new superpower and the United States of America, our closest ally, is a current superpower. But there are a series of great powers underneath that level, including France, Germany and Japan, and rising ones such as Brazil and Indonesia. Arguably, because of our varied and integrated assets—our language and culture, and the military in which my hon. Friend served—we are still a great power, and perhaps the most leading one.

Bob Stewart: I am not going to argue with my hon. Friend about the semantics, because I agree with him. There is a level below the superpower of which we are most definitely a member.

I firmly believe that our participation in the United Nations really helps us to have influence in the world; and if we get it right, we get it very right. We were a founding member of the United Nations in 1945, which then—75 years ago—was an organisation that reflected the power politics of that time. Now there are 193 members and the United Nations is honestly the world Parliament, albeit a flawed one just as we are flawed here. It is the best we’ve got.

The most important United Nations organ is the Security Council, which consists of five permanent members. As everyone probably knows, they are the United States, Russia, China, France and ourselves. We were all allies in the second world war, and incidentally we are all nuclear-capable. Any one of the permanent members of the Security Council can veto a resolution to prevent its adoption, regardless of the fact that it may have majority support among the 15 members because the Security Council includes 10 non-permanent members, with five being elected each year to serve for a two-year period.

Critics quite rightly say, “Things have moved on. You’re looking at something that was relevant in 1945 and things have hugely changed since then.” They are right. In a way, the United Nations is stuck in the past. The way it is set up is. Many people say—and my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) just implied this—that states such as Japan, Germany, India and Brazil, and perhaps the European Union in the round, should be permanent members. Others say that France and the United Kingdom should not. Actually, they have a point—we must accept that—but may I just examine it and tease it out a bit? In terms of GDP contribution to the world, the United States is at 24%, China is at about 16%, Japan is at 5%, and then Germany and India at 4%. The UK and France are next, at 3%, followed by Italy, Brazil and Canada, at 2%. Interestingly, Russia is at less than 2%. Thus we hear the odd phrase that Russia’s economy is smaller than Italy’s—that is where it comes from. Using such measures, and assuming that the Security Council continued to have only five permanent members, they would be the United States, China, Japan, Germany and India. The UK and France would be out, and so too would Russia.

But in truth there is no real mechanism for change in the United Nations, and I do not think there is much appetite for it either. Trying to change that sort of organisation would be incredibly difficult. For instance, it would require the agreement of all five current permanent

members—in other words, they would be volunteering for redundancy. I do not see that happening, and I am not sure whether the world would want it to happen. So, for the foreseeable future, the United Kingdom will remain a permanent member of the Security Council. That is really good news for us, as global Britain—great news. It provides us with a platform, and we do not have to pay too much for it because we use our reputation. Our reputation in the world is huge, regardless of the fact that we have lesser and lesser defence forces. I have had direct contact with that myself, as I once rang the Security Council from the field, and when I said I was British, that got me through pretty quickly. We have a very good reputation in the Security Council, and the General Assembly as well.

Let me comment particularly on British involvement in UN peacekeeping, which, of course, the Security Council authorises. No United Nations operation can take place without being sanctioned by the Security Council, and we, as a permanent member, have a veto on that. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West back in his seat. I am sure he missed my slight dig at the Royal Green Jackets, so I want to get it in again now he is back—but he can read it later. For peacekeeping, there are three practical ways in which we contribute in the Security Council: first, by helping to provide the mandate, then by funding the forces, and then by contributing forces. Overall, the United Kingdom contributes nearly 7% of the UN’s budget for peacekeeping. That is more than we have to, but we still do pretty well because it is considerably more than our world GDP percentage.

I am glad to see that the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), is now in his place, because I am about to give him a bit of a hand, as he is a good friend. It was a good idea for him to attend and perfect that he has just arrived. From hints put out by the Government over the last weeks, I gather that they intend to put more effort into UN peacemaking and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. That is really good news—I am totally up for that. In fact, as part of our defence review, I am up for the idea of earmarking part of our armed forces to be sent to the United Nations when there is a requirement and we agree it. I like the idea of a battle group that is UN-designated.

I accept that the United Nations is not perfect, but it is well worth having, and honestly, it is all we have got. Every recognised state in the world—all 193 of them—is a member, and each has a seat in the General Assembly, as do we. Of course, the UK may not like some of the resolutions and debates in the General Assembly, but there is no doubt that it is the best forum—indeed, the only one—for gauging world opinion. Condemnation within the forum of the world is never welcomed by any country.

I have concentrated on one part of global Britain, but that is because I wanted to, because I believe that the United Nations is so important. The United Nations is a crucial part of keeping and improving our international influence. We are doing well now—we are not doing badly—but if we put more effort into it, we could get much more back. Our permanent seat on the Security Council is incredibly valuable, because that is where legally binding international mandates are designed,

[Bob Stewart]

and through our own arguments, with our good Foreign Office officials and our good Ministers, such as my hon. Friend the Member for—where is it?

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): Plymouth Moor View.

Bob Stewart: I have not been there yet, but I am coming. It is people like my hon. Friend who go and represent us at the Security Council. Let us give as much support as we can to the United Nations, and by doing that, I bet we will get much more back than we put in.

3.42 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). Today's debate comes at a crossroads in our island's story. In the 1950s, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson said:

"Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role."

The role we eventually found for half a century was in the European Union, and now our citizens have decided in aggregate that we leave the European Union and forge a new destiny. What is that to be?

Global Britain, at the moment, is a slogan in search of a strategy, and it is the duty of this Government and all of us to bring it alive. I welcome the announcement of the security, defence and foreign policy review and lots of work in other Departments, and I hope that the Budget will pivot to boosting Departments that can deliver a more global Britain. The good news is that we have most of the ingredients already. It is now about the recipe and how we bring them together.

Here are some of the key elements beyond language, law, history and the Commonwealth. Domestically, we are the top destination for foreign direct investment in Europe. Last year, we had more investment in technology than the US or China. We have a strong domestic starting point for engagement with the world. Abroad, as a result of a significant change made by this Government, some £12 billion of funds used through the Department for International Development has achieved remarkable things—since 2015, some 76 million children have been immunised, and some 60 million women, children and girls have benefited from nutrition programmes.

We now have in the Department for International Trade, so recently created, more trade negotiators than the US Trade Representative. We have exports that have risen 22% in the last three years—now over £654 billion—and that are contributing 30% or almost a third of our GDP, up from 27%. We now have in our diplomacy 14 new posts and, I believe, the greatest global diplomatic coverage of any nation in the world. On issues such as the environment, we are now hosting the climate change summit, COP26, in Glasgow.

When it comes to sport and culture, we are leading in so many ways, whether in films, TV, the premier league, singers—you name it. Our values have never been forgotten. We are leading on Christians in danger, media freedoms and girls in education, as well as the campaign against rape as a weapon of war, as mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall). So we do have much to build on.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Foreign Office overseas staffing department has been cut by over 1,000 staff in the last 30 years? Does he agree with me that, whatever the future holds for Britain post Brexit, we must ensure that the Foreign Office—the diplomatic service and, specifically, its consular staff—have the best possible resource and training, so that when families lose loved ones abroad or are constituents are held against their will or are ill-treated abroad, the Foreign Office is properly resourced, staffed and skilled to make sure that our constituents and our citizens are looked after and represented?

Richard Graham: The hon. Member makes a good point. As a former consul and diplomat, it is hard for me to argue against additional resources for the Foreign Office. I would say that the figures she mentions I think relate to a reduction in the numbers of British diplomats deployed overseas, but during that time there has also been a considerable growth in the numbers of locally employed members of high commissions and embassies. There is a balance there, and local knowledge is incredibly useful as well. She is right, however, and I did say earlier that I hope the Budget will see a boost for all Departments that can deliver global Britain.

It is not just as the United Kingdom that we have an overall aggregate global role. If we look at every constituency in the country, there are huge links between our businesses, or indeed our hospitals, and overseas organisations. In my constituency of Gloucester alone, we export to China alone valves for the oil and gas sector, the cylinders that go into every Dyson vacuum cleaner, marine engines and the landing gear for every Airbus—and we export tea to China. That story of engagement is replicated across the towns and cities of the entire United Kingdom.

Bob Seely: I want to make a point about pay and conditions. We produced a "Global Britain" study last year, and one of the things that surprised me is that ambassadors do not always have line management of all staff in embassies, so if people are from DFID or the MOD, it is more difficult for them to fall under a cohesive and integrated approach to management. People were also on different salaries for doing the same job, very often to the detriment of the Foreign Office. It would be very good if, in the foreign and defence review, these things were ironed out, because it would be an encouragement to folks in the Foreign Office and actually valuable for them.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. All I would say at this point is that the most important thing for us overseas is to have one HMG—one presence of Her Majesty's Government's representatives—and the boss should always be the ambassador or the high commissioner, regardless of which home Departments individuals in that embassy or high commission originally came from.

That is part of the projection of our values, and our role in and our contribution to the world, which we do need to look at as we move forward: very much part of Europe, but no longer a member of the European Union; very much part of the international rules-based order, which we played such a large part in establishing; and an outward-looking, independent nation—working in partnership with many others and many organisations,

but making our own decisions in the best interests of the United Kingdom and in line with our values. Contrary to what one or two Opposition Members said earlier, those actually are valuable and are precious to the world. Those of us who have been a Prime Minister's trade envoy will have experienced that across the world.

That means working closely with our neighbours, especially on security issues and European borders, and constraining Russian expansionism. That is our traditional role in maintaining the balance of power on our continent. It also means taking different views where we need to, and the same will be true of our relationship with today's superpowers, the United States and China. We will be making decisions, whether on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 5G telecoms, or free trade agreements, that are right for the United Kingdom.

For the past few years, the Labour party has appeared to be against business, international trade, defence and security, and against so many countries who are close allies. It has never spoken up for the global opportunities, and largely sees only corruption and villains. Unlike that, we believe in the huge opportunities and benefits to this nation from manufacturing as well as services, and from apprentices in both. We believe in creativity, and in opportunities to export our education, satellites and pharmaceuticals. That, I believe, is the opportunity that lies ahead.

We will need some changes to help bring that alive, so perhaps I can make a few recommendations to which the Minister can respond. We need a Foreign Secretary who has overall responsibility for £12 billion of development, as well as for diplomacy. We need the Departments for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and for International Trade to work more closely together, and with MPs, to hold "Global Britain" exporting seminars in every constituency across the land. We must focus on attracting key foreign technology investors and capital, and I welcome the Government's decision on visas for scientists. We must continue to lead in aerospace and digital businesses, and I welcome the commitment to working with our Five Eyes partners on telecoms alternative technologies.

Above all—you would expect me to say this, Madam Deputy Speaker—we must look more closely at what we can do with Asia, and at opportunities for closer engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the possibility of acceding to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the opportunities for working more closely with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore, our Commonwealth partners, on defence, training and preparations. We must help nations with their cyber and finance requirements, and create huge numbers of jobs in those nations through our own expertise. One British insurer alone has 275,000 agents working in Indonesia. Those are franchises and independent, small Indonesian businesses. Those are the opportunities for us. We can take them forward and be a great power for good. We can make global Britain a real strategy.

3.52 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a pleasure, as ever, to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), and I will be following up on some of his points. [*Interruption.*] Is he right honourable?

Mr Steve Baker: It's only a matter of time.

Bob Seely: It is a matter of time. I thank my hon. Friend.

There has been much talk about global Britain, and last year I and others published "Global Britain: A Twenty-First Century Vision", which I circulated to many MPs this week. Unfortunately, I came third in a tight field of three in the race to be Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, but I hope that was a comment on me, rather than on my work, which I hope is still useful.

That study contained 20 ideas, one or two of which have been mentioned by other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who spoke about the importance of the United Nations. The United Kingdom has arguably been the world's greatest nation at developing alliances throughout our history. Indeed, we would not have done so well in the last two world wars if those alliances had not been in place. Whether NATO, our close relationship with Europe now that we are not part of the European Union, or CANZUK, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) eloquently referred, there is a wealth of alliances that we could be building. The victor in the Foreign Affairs Committee race, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), spoke about partnerships with middle-ranging powers, or with great powers such as Korea and Japan, which are important.

Bob Stewart: On soft influence, when my hon. Friend and I, and other hon. Members, go abroad, perhaps in uniform, we are very well received in large parts of the world. One very important instrument for our soft influence is using our military academies to educate people, particularly from the middle east, but anywhere—for example, Kazakhstan.

Bob Seely: Absolutely. In my very brief time at Sandhurst, I saw people who were there from foreign powers. That is a very important form of soft influence, along with our universities and higher colleges. In Shrivenham, there are many international students, especially in the higher courses. I thank my hon. Friend for making that point.

I want to add one thing to the debate about the necessity for strategy. Despite having a wealth of think-tanks that study strategy, I am not sure we have done it well enough in the past few decades. We have been too tied to the United States for its concept of strategic hard power, much of which we might agree with, and too tied to the European Union for our definition of soft power, through trade and so on. A global Britain would give us the chance to develop our own idea of how to combine hard and soft power when it comes to trade negotiations, the export of values, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester spoke, and many other elements.

Many Members have spoken about the rules-based order, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) and the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson). There are now considerable threats to the rules-based order, not only from the rise of Russian authoritarianism but potentially from the rise of China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist party. I may well differ with my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester on some of these matters. I think he sees many opportunities and some threats. I see many opportunities, but also many threats. We have to

[Bob Seely]

understand much better not only how we ourselves can project an integrated power, but how others are projecting an integrated power to us.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Is not one key element in this discussion, which does not get much political oversight, how China operates in different universities and the academic sector, not just here in the United Kingdom but throughout the western world? Could that not do with a bit more—oversight is maybe the wrong word—political and Government attention?

Bob Seely: I very much agree, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. The Foreign Affairs Committee covered China's role in universities in this country, but we need an understanding of how we use integrated strategy and how people use that strategy against us. For example, I suggested in the "Global Britain" study that we should think about rolling the Department for International Development and the Department for International Trade, as agencies, into the Foreign Office. People who prioritise DFID think that that cannot possibly be done, but we can still have the 0.7% and a significant aim for aid, while having those Departments as agencies within the Foreign Office to have greater integration between the different elements of power that one has at one's disposal. That is just a suggestion. I am not saying that one should do it, but I think we need to think freely about the options we have. One would not want to copy Russian power, because it is very often used unethically and immorally, but its notion of integration is very important.

I want to say a few words about Huawei. I know I have, with my role as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, bent the rules slightly. I am very grateful to the Whips for their generosity in allowing me to talk about this issue in the past week or so. It falls under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, but I have been talking to them extensively to make sure they are not too disappointed in my actions.

Huawei is probably the major strategic goal of China in the UK and Europe over the next five to 10 years. By that, what I mean is that China's strategic goal, with its Made in China 2025 and Digital Belt and Road initiatives, is to become dominant in the cyber space. That presents potential opportunities, but also very significant threats. I am concerned that in the past 15 years, Huawei, which is an arm of the Chinese state—let us be under no illusion about that—has built up a potentially dominant position in many countries. That presents significant problems and threats to us, and I would just like to rehearse some of the arguments. I do so in part because this will come back and be a focus of discussion here, certainly for the next month or six weeks as the Government seek to put through secondary, and potentially primary, legislation.

First, there is a claim that Huawei is a private firm. In no meaningful sense is that correct, as we would understand it. The company is 99% owned by a Chinese trade union, and Chinese trade unions are part of the one-party state. To follow up on what the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) said, I think we need a better understanding of non-democratic systems. We tend to assume that the rest of the world is

a little bit like us in different ways. I lived in a one-party state, the Soviet Union, before its collapse, and I am glad I did. One-party states are functionally different. For us, the rule of law is given the highest rank. In one-party states, the rule of the party is given the highest rank, and the rule of law is ranked somewhat lower. So party comes before law in such countries, in a way that it simply does not in democratic states. That goes to the heart of the question of being a non-trusted vendor and a high-risk vendor. I will develop that argument in a minute, if I may, although I will be conscious and respectful of Members' time.

Huawei is not a private firm; it is 99% owned by a trade union, and trade unions are part of the Chinese state. Considering that previous Secretaries of State have described Huawei as a private company, is the UK Government's position that they believe Huawei to be a private firm, or do they accept that it is part and parcel of the Chinese state? I will probably write a letter to the various Secretaries of State to follow that up, because I think it is important.

My second point is about the idea that we can limit Huawei to the periphery of the network. That is key to Government plans, and I think it is highly questionable. The Government say that there is a way of managing the risk through network design, but many other countries say that that cannot be done. Mike Burgess, the director general of Australia's version of GCHQ, said that

"the distinction between core and edge collapses in 5G networks. That means that a potential threat anywhere in the network will be a threat to the whole network".

I will quote some other experts whom I have talked to. One told me:

"Basic cybersecurity principles tell you that one vulnerability or weakness in the system threatens the entirety of the system."

I would like to know whether the Government think we can build out threat in our network design.

As regards the core versus edge arguments, many experts argue that proposed solutions based on segmentation between functions are

"yesterday's perspective on tomorrow's problem."

Such experts argue that it is not possible to segment 5G as we could with 3G and 4G, because some of the core functions will be pushed to the edge. As the architecture moves on, those core functions will be stretched across the network via virtualisation and intensification of active features of radio access network equipment. Another expert said:

"Many...core functions have to move close to the edge in order for 5G to offer the benefits it does"—

that is, latency and speed.

I was reading an article in *The Strategist*, a magazine put together by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The article was written by one of the magazine's cyber experts who formerly worked at Australia's version of GCHQ, and who said:

"I was part of the team in the Australian Signals Directorate that tried to design a suite of cybersecurity controls that would give the government confidence that hostile intelligence services could not leverage their national vendors"—

Huawei—

"to gain access to our 5G networks. We developed pages of cybersecurity mitigation measures to see if it was possible to prevent a sophisticated state actor from accessing our networks through a vendor. But we failed."

Mr Bone: I know little about this issue, and my hon. Friend knows a lot more about it than I do. The conclusion I draw from his remarks is that he is saying that Government policy is wrong.

Bob Seely: I look forward to debating this fully, especially when I am no longer a PPS. I think there are justifiable questions, and we need collectively to think very carefully about this decision.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I cannot believe that I am agreeing with the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), but his assessment is right. What the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) has just described is the Government willingly bringing us a digital Dunkirk.

Bob Seely: Let me be fair to this Government. They have not been in power for long and we have had 15 years of Huawei effectively coming into our country by subterfuge. I think there is a role for foreign lobbying, but it is doing damage and we need a foreign lobbying Act, which I hope to work on. To be fair to this and the previous Government, their telecoms review at least tries to bring order to something that has been driven by a price-dumping strategy. I will come on to that later. I want to make progress so that I do not talk for any more than another five minutes.

Richard Graham: My hon. Friend poses a bigger-picture question about the role of democracy in today's world and the threat from authoritarian regimes. Does he agree with me—I should declare an interest as chairman of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy—that we need to create a democracy fund that spends more money and uses our influence more effectively in encouraging and helping nations that, like us, have difficulties in making sure that democracy is working as well as it possibly can?

Bob Seely: That is an excellent idea, because we are a values leader in this world. I do not at all negate the role of soft power; I just think we need to get the integration of hard and soft power right.

I will crack on. I would like to know from the Government what our network architecture is likely to look like. How can we think about how edge and core functions will work in our 5G in five or 10 years' time? Moreover, if we were red-teaming this, we would need to ask how non-trusted, high-risk vendors could manipulate future network design. If there is a realistic chance of them being able to do so, that would be potentially damaging.

We have been told that a non-spy agreement with China is feasible. It is not. Huawei has offered one. Article 7 of China's national intelligence law states:

"All organizations and citizens shall support, assist, and cooperate with national intelligence efforts in accordance with the law".

That is pretty cut and dried. How will this Government guarantee the security of networks when non-British passport holders have access to them, given the nature of the Chinese state and Chinese law? This is not about being anti-Chinese; it is about questioning the role of the Chinese Communist party and the one-party state.

I question the claim that the security services are happy, and not only because Sir Richard Dearlove wrote the foreword to our report on Huawei a few months

ago. I think there are ways of phrasing things to get the answers one wants from the security services. Much as I respect the National Cyber Security Centre, I am concerned about some of the advice it is giving, only because I hear very impressive people in different positions saying different things and I do not believe it is possible to give certainty for five and 10 years ahead. By building a 5G network now, we are effectively committing to allowing the Chinese state to introduce 6G and 7G in 10, 20 or 30 years' time.

We are told that this enables market provision. It does not. Huawei came to power by, in effect, stealing the intellectual property of Nortel, a Canadian company, leading to its collapse. Considerable allegations have been made. In future weeks we might hear more—who knows?—about the nature of the deals that Huawei strikes with western telcos and about accusations of price dumping and other things. More generally, Huawei is funded by the China Development Bank, to the tune of \$10 billion in loans and a further \$100 billion in credit lines, which means that it can simply undercut any commercial fair price offered by a western telco. That puts permanent pressure on Samsung, Fujitsu, Nokia and Ericsson.

About 10 years ago, Huawei had 5% of the market. Now, China collectively has about 40% of the market. On the current trajectory, in 10 or 20 years' time there will be no market apart from that dominated by ZTE and Huawei, and Nokia and Ericsson will go the same way as companies such as Nortel, about which we no longer hear. That is cause for concern. It is simply a myth that this enables market provision. Indeed, it limits it.

We are told that there are no alternatives, but yes, there are. There would be short-term delays and additional cost—there is no question about that—but this is a question of balance. I look forward to having a grown-up discussion when the Bill comes before the House.

I will not dwell on the human rights argument—I want to be respectful of people's time—apart from saying that there have been allegations from ASPI and others that Huawei has worked on the oppressive surveillance kit in Xinjiang province.

Next, it is claimed that the quality of Huawei's work is high. Well, the Huawei Cell says that the coding is sloppy. Indeed, Infinite State, a tech company based in the United States, found sloppiness in Huawei's source code after analysing 1.5 million files, but also said that on multiple occasions Huawei coders had disguised unsafe functions, and that too concerns me.

In general, I question the reassurances that we have been given. What positive action can we take? If I were suggesting stuff to a Government whom I strongly support, what would I say? First, we need public debate. Australia had nearly a year of public debate about this, because it raises significant issues such as data privacy, human rights and our attitude to human rights abusers abroad, and whether the Magnitsky Act could apply to Huawei if it is used to supply oppressive equipment in other parts of the world.

There are significant practical, economic and moral implications that have simply not been discussed. We have been getting it wrong for about 15 years, and our answer is "We have got it wrong, so let us just brush it under the carpet." Huawei is hiring the great and good

[*Bob Seely*]

for its board, and a former senior Government information officer is oiling Whitehall to make it safe for Huawei. All those points raise significant ethical, political and economic questions.

We could try separating Huawei in the same way that BAE Systems in the United States is an entirely different company from BAE Systems here. We have not done that. Why not? A public inquiry into how we have messed this up so badly might also be a good idea. My preferred option, however—and I would love the Government to consider it—is an international conference to agree trusted vendor status for the free states of the world, the liberal democracies, so that they could have trust in the future building of a critical national infrastructure. Machine-to-machine communication through 5G will revolutionise and become the core of our communication society.

Finally, we need a foreign lobbying Act. We know that Huawei's lobbying operation in this country is very well funded and very extensive, but apart from that we know little about it. I think that, for the purpose of good government and, indeed, leaving the European Union—I keep reminding myself that we are doing that tomorrow, which is wonderful—we need more transparency, not less, and we need more accountability, not less. That is one of the reasons why I chose to vote to leave the European Union.

4.12 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is an absolute honour to speak in the debate. This is the third speech that I have made since I was elected; I know that that is quite a lot for someone who has been in this place for only a very short time.

I wanted to speak in the debate for two reasons: because it is the final opportunity that I will have to speak in this place while we are a member of the European Union—and I am very happy about that—and because of the impact on my constituency, which has its own port and is just down the road from the country's biggest sea container port in Felixstowe.

This is of course a time for us to come together, although I appreciate that tomorrow will be a difficult day for many people. I must admit that I shall be celebrating: I shall be at two pub parties in my constituency. Both the pubs are in a part of town that has historically been Labour, but this time, and hopefully for a long time, people have come over to the Conservative party, because they believe in democracy, they believe in Brexit, and they believe in this country.

I want to pay tribute to some of the other Members who have made speeches today. First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), whom I have known for many years and with whom I will be working to try to convince the Government that we need more investment in our regional rail and road infrastructure so that we can step up to help global Britain. I will not, however, be on the same side as my hon. Friend this Saturday, when he will be visiting Portman Road in Ipswich to watch the Ipswich-Peterborough football game. That will be one occasion on which we will not be on the same side, but I imagine that after that we will always be on the same side.

As I said in my maiden speech, Ipswich has been on an important trading route since Roman times, and that long tradition continues today. The port of Ipswich is the UK's leading exporter of grain, and in 2019 it doubled its grain exports after the good harvest. The 2.5 million tonnes of cargo—worth more than £600 million—handled per year at the port are a source of employment for 1,000 of my constituents. As I mentioned earlier, down the road we have the port of Felixstowe, the UK's busiest container port, which employs a further 5,000 of my constituents. Overall, I represent 6,000 constituents who work at ports, so their stake in global Britain could not be higher.

Anthony Mangnall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the value of free ports will help them to grow in the years to come and allow us to become an international player in the maritime sector?

Tom Hunt: I share my hon. Friend's view on that. Indeed, I hope that Ipswich will become a free port.

We know that 48% of the UK's containerised trade goes through the port of Felixstowe, and a total of £80 billion-worth of goods pass through it every year. Both of these ports are major contributors to the East Anglian economy, and I know that my right hon. Friend the International Trade Secretary will share that view. We must remember that the ports do not just support the people employed directly by them, and that the business done at the ports ripples throughout the economy, supporting many thousands of jobs and livelihoods in the community. It is my firm belief that, as we leave the European Union and embrace a more global Britain, ports such as Ipswich and Felixstowe and the communities surrounding them can do even better if given the right tools to do so.

As members of the European Union, our trade policy has largely been made in Brussels, where the voice of East Anglia is but a whisper as 27 other countries with competing interests jostle for position on the EU side of trade negotiations. Some have said that trading off some of our interests in order to negotiate as part of a bloc is worth it because we have greater clout in negotiations with third-party countries, but that argument is meaningless if many of the proposed EU trade deals never see the light of day. Recently we saw the long EU-US negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership fall through. We also saw the negotiations with South American countries fall through. The EU-Canada deal, which eventually got through, did so only after the Walloon regional parliament in Belgium finally agreed to adhere to its main ambitions.

Inside the European Union, we have also been greatly restricted in our ability to designate docks, and the industrial clusters that rely on them, as free ports. Designating free ports would give our manufacturing sector a huge boost and create thousands of jobs. Given that most of our ports are located disproportionately in areas of high deprivation, employment growth from new free ports would occur where it is needed the most.

While we have been tied to a sluggish European Union, and paying for the privilege, the rest of the world has been moving forward at pace. In the past, before the internet, refrigerated shipping and the rapid rise of the developing world, regional trade blocs were understandably seen as the future, but today trade is

more and more global. The EU now has an increasingly small share of the global economy and it is estimated that 90% of world output growth in 2020 will be generated outside the European Union. As a member of the European Union, our trade patterns have reflected these irresistible trends. The share of UK exports going to the EU has fallen from 55% in 2006 to 45% in 2018. In the face of all this, the EU has exhibited its protectionist tendencies. EU tariffs are high on goods such as food and clothing, which disproportionately impacts the least well-off in our society. These tariffs are also unfair to the least well-off people in the world, as those in developing countries struggle to compete in our marketplace on fair terms.

By way of contrast, other countries have reaped the benefits of embracing global free trade as independent nations. Among the most successful of these is Chile. Although not a large nation, it has struck free trade deals that cover 86% of global GDP, including with the EU, China, the USA, Japan and Canada, and a partial deal with India. I believe that if Chile can do it, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can most certainly do it as well.

Outside the European Union, we can pursue a bold free trade agenda with the interests of East Anglia and its powerhouse ports at the forefront. We can be nimble and we can do trade agreements quickly, and I am glad to see that the Government have not lost any time in this endeavour, with deals with South Korea, Switzerland and Israel set to take effect once we leave the European Union. I am pleased that dialogues are also under way with many other nations, including the United States and our Commonwealth partners in Australia and India. I welcome the fact that one of the Government's principal aims in these discussions is to ensure that our trade policy reflects the needs and the potential of the whole of the United Kingdom, because the potential of Ipswich and East Anglia is enormous when it comes to trade. The ports of Ipswich and Felixstowe have already had investment in preparation for Brexit, and both ports have the potential to expand. An estimated 98% of non-EU crates pass through the port of Felixstowe as quickly and as easily as goods arriving from the EU thanks to cargo tracking systems, which allow many goods to clear customs before they even reach the UK.

Furthermore, Ipswich's workforce and community are ready to take advantage of the benefits of increased trade, as they have done for centuries. Like I said, East Anglia just needs the right tools in place to realise its trading potential, which will benefit the whole country. The people of Ipswich and Felixstowe, some of whom work in the ports, and elsewhere in our region stand ready to help the Government achieve their ambition to be the greatest country on earth, but we need Government support for our rail and road infrastructure to help us do just that.

Some 48% of the country's containerised trade comes through the port of Felixstowe, but the only route around Ipswich involves a bridge that closes when it is windy. That simply is not good enough. We need a solution for the Orwell bridge so that it never has to close. We also need an Ipswich northern bypass, and we need to sort out Ely North junction. We need the complete electrification of rail routes across East Anglia, because rail freight currently goes down to London and then up again because of inadequate rail infrastructure.

The people of Ipswich are world beaters when it comes to international trade, and they stand ready to embrace competition. We in this place must remake the UK as a beacon for free trade around the world once more while ensuring that the people of this country have every opportunity to benefit fully from that. To be a truly global nation, we have to be nimble, dynamic, flexible and buccaneering. We should not be inward-looking, rigid, protectionist or sclerotic. I said in my maiden speech that this is the greatest country in the world, and tomorrow presents a fantastic opportunity to spend the next decade proving that to everyone around the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Mr Peter Bone.

4.21 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): That was a marvellous speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt). He may have spoken only three times, but I encourage him to speak many more times in this Chamber. The maiden speeches we heard today were all different, but they had one thing in common: they all held the House. The House listened and was respectful, and these new Members will be a useful addition to this Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am so pleased that you are in the Chair. I have been waiting not five hours to make this speech but more than 30 years. I cannot tell you how unbelievably happy I am about what is going to happen tomorrow. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) quite rightly said that we should remember that some people will be disappointed, but there will only be a few Liberal Democrats left, so—*[Laughter.]* No, the point is that I have knocked on thousands of doors over the past 30 years, and I know that whether someone voted leave or remain, they will celebrate tomorrow because the decision has been made and we are leaving, and I will be in Parliament Square tomorrow to celebrate.

I have a couple of things to say about Brexit and then I will talk about something perhaps more important. We will end the free movement of people. We will stop paying billions of pounds to the EU each and every year. We will make our own laws in our own country to be judged by our own judges. Since we went into Europe, more than 2 million people net have come here, and the problem with that is that they came here whether we wanted them to come or not, which made us restrict immigration from the rest of the world. I am looking forward to us having a fair immigration system, under which we get the people we want from all over the world and we keep out the people we do not want. The amount of money that we have given this club since we joined—after all the money they have given us back in funny projects—is £211 billion net, and yet that same club exports in goods nearly £100 billion more to us than we sell to them. That is not a good deal, and that also ends tomorrow.

Then I thought—I do not think this has been mentioned today—that what has happened is that the establishment has been beaten. I lived in Wales in the 1990s and stood against Neil Kinnock in 1992, and the position of the Conservative party then was that we should be in Europe for ever and that we should join the euro. That was the held position when Mr Major led the party. I got myself

[Mr Peter Bone]

into trouble, as I put in my manifesto that I wanted to come out of the EU. Mr Major was not much pleased. I did not quite win against Neil Kinnock—I lost by a mere 30,000 votes to 6,000—but it was the best ever Tory result in Islwyn.

In 1997 the established view of the establishment, whether it was big business, the media—especially the BBC—the civil servants, the Government or the Opposition, was that we were in decline as a nation. They all agreed that we were in decline as a nation and that the only way we could survive was to become part of this federal Europe. That changed over time. I fought the seat of Pudsey in 1997, and I think I was the only Conservative candidate to be endorsed by the Referendum party. Under Mr Major and co we were still the party of staying in Europe.

Moving on to 2001 and we had William Hague. At least then we were fighting to keep the pound, which we managed to do. There had been a slight move in the establishment. Then we come to 2005, when I was first elected. The establishment view of Mr Cameron and Mr Osborne was, “We are staying in the EU. You right wingers are fruitcakes,” and things like that.

With the help of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and a number of others in our group, we organised the 2011 Backbench Business debate on whether we should have an EU referendum. I remember George Osborne arranging for the debate to be brought forward from the Thursday to the Monday so that we Eurosceptics would be put in our place. On the day, 81 Tories voted against a hard three-line Whip, because they were in touch with their people, to say that a referendum was necessary. In 2013, thanks to the last Speaker, there was an amendment to the Queen’s Speech regretting that it did not include an EU referendum.

This House slowly began to believe that we should come out of Europe, or at least that we should give the people the chance. I was delighted when David Cameron granted the referendum, and I was delighted to work with my hon. Friends the Members for Kettering and for Corby (Tom Pursglove) to create Grassroots Out. We toured the country, and many of those rallies and meetings were attended by colleagues I now see in the Chamber, including some on the Front Bench and even one in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was clear to me that people wanted us out and that Parliament was behind.

We won that referendum, and I remember being in the Division Lobby after a later debate, before David Cameron resigned his seat. He gave me a friendly punch in the stomach to show his appreciation. Who would have believed that after that result, for three and a half years, the establishment would continue to fight? We very nearly lost our grip on Brexit. Thankfully, now that we have a Prime Minister who had the courage to resign as Foreign Secretary, who led the Vote Leave campaign, and who got the withdrawal agreement changed when nobody said he could, we are coming out tomorrow, and I am so proud of that. That is the result of what we did in this Chamber and what the people outside did. It is right that the Opposition continue to scrutinise and criticise, as that is their role, but there are fewer of them because they did not listen to the people.

I am very pleased about what is going to happen, but this seems unfair on the people who have actually achieved this. They put up with all the propaganda, turning down the “fact” that we were going to have bubonic plague, massive unemployment and falling house prices—there was all that money thrown at the remain campaign. People will celebrate tomorrow, but why should we not do something a little more permanent? We should follow the example of some of our European neighbours. Germany has nine bank holidays, France has 11, Italy has 11, the Netherlands has 12 and Belgium has 15, so why not take a leaf out of their book? We have only eight in this country, so why not have an extra bank holiday? I suggested this to the Leader of the House, but I was not sure from his answer whether or not he was in favour. I will introduce a private Member’s Bill next week—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald *rose—*

Mr Bone: I must just finish this important bit. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, and I will not yawn at that moment either. My private Member’s Bill will establish a bank holiday on the Friday nearest to 23 June each year. It is a good time to have a bank holiday, and we do not have one in June at the moment. I want it to be known as “United Kingdom day”. [Interruption.] Members may scoff—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I do.

Mr Bone: He does. But the advantage of this is that we can celebrate our sovereignty at the same time as celebrating our nations of the United Kingdom. That would be a permanent reward; every June, people would have the day off and say, “Thank goodness for that Brexit vote.”

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: We will work that bank holiday if the hon. Gentleman is successful in getting it. Throughout his speech he has been railing against the “establishment”. I know he sees himself as a kind of mild-mannered, modern-day answer to the metric martyr here in Parliament, but the Brexit project is entirely of the establishment. Is he really asking us to believe that people such as Arron Banks are not the establishment? They are, and the hon. Gentleman is the establishment now, even if he does not want to believe it. But why does he want to take a leaf out of all of those European countries’ books, all those countries he is so desperate to get away from? Why is he so workshy, in wanting to have another bank holiday?

Mr Bone: I am grateful for that intervention. The praise the hon. Gentleman gave me about being a metric martyr was kind. I was just saying that on this last day of our being in the EU let us take the one good thing that the EU does, which is have bank holidays. Once we are out, we will not have all these pettifogging regulations and all this oppression on industry, so industry will do better. So let the workers have the extra day off to celebrate.

I am pleased and honoured to be the last Back Bencher to speak in this debate, the last Back Bencher to speak while we are still in the European Union. People in this Chamber deserve credit, but the people who deserve the most credit are the British people, and well done them.

4.34 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to respond to this important, wide-ranging debate. The Opposition welcome the opportunity to discuss Britain's place in the world at this critical juncture for the future of our country. Although we formally leave the EU at 11 o'clock tomorrow, there are still a great many unanswered questions about the UK's future relationship with the EU and with countries all around the world.

In the Labour party, we of course want to see Britain as a globally influential country, trading with partners as equals and fulfilling our obligations to the poorest people in the world. We are optimistic and ambitious for our country, but we believe that we face a great many challenges, too, and it is not doing Britain down to be clear-eyed about that. We should all expect some frank and detailed answers from the Government.

Let me congratulate those Members who made their maiden speeches today. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) spoke extremely movingly about his journey to this place and the adversity that he has overcome. I am certain that his experiences will allow him to make an important contribution to our debates. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) spoke about the global nature of his city of Aberdeen, and made a powerful case for fairness in the face of injustice. The hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) spoke movingly about the sacrifices that his mum made, and I am sure she is very proud of him. We do not thank our mums enough. His point about spreading opportunity throughout the country was well made. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) spoke powerfully about the need to fight racism and injustice at home and abroad. She is exactly right that our country's trade must be fair as well as free.

I wish to make a few points and pose some questions to the Government about exactly how prepared they are for the opportunities and challenges ahead. First, the Government must be clear about their priorities and capabilities as we seek to strike trade deals around the world. The Government have already said that they intend to carry out negotiations with the EU and US simultaneously, as well as moving ahead with the Australian and New Zealand deals. A number of important EU trade deals must be renegotiated, including those with Japan and Canada. Altogether, that will require significant resources and expertise to achieve.

The significant task facing the Government comes against the backdrop of a broader challenge: as the UK takes responsibility for trade policy for the first time in 40 years, we face a severe shortage of the skills and experience necessary to negotiate on the global stage. In a submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Foreign Office has already acknowledged that it will be a challenge. It said:

"The UK has not had to operate on the frontline of trade policy and negotiations since it joined the EEC. The scale of the UK's challenge in building trade capability from a very modest base is unparalleled amongst developed economies."

When he responds to the debate, will the Minister tell us just how modest a base we are dealing with? What progress have the Department for International Trade and the Foreign Office made in training officials to an

expert level in trade policy and negotiations? Put simply, just how many fully trained trade negotiators do we actually have?

On the subject of Government preparedness for trade negotiations, we are in the quite extraordinary situation of not knowing which Department will be responsible for the negotiations. The Government have said that the EU trade talks will be run from the Cabinet Office, but we still do not know whether the Department for International Trade will be merged into another Department or stay as a stand-alone entity. Can the Minister shed any light on that?

Whoever conducts the negotiations will have to think carefully about our priorities. That means engaging seriously with businesses and civil society about the potential benefits and costs of trade agreements. So far, we have had a lack of clarity from the Government about the trade-offs involved in a deal with, for example, the US. Instead of rushing into a deal for political purposes, the Government must engage fully and consider our national interests.

The UK is taking control of its trade policy at precisely the point that the global rules-based order is under great pressure and openness to trade is declining globally. We can no longer rely on the WTO to settle trade disputes, because of the US refusal to appoint new members to the appellate body. We must be a strong voice for free and fair trade and work with partners around the world to further those aims.

Mr Steve Baker: Is it the Labour party's policy to abide by WTO rules, as they have been committed to by the UK? Is it the hon. Lady's intention to build up the WTO, or does she envisage some other way of establishing free trade? I am delighted to hear, by implication, that she is open to free trade around the world.

Judith Cummins: I welcome that intervention. I will answer it very, very bluntly: we do want reform of the WTO rules.

I turn now to a couple of specific challenges that we face over the coming years. The Government's announcement on Tuesday regarding the role that Huawei will be allowed to play in delivering our 5G network is an example of the global pressures that we face. The Government have given assurances about the security of our critical national infrastructure, and it is vital that these assurances are matched with action. The crucial question must be: why do we not have our own domestic tech and manufacturing capacity to deliver this technology and meet our own security needs? We must not allow ourselves to be held hostage in a geopolitical tug of war.

Global Britain must surely be underpinned by a strong and dynamic domestic economy, with good jobs and prosperity spread across the country. As we leave the EU, the Government must set out exactly how they will attract overseas investment into all the regions of the UK and help to grow our export base, particularly in manufacturing.

One of our most important industries is the British steel sector, which, as the Minister will know, faces acute global challenges. We are still waiting for a steel sector deal, and we need urgent action from the Government on the prolonged dumping of Chinese steel.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. She is making an excellent speech and posing some really good questions. On steel in particular, does she agree that we, on these Opposition Benches, have had many sterling champions of the steel sector? I wish to single out for special praise my colleague, the former Member for Scunthorpe, Nic Dakin, who lost his seat. The Members on the Government Benches who have taken those steel seats have their work cut out if they want to live up to the standards set by Nic Dakin and our colleagues who fought for the steel sector for so long.

Judith Cummins: I thank my friend for that intervention. I certainly agree that colleagues like Nic Dakin, the former Member and friend from Scunthorpe, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who is co-chair of the all-party steel group, have done sterling work and made very powerful contributions in this House on the future of steel and the steel industry.

As we leave the EU, this Government must stand up for these vital British interests. We also need to be better equipped in this Parliament to scrutinise trade deals. We on these Benches have repeatedly called for a new system of parliamentary scrutiny and approval of trade agreements, and so, too, have a diverse range of groups, including the CBI, the British Chambers of Commerce, the TUC and five parliamentary Committees. However, the Government have sought to limit access to negotiating texts and make the process more secretive than the current approach of the European Union.

As will become more and more evident over the coming years, trade deals have the potential to reach into all manner of policy areas, from food safety to workers' rights, and from national security to climate change. It is vital that this Parliament has the tools that it needs to properly scrutinise any and all future trade agreements.

Finally, given that this debate is about global Britain and given that I am a rugby league fan, I could not resist the opportunity to briefly mention the rugby league world cup taking place in Britain in 2021. This and other international sporting events give the UK a fantastic opportunity to welcome people from around the world and to show off all that we have to offer. Indeed, I was pleased—in fact, delighted—to find out that the rugby league world cup was even mentioned in the global Britain section of the Conservative manifesto. So, in this, the final debate before Brexit day, there is finally at least something on which we can all agree.

4.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): It is a pleasure to reply to what has been a lively, entertaining and very well-informed debate. It is both an honour and a privilege to stand at this Dispatch Box today as the last Minister of the Crown to respond to a full debate while Britain is a member of the European Union.

Three and a half years ago, the British people took part in the largest binary democratic exercise in our nation's history. In that referendum, they voted decisively that they wanted Britain's relationship with the EU and with the rest of the world to change. As my hon.

Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) so brilliantly said, they wanted an open, outward-looking, internationalist, generous country to rejoin the international community. That is approach, as someone who campaigned to leave and who believed, frankly, from the moment the Maastricht treaty was published in 1992 and citizenship of the European Union was established, that Britain's destiny lay outside that political institution. But I respect the fact that many of those whom I admire took a different view. I have always been guided, as I know has my hon. Friend, by the old saying that two reasonable people can perfectly reasonably reach opposite conclusions, based on the same set of facts, without each surrendering their right to be considered a reasonable person.

The people of Britain voted for a global Britain, and we are now in the process of realising that agenda. At 11 o'clock tomorrow night, or 12 o'clock for those in Gibraltar, we will leave the EU—I say this for the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), who mentioned this in response to an intervention from his friend the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry)—as one United Kingdom. This Government are determined to involve every nation and region of this great United Kingdom in that process, which is why only last week I chaired the first joint ministerial forum on trade.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald *rose—*

Conor Burns: I would be delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Can the Minister tell me one concession he made that the Scottish Government asked for?

Conor Burns: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman talks to his counterpart in the Scottish Government.

My first visit as Minister of State at the Department for International Trade was to Scotland, the second was to Wales, and I was in Northern Ireland the following week, as a declaration of intent of our ambition to involve every nation of this country.

We will now be free to determine our own economic future, rekindling old friendships and reaching out to parts of the world that we may have ignored in recent decades. In our increasingly interconnected, globalised world, trade will play a central and vital role in supporting our shared security and prosperity. We face this future with confidence, built on firm foundations: we have the fifth-largest economy in the world; we are the second-largest service exporter; and we are home to the City of London, the world's global financial gateway. Our commitment to law-governed liberty, our open liberal economy, our world-class talent and our business-friendly environment have made us a go-to destination for venture capital, and the European leader in attracting foreign direct investment, which last year, according to the Office for National Statistics, was a record level of £1.5 trillion.

We have an enormous amount to offer, whether it is our world-class education sector—a passion of mine since I made my maiden speech nine and a half years ago on the subject of student visitor visas—a system that has led to one in six global leaders having part of their education in the United Kingdom; our internationally renowned tech sector, now home to over 70 tech unicorns;

or our green energy sector, which has seen us become a world leader in offshore wind and green finance. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) not only on being elected to chair the Defence Committee, but on highlighting the opportunity we have to play a massive international role in combating climate change.

Greg Smith: Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, among the fantastic list of areas in which we are prosperous and have something to offer the world, our creative industries will also be put centre stage?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We lead the world in the creative industries. Only tomorrow I will travel to Pinewood Studios, and on Monday I will visit MediaCity in Manchester, where I will be outlining the contribution that the creative industries make to the United Kingdom's economy. Given that my hon. Friend is a Bucks Member of Parliament, I think I am right in saying that the person who is hosting me tomorrow at Pinewood Studios chairs his local enterprise partnership.

However, there is a massive missed opportunity in the United Kingdom. It is a sad but true fact that less than 10% of British companies export anything at all overseas. That is why the Government's export strategy will respond to that, to help increase exports as a percentage of GDP, complemented by a network of free ports, championed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), who I think is bidding for two of them.

Paul Bristow: The Minister talked about a lack of British firms exporting.

I wonder if he would give a shout-out to the communications industry. The communications industry in the UK is pioneering, and the Public Relations and Communications Association—the trade association for the communications industry—is now setting up and exporting British communications expertise across the country. I declare an interest in that my spouse is the owner of a communications company.

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have no doubt that as well as being a vocal and articulate champion for Peterborough, he will promote the service sector in the UK economy, as he has just done so effectively.

I will endeavour to reply to the specific points raised in the debate. The shadow Minister criticised the Government for our interaction with Parliament in future agreements. We are going to publish an outline for each negotiation that includes objectives and scoping assessments, as well as an explanatory memorandum. The shadow Secretary of State constantly talks about us having an ineffective trade remedy system. The simple repetition of something does not make it true. We are going to have a tough regime, learning from international best practice.

I promised to come back to the shadow Secretary of State on the situation in Western Sahara. The UK-Morocco agreement will apply in the same way as the EU-Morocco agreement, having been amended to comply with the European Court of Justice judgment on the issue; that is a critical point. He also raised the question of bribery

and corruption in the provision of UK Export Finance. UK Export Finance always carries out anti-bribery due diligence before providing any support at all.

I promise that I did not put him up to it, but my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) said that we needed greater resource and more trade commissioners. He made that point very well indeed, and I hope it is heard. It would be inappropriate for me to endorse it, but—what is the old saying?—"He might very well think that; I couldn't possibly comment."

Mr Steve Baker: May I impress upon the Minister that with so many trade negotiations going on simultaneously, it is very important that he has another Minister of State in his Department?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend will doubtless have been heard as well.

I pay tribute to those who made maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) gave an accomplished performance. I disagreed with almost every word of it, but he delivered it very effectively indeed. I thank him, from many of us on the Government Benches, for his kind words about his predecessor Ross Thomson.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) spoke of his conversation with the noble Lady Boothroyd. We on the Treasury Bench understand the need to deliver, and having listened to him, I am certain that we will deliver for him and that he will not let Baroness Boothroyd down.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) gave the most moving and deeply personal speech of the day. I salute him for his courage in speaking in that way in the Chamber. It was a genuine privilege to be on the Front Bench to hear his contribution.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) gave an amusing and engaging speech, and spoke of her predecessor, Chuka Umunna. We all have things to learn from our predecessors. I learned much from Sir John Butterfill. I continue to learn much from the right hon. the Lord Eden of Winton, who first came to this House in 1954 and still provides me with excellent advice. The one piece of advice that the hon. Lady perhaps should not take from her predecessor is to join the Lib Dems—however tempting a prospect and however desperate they are. It would not be a career-enhancing move.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) gave an absolute tour de force of a speech, in which he spoke a lot about fishing and ports, and then more about fish. I would say there is absolutely nothing fishy about my hon. Friend, which is not something that we could always say about his predecessor.

There are many who are worried about us leaving the European Union. They seem to think that we are going to cut all ties and walk away. The EU will remain our closest and largest market, and the Government are committed—as we committed with the EU in the political declaration—to signing a free trade agreement by the end of this year. But there are massive opportunities for the United Kingdom to exploit outside the European Union. According to the IMF, 90% of global GDP

[Conor Burns]

growth in the next five years will come from outside the EU. The trade deals we seek to negotiate, alongside those with the EU, represent a raft of exciting new trade agreements with other priority countries, our aim being to cover 80% of our trade with FTAs within three years. The United States, our largest single trading partner, is the obvious place to start—which is why we started there—but we also look to like-minded partners such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made enormous strides in this regard, along with engaging positively on our potential accession to the CPTPP—heralded, again, by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow).

As I travel, I see enormous interest in what leaving the European Union means for other countries in their relationship with the United Kingdom. When I listened to the speech by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), I concluded that she must have been supping from the cup of pessimism. If what she was saying in the House today is what she is saying to people overseas, no wonder they think we are in a bad way. I find when I go to Chile, to Brazil, to Morocco, to Algeria—

Ruth Cadbury: The Minister talks about pessimism from overseas. When I visited businesses in Mumbai in 2018, they told me that it was incredibly difficult for them to do business in the UK because of the restrictive nature of getting business visas to come to the UK to meet their counterparts here. What conversations is he having with the Home Office to ensure that it is making it as easy for businesses overseas, in all these countries that the Government now want to trade with, to come here and do business as it is when they visit other countries—our competitor countries?

Conor Burns: The hon. Lady missed out only one thing in that wonderful intervention, and that was to conclude by welcoming the commitment to a points-based immigration system that will make it easier for people from around the world to come to the United Kingdom.

Ruth Cadbury *rose*—

Conor Burns: No, I am not giving way again.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the UK-Africa investment summit, we want a system that is about people, not passports. I see enormous interest about what we can do—

Ruth Cadbury: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Could the Minister please stop trying to change my words? I was talking about visitors' visas for business people.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): That is not a point of order for the Chair; indeed, it was not even made to the Chair.

Conor Burns: I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker. Of course, the point that the hon. Lady made in her speech, and the point she is making now, is that people think that there are no opportunities in Brexit—that it is a disaster for Britain. But that visa situation happened while we were inside the European Union; it is an entirely unrelated point. We have the opportunity of changing that when we leave tomorrow and at the end of the year.

In response to the shadow Minister, who is again talking to the shadow Secretary of State, we have plenty of negotiators to help and support us—as many as the US trade rep has—and we have managed to negotiate over £110 billion of trade continuity agreements. She asked if I knew about what plans the Prime Minister has to change the structure of government or reshuffle his team. I have to say—knowing him well, as I do—that I do not. If I did, I might be more popular with my colleagues than I am.

Our country, and its nations and regions, have, over the centuries, given so much to the world. I remember the story of Winston Churchill in the early years of the last century, when, leaving this Chamber through those doors late at night, he turned and pointed in, and said, looking towards your Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker:

“This little room is the shrine of the world's liberties.”

I was born in September 1972. Her Majesty gave Royal Assent to the European Communities Act in October 1972. I have lived but one month of my life in a country that had an independent trade policy. In one of Lady Thatcher's favourite quotes:

“That which thy fathers have bequeathed to thee, earn it anew if thou wouldst possess it.”

That is our task: to herald our talent, to boost our trade, to grow our exports. Let future generations say, when they look back at us today, that we have brought jobs, prosperity and investment to every person in, and every corner of, our great nation. When they look back, let them say of us: they heralded the dawn of a new golden age and built a truly global Britain.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered global Britain.

War Widows' Pension Scheme

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*James Morris.*)

5 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): After the knockabout of what was described as the last full debate while Britain is still a member of the European Union, we come to the last actual debate under those circumstances. The scandal—and it is a scandal—that I wish to discuss has absolutely nothing to do with the European Union whatsoever; it is entirely self-inflicted.

I am grateful to Mr Speaker for granting this debate about the sickening mistreatment of a group of 200 to 300 of the people whom we in this place above all should hold in the highest honour—namely, widows of service personnel who died in combat defending this country or as a result of terrorist offences against them because they wore the Queen's uniform.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) was elected my successor as Chairman of the Defence Committee. He won a worthy victory in a field of five very well qualified candidates, and I congratulate him once again. I take this opportunity to give my thanks to the conscientious Committee Clerks, the gifted Committee specialists and the indispensable Committee administrators, without whom, as he will find, no Committee Chairman could hope to function efficiently.

I should also like particularly to pay tribute to the four Labour members of the 11-person Committee that I last chaired in the previous Parliament who lost their seats: Madeleine Moon, Ruth Smeeth, Phil Wilson and Graham Jones. Like all the other members of the Committee, I never had to give a moment's consideration to which party they belonged to. All they cared about was their belief in a strong defence for the United Kingdom. They should be very proud of their work on the Committee; I certainly am.

The early general election inevitably left a few inquiries unfinished, but time and again, during the dozens of hearings that we held on two Committees from 2015 right through to the end of 2019, we referred and returned to the atrocious treatment meted out to an estimated 265 war widows who lost their war widow's pension on remarriage or cohabitation and who still await its restoration.

On 8 November 2014, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that from April 2015, war widows would be able to continue to claim their war widow's pension when they remarried or cohabited. That commitment was repeated at Defence questions on 24 November 2014, when I asked the then Minister, Anna Soubry,

“whether it is the case that a war widow who lost her widow's pension on remarriage but who has subsequently become single again is eligible to have it reinstated and never taken away under any circumstances thereafter?”—(*Official Report*, 24 November 2014; Vol. 588, c. 644.)

She replied that she thought the answer was yes, but that she might be wrong. I am sure that if Anna is watching this, she will smile when I record the fact that that was probably the only time in her prominent and distinguished parliamentary career that she admitted that she might be wrong about anything.

However, the following day it turned out that the Minister had in fact been right, because she replied in a written answer to two written questions I had tabled on 17 November 2014. She said:

“From 1 April 2015 the spouse or civil partner of all members of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 75 and any War Pension Scheme widow will retain their pension for life if they have not already surrendered it due to remarriage or cohabitation.

From 1 April 2015 those who have already surrendered their pension due to remarriage or cohabitation can apply to have their pension restored for life, should the relationship end or they cease cohabiting.”

I sent this reply to a remarried war widow, the widow of someone who had been killed liberating the Falkland Islands in 1982, who lived in my constituency. I noted at the time that:

“It seems to me that this will lead to some rather odd situations, given that—once restored—the pension could never again be taken away. Therefore, there may be a perverse incentive for couples to break up in order to have the pension reinstated and then get together again now that it cannot be removed a second time.”

The remarks I am going to make from now on are a continuation of a speech that I made on 22 November 2018. That date in itself signifies how unsatisfactory the situation is. I really should not have to be still banging on in 2020 about the same problem that was fully explored a year ago and more. At that time, I paid tribute to the fact that the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Judith Thompson, had—with the assistance of the chairman of the War Widows Association, Mary Moreland, who is present with colleagues today—compiled the testimony of a number of war widows in an attempt to enable me to convey to this House what it really meant to have had their sacrifice acknowledged by the award of a war widow's pension, only then to have it snatched back on finding somebody with whom to spend the rest of their lives.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for securing this debate. Does he recognise that, as well as that terrible slight, many of these women will have made huge financial sacrifices personally so that their husband could serve, making them very fragile financially, and therefore to ask them to choose between their security and a new partner is not just a disservice to them but also, I would say, a breach of the contract we would have had with that fallen serviceman?

Dr Lewis: May I just say that it is typical of my right hon. Friend, a former Secretary of State for Defence, to make sure that she was present today, as she notified me she would be, to make that very point? Indeed, as I would have expected, she goes to the heart of the matter. As we will hear later, what really needs to be done is to stop looking at this award as the award of a pension or a benefit when in reality it is meant to be recognition of and compensation for a sacrifice, which should be untouchable under any circumstances.

In fact, however, that is not the case because, as Judith Thompson, the commissioner, spelled out at the time:

“If your spouse died or left Military or War Service before 31 March 1973 and you also receive the War Pension Scheme Supplementary Pension you keep your War Widow's Pension for life.”

[Dr Julian Lewis]

So if it is before 1973, they are okay. She went on:

"If you were widowed after 5 April 2005 and receive Survivors Guaranteed Income Payment from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme you keep your War Widow's Pension for life."

In between, however, we have this cohort—now reduced to between 200 and 300—of war widows who lost the pension under a change in the rules and have not had it reinstated. I said in that earlier debate that that basically created a perverse incentive for people who, by definition, have already suffered the greatest trauma and tragedy, to part from the person with whom they have found renewed happiness, and go through a charade of this sort if they wish their pension to be permanently reinstated.

At that time, the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who sat on the Defence Committee on behalf of the Democratic Unionist party, pointed out an additional perversity, which was that widows of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who served and died alongside members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and other regiments, had had the issue resolved locally in Northern Ireland. Because members of the Ulster Defence Regiment were in the Army, which is covered by defence and not a devolved matter, their widows had not had that issue resolved, and were still being denied the reinstatement of their war widow's pension.

I then read extracts from five of seven testimonies—that was all I had time for—from war widows who explained what this issue meant to them. I shall now abbreviate those testimonies, but I urge anyone who is interested in reading the full account of what those five widows had to say to look at the speech from, I believe, November 2018, which can easily be found in the appropriate section of my website—[*Interruption.*]

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am intervening at an appropriate time so that my right hon. Friend can reshuffle his papers.

Dr Lewis: That is very helpful.

Bob Stewart: This situation is frankly iniquitous. It is unfair and wrong, but it could be put right very quickly if we just say that once someone receives a widow's pension they keep it, end of.

Dr Lewis: That has been said. That is what David Cameron did, and that is now the situation. The argument arises because of the small cohort who between those years did not have their pension reinstated. Thanks to my gallant friend's intervention, I now have the exact date of that previous debate. It was on 22 November 2018, and it is easily accessible in *Hansard*, or, even more easily, in the "Commons Speeches" section of my website.

I first quoted Linda, whose husband John was murdered by the IRA in May 1973 by a booby-trap bomb. She explained:

"In the early 70s War Widows were visited by inspectors to ensure they were not living with another man whilst in receipt of their compensation pension. I felt degraded by this. Life was lonely as a young woman with a baby and over time I missed the family life I so tragically had taken from me. I missed my son having a father, I missed the closeness and friendship of a husband...As was stated in 2015 this was a choice—"

the fact that she had to give up her pension on remarriage—

"that should not have been forced on War Widows. I was personally heartbroken when I was told that pension changes in 2015 had left me behind. The utter disbelief that the Government didn't really mean ALL War Widows would now have their pensions for life was unbearable. These changes made me feel like a second class War Widow and I have now been made to relive the pain and grief of 1973 every day. I cannot and will not accept that John's sacrifice is less worthy than others."

I read out four more testimonies on that occasion, but I do not have time to do that again. Instead, I shall refer to two testimonies that I did not previously have time to read out. One was from someone who was bereaved not during Operation Banner in Northern Ireland, but in Iraq in 2003.

Raqual lost her husband Matt there.

"If anything happens to me",

he wrote immediately before deploying,

"I want you and our son and our baby to be happy. Meet someone else and give our children a loving home. You won't need to worry about money as you will be financially independent"—

he thought—

"and able to give our children what they deserve!"

Eight weeks later, she was a widow. Eight years later, she remarried. Upon remarriage, she writes:

"I surrendered my War Widows' Pension as I had to do and increased my hours of work to compensate for this loss of income.

Being able to support my children independently was and still is very important to me and to Matt's memory. I would never expect my new husband to have to do this. And then came the decision to allow widows to retain their pensions on remarriage, but only if they remarried after April 2015.

I am so pleased for the widows who will benefit from this. But I hold the values of fairness and equality in high regard, and we are now in a situation which is neither fair nor equal. Even now, I simply can't get my head around the fact that had I waited four more years to remarry I would have kept my pension for life. How can it be fair that someone who remarried on the 31 March 2015 lost their pension, and yet 24 hours later someone in the exact same position would keep theirs!!!!?"

Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Raqual is a constituent of mine. At the time of her husband's tragic death in 2003, they already had one child and she was 12 weeks pregnant with her second child. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that children of fallen servicemen deserve the financial security of a pension, paid into by their father during his time of service, if for no other reason than the memory of the man who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country?

Dr Lewis: I agree totally. I thank the hon. Gentleman, a new Member from the opposite side of the House, for taking the time and the trouble to participate in this short debate.

My final extract from testimony is from Elizabeth, the widow of Ronnie, who was murdered in Northern Ireland. She says:

"I was devastated by his murder and went into deep shock...Due to my depression, I was on injections for months, but I just couldn't get out of my feeling of hopelessness. The authorities threatened a number of times to put me into a secure hospital if I did not improve. I had a friend who stayed with me every night for almost eighteen months. The children didn't want me to go anywhere as they thought that I might be murdered like their

daddy. I just couldn't believe he was gone, and for a long time, when I made the tea, I set a place out for him, almost believing he was coming home."

She concludes:

"It makes me so angry and sad that the government took the pension away, it's almost as if they stole it off me. My first husband Ronnie was a brave man, and he answered the call to join up, and I will always be proud of him.

As I get older, that pension would be such a help, and it would also be an acknowledgement by the government that taking it away was wrong and we deserve it for Ronnie laying down his life for his country."

Time is defeating me and I want the Minister to have time to reply, so let me just move forward by saying that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), the new Chairman of the Defence Committee, appeared before the Committee on 19 March 2019 during the course of one of our annual inquiries into the armed forces covenant. At the time, I asked him how this matter was progressing. He explained that the then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) who is now the Secretary of State for Education, had already written to the Treasury. They were awaiting a reply and were in the hands of the Treasury. I now have a copy of a letter that was sent on 12 February 2019 by the then Defence Secretary asking that the Treasury reinstate all war pension scheme widows' pensions and armed forces pension scheme widows' pensions for the people concerned. He explained that the Treasury had previously refused; but this was a letter that he had actually sent to the Prime Minister. I also have a report, which I do not have time to read, from the *Daily Express* on 9 March, which stated that the then Prime Minister had said that this needed to be got done. Since then, what? Nothing. The months have gone by, and nothing has been done.

What is the way forward? It is to do what the chairman of the War Widows' Association—Mary, who lost her husband to the IRA during the troubles—and others have recommended all along, namely to reclassify this award as compensation for sacrifice, and not a benefit that should in any way be affected by a change in a person's financial or other circumstances.

I mentioned former Prime Minister David Cameron, and said that he did his best to sort out this problem. I want to give him a pat on the back for how he sorted out a previous problem to do with a campaign in which I was involved to get belated recognition for the Arctic convoy veterans, who had not had a campaign star. All the same objections were raised as are raised by the Treasury now—about precedents, Pandora's boxes and all the rest of it—and in the end Mr Cameron said, "Just do it."

I know that successive Defence Secretaries have wanted this done. I know that the Minister, who was a member of the Select Committee when we were going over all this, wants it done. It has to be done. The situation is a disgrace. I hope that the change in Chancellor might conceivably have removed an irresistible force or an immovable object, or whatever metaphor we want to use, that was disgracefully holding things up. This has to be dealt with now. We cannot wait for these ladies—those affected overwhelmingly are ladies—to die before we finally recognise that a shocking and indefensible injustice has been perpetrated.

5.22 pm

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who has been a source of strong counsel to me as I have worked my way through this House on the Select Committee. I congratulate him on securing this debate.

The subject of this debate was one of the first issues I looked at when I took over this role, and I have looked at it in detail. When I first came to this House, I did so with a clear mission. I mentioned at the time that I felt that the families of the bereaved had made the greatest sacrifice on the altar of this nation's continuing freedom. I know that individuals in that position are here today, and I pay tribute to them for their sacrifice to this nation.

I think it is incumbent on Ministers to be honest about the challenges at hand. The situations that have been outlined in heart-rending detail today are clearly wrong. It was wrong to take that pension away, and in 2015 the Prime Minister reinstated it. It was corrected. This argument concerns a specific case of retrospection, and I will outline the challenges around that, fully conscious of the fact that the armed forces covenant speaks about special dispensations for the bereaved of those who have died in the service of their country.

I have a huge appreciation for our war widows. I am well aware that military partners do not have easy lives, and that they have to move around. Let me be clear about the issues at stake. War widows' pension provision is a complex area, and it might be beneficial to the House if I clarified what we mean by some of the terms. For example, when we think of war widows, we tend to imagine we are referring to those whose husbands have died as a result of conflict. However, the term as used by the War Widows' Association—members of which we are lucky to have joining us today—encompasses a much wider group of people who have lost their loved ones during service, and not necessarily in war. By the same token, I think it is also useful to be clear about what we mean by war widows' pensions.

There are actually two schemes. The first is the war pension scheme, a legacy compensation scheme which is paid to a surviving partner where the service person's death or injury was caused by their service in Her Majesty's armed forces. While that death or injury must have been caused by service, it need not have been caused by combat. The second is the armed forces pensions scheme 1975, a traditional occupational pension scheme which pays out upon the death of the service person, regardless of whether his death was caused by service.

Under both schemes, in broad terms the original policy was that survivors' benefits were permanently surrendered in the event of remarriage or cohabitation. This reflected social assumptions at the time, namely that a widow or widower's pension provided for loss of financial support from the late husband or wife; and on remarriage, financial support would be provided by the new spouse. Over the decades, however, the rules on surrendering war pensions have changed—in my view, rightly.

First, in 1995 a change was made to allow widows who had surrendered their right to a war pension to apply for reinstatement if they became single again.

[Johnny Mercer]

However, upon a subsequent remarriage or cohabitation, it would again be surrendered. In other words, a war widow was entitled to a war pension only if she was single. However, in April 2005 a change was made to the war pensions schemes. This allowed those who became widows before 1973, or whose husbands had left service before then and who had not remarried and were therefore entitled to a war pension at the time of the change, or at any time in the future, to keep their war pension for life. Therefore, their entitlement was not affected by any future relationship. This was targeted at pre-1973 widows, because that cohort had not benefited from the significant improvements to occupational pensions that other groups had.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): If I may, I wish to raise the case of Mrs Gillies of Harrogate, who was widowed in 1984. If I write to the Minister with the details of her case, will he please give it some consideration?

Johnny Mercer: Of course. I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will look at every single case. I am determined that we will get this right.

Ten years later, in April 2015, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, made the same pensions-for-life changes for all other widows or widowers who were, or who became, entitled to a pension from that date. We must be clear here: none of these changes reinstated war pensions that had already been foregone as a result of remarriage or cohabitation, which is what we are being urged to do today by the War Widows' Association. These changes were forward looking, with no retrospective effect, meaning that if a widow was, or became, entitled to a pension in April 2015, it was a pension for life and we would never take it away.

The War Widows' Association has argued that the changes created an anomaly, because a group of people—whose number, the War Widows' Association claims, is in the hundreds—have not benefited from them. These are widows whose remarriage, civil partnership or cohabitation occurred before the rule changes and whose relationship remains intact. As that group of war

widows have not had an entitlement to reinstate their war pensions, they have not benefited from the pensions-for-life changes.

I am certainly well aware of their concerns. One of the first things I did on becoming a Minister was meet the War Widows' Association. The Ministry of Defence regularly receives representation from the War Widows' Association, which is a member of the central advisory committee on compensation. Indeed, I have discussed these issues with war widow representatives recently.

I will end by referring to the statement released by the War Widows' Association after David Cameron's announcement in 2015. It specifically said and accepted at the time that new legislation never has a retrospective effect, and that the change would apply only to those who were receiving the pension when the new legislation came into force that April.

Dr Julian Lewis: The Minister has not addressed their particular proposal, which is to say, "Reclassify this. It is not a pension. It is an award. It is something separate and special. It does not set a precedent."

Johnny Mercer: The Treasury has looked at reclassifying it in the way that my right hon. Friend asks, but that would be retrospective and the war widows themselves have accepted that those who have already given up the pension as a result of remarriage or cohabitation will not have it reinstated.

Dr Lewis: They haven't—they want it reinstated.

Johnny Mercer: Let me be clear with the House, the War Widows' Association and my right hon. Friend. No one, least of all me, underestimates the sacrifice of these individuals who have lost their spouses on operations. I am determined to continue these conversations so that we can fulfil the part of the armed forces covenant that talks about the special recognition we give to the bereaved. I am happy to continue meeting my right hon. Friend to find a way forward.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 30 January 2020

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

Scotch whisky: US tariffs

1.30 pm

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of US tariffs on the Scotch whisky industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I am delighted that the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross), is responding to the debate, because he is the Member of Parliament with the most whisky distilleries in his constituency. He has been a powerful advocate for the industry since he was first elected.

For some years, the Scotch whisky industry has enjoyed a renaissance. There is a romance about Scotch, a heritage that is unmatched, and a global reach that is unrivalled. As an economic reality, Scotch whisky provides jobs and investment in rural communities, underpins a supply chain that extends across the UK, and has become central to Scotland's tourism offer, attracting visitors to our shores from all over the world. As Secretary of State for Scotland, I spoke often of the whisky industry's stand-out success. By the end of my tenure, I could recite the numbers in my sleep: £4.7 billion in exports to 180 countries globally, 40,000 jobs supported across the UK, 20% of UK food and drink exports, 41 bottles exported every second.

Global Britain, which is being debated in the main Chamber right now, is surely about reinvesting in the UK on the world stage; championing rules-based trade; and demonstrating that the UK is open for business, outward-looking and confident in its trading prospects. The Scotch whisky industry has led the way on that in its 150 years of exporting. Distillers large and small beset the world and the brands have become some of the most recognised globally, as I saw for myself when promoting the industry in countries as diverse as Argentina, Mozambique and Japan, always with positive support from the Scotch Whisky Association and its members.

This great Scottish and British export has been put under considerable pressure since the imposition by the United States last October of a 25% tariff on the import of all single malt Scotch whisky and Scotch whisky liqueurs. I asked an urgent question in Parliament ahead of the tariff's imposition and during the debate that followed, along with other Scottish Members, I set out the industry's concerns about its potential impact. The Prime Minister spoke to President Trump, as I requested in those exchanges, and many MPs lobbied US Ambassador Woody Johnson.

Regrettably, the tariff imposition went ahead. I should be clear, however, that the US is legally entitled to impose the tariff because of the World Trade Organisation's ruling on the long-running dispute between the EU and the US about aircraft manufacture. To cut a long story short, the WTO found that both Europe and America

had given illegal subsidies to Airbus and Boeing. The WTO said that until the subsidies were repaid and their impact eliminated, each side was entitled to impose retaliatory tariffs on the other's exports to encourage compliance. That may be legal, but it is a bitter blow to the Scotch whisky industry.

The US is Scotch whisky's most valuable global market; more than £1 billion of Scotch whisky was exported there in 2018. The disconnect between the source of the dispute and the UK products affected by the tariffs is particularly galling. The US chose not to impose tariffs on imports from UK aircraft manufacturers, so Scotch whisky is bearing almost two thirds of the total tariff liabilities imposed on UK exports to the United States.

Our cashmere and shortbread industries are feeling the pain every bit as much. As the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) have highlighted, those industries have also been targeted and their imports to the US subject to a 25% tariff. Given the importance of cashmere to the borders, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk raised his concerns directly with the EU Trade Commissioner. Depressingly, they have not even replied, which suggests that the EU does not recognise the economic impact of those taxes on businesses in rural Scotland.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for his tenacity in pursuing this matter, which concerns us all. He has highlighted the vastly disproportionate effect that the tariffs will have on the Scotch whisky industry. He has also referred to other important Scottish exports that are affected. Has he seen any analysis of the proportionate effect on Scotland's economy, compared with the economy of other parts of the UK, of the imposition of those tariffs? If that has not been produced, does he agree that it would be a good idea for the Government to produce it?

David Mundell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful intervention. I will come on to the initial feedback in relation to the impact of the tariffs. If we cannot resolve the issue in the short term, however, his suggestion has much to commend it.

As the hon. Gentleman alluded to, it is the small businesses, the new distilleries, that will be worst-hit as a consequence of a dispute in an industry with which they have no connection. Large spirits companies have portfolios of products that make them less vulnerable to market changes, but as Diageo chief executive Ivan Menezes recognised today, it is "devastating" for the industry as a whole. He said:

"It's not a big impact on Diageo on the single malts into the US, however for the industry in Scotland, it's devastating. It impacts small distillers, farmers and employees there. Thousands of jobs. That's our focus. We hope sense will prevail between the US and the UK and the EU to get these tariffs down."

It could get worse. Following a WTO ruling last December that the UK, among other European countries, was still in breach of WTO rules in its support for Airbus, the US Government proposed to increase existing tariffs and expand the coverage to include more products. As early as next week, we will know whether the tariffs on Scotch malt whisky or other Scottish products will rise or widen in their scope. Most troublingly, they could include blended Scotch whisky.

[David Mundell]

Meanwhile, since June 2018, the EU has imposed a 25% tariff on US whiskeys in response to US tariffs on steel and aluminium. That is another long-standing dispute and another unrelated sector bearing the painful consequences of Governments' failure to resolve disputes. It is a far cry from the mid-1990s, when the US and the EU, together with Canada and Japan, agreed to remove all tariffs on imported brown spirits. That unleashed an increase of 270% in total Scotch exports to the US. That is impressive, but it is put in the shade by the 400% increase in US whiskey exports to the UK over the same 25-year period. Friendly competition has been good for both industries, for tax revenues and for consumers.

It could not be clearer that the UK Government need to resolve the outstanding issues on UK subsidies to Airbus to ensure that the UK is fully compliant with international law in the WTO's view. That is evidently key to ensuring the return to tariff-free trade in whisky across the Atlantic.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House. He is making a compelling argument for the virtues of free trade, something that we have not had to do for some decades now, although I fear we may be returning to it again in the future. Does he agree that there is a fundamental disconnect here? If the sector that is in breach of WTO rules is not the one that suffers the penalty, there will never be any incentive for the behaviour to be improved.

David Mundell: The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. His constituency makes two excellent whiskies, Highland Park and Scapa. People involved in the distilleries have nothing to do with the steel and aluminium industry; they have nothing to do with competition in the aircraft industry. It is completely wrong that they should be drawn into what is not their dispute. That is why we must resolve the underlying disputes.

Mr Carmichael: The right hon. Gentleman refers to Highland Park and Scapa, both of which are products that are owned by larger groups, and so will probably be better able to sustain the damage brought by the tariffs. Surely, however, we must view the industry as one unit. The small, start-up distilleries, from Arran back in the 1990s to Kilchoman and Ardnahoe on Islay now, are the businesses that will suffer the most serious impact; they play an important role for the success of the conglomerates.

David Mundell: I absolutely agree. It was very welcoming to hear Ivan Menezes, head of Diageo, one of the most successful spirits companies in the world, focusing on that. He said that although Diageo has a portfolio of spirits and can weather the storms, this is devastating for the industry as a whole; Diageo wants to see a resolution through its own offices and through the Scotch Whisky Association for the whole industry.

Since a tariff was imposed on 18 October, export figures appear to paint a bleak picture, although there may have been some additional exporting ahead of the possible introduction of the tariffs to avoid them. According

to the Scotch Whisky Association, single malt Scotch exports to the US in November 2019 fell by 33% by value compared with November 2018, following a fall of 26% in October. Although it is too early to tell the longer-term impact, if such drops in exports are sustained over a year and mirror the fall in US whiskey imports to the EU in the last 18 months, that would mean a loss of around £100 million in exports to the United States, with a corresponding impact on investment, productivity and, eventually, jobs at home.

For medium-sized and smaller distillers, single malt is all they have and the US market is vital. They have invested in single malt because that industry is growing. Over the last decade, global sales of single malt have grown 166%, and growth in the United States has been even higher—up 230% over the past 10 years. These small and medium-sized distillers cannot shift their investment and are being hit particularly hard.

Distillers are waiting now to see what will happen in the next few weeks. They have paused investment, reduced exports and delayed launching new brands. Some have cut jobs in the US and have stopped hiring in Scotland. Over time, as stocks in the US market run down, the impact will be clearer. Some brands will disappear from the US market altogether, as it becomes uneconomic for smaller distillers to export them. Market share and brand recognition built up over many years, once lost, will take a considerable time to rebuild. The longer the tariffs are in place, the more profound the impact will be on the industry and in Scotland.

Three months ago, when it became clear that import tariffs would be imposed on Scotch whisky, the UK Government asked the Scotch Whisky Association to suggest a package of support for the industry to help distillers cope with an unprecedented challenge in its largest marketplace worldwide. That request was welcome, but the industry is now looking for action to follow through on the proposals submitted. The Budget is due soon, and yesterday my hon. Friends the Members for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk and I met the Chancellor to discuss those proposals and how the industry, and cashmere and shortbread, could be helped more generally in the current circumstances. I look forward to his formal response in or before the Budget.

Obviously, any increase in excise duty in the March Budget would be unacceptable, and the potential impact of the introduction of a digital service tax on UK/US trade discussions and on whisky needs to be understood. It is too simplistic to suggest that France's decision not to proceed with the digital services tax as planned is the reason why champagne and cognac are not subject to the tariffs, but the full implications of the unilateral introduction in the UK of a digital service tax need to be understood before that step is taken.

It is instructive that the EU has already agreed to increase the co-financing for wine promotion schemes to help boost exports in the face of the tariff on wine. Since the EU imposed tariffs on US whiskey, the US Government have delivered a \$3 million package for trade promotion activities in the EU. The UK Government can learn from those actions. Support must clearly be focused on the need to build a more secure UK base while the US market, which is the cornerstone of investment and business plans, is under threat. We also need to see

a resolution of the underlying dispute, starting by taking unrelated sectors out of the line of fire, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said.

On a visit to Roseisle distillery on Speyside last December, the Prime Minister committed to removing the EU's tariffs on US whiskey as soon as the UK is legally able to following its departure from the EU. That was a welcome statement. I know the Prime Minister, the International Trade Secretary and the Trade Minister have raised this issue at the highest levels in the US Administration in multiple meetings and calls. As we embark upon a trade negotiation with the US, eliminating existing tariffs on both single malt Scotch whisky and American whiskey would be an important early confidence-building measure. I urge the Government to make that explicit when publishing the UK's negotiating objectives for trade talks with the US; otherwise, one could understand why an industry as pro free trade as the Scotch whisky industry would start to question the value of such talks.

We need to find a solution that works for the Scotch whisky and US whiskey industries together. We need to return to tariff-free trade in whisky across the Atlantic. We need to see a laser focus from the Government on resolving the Airbus issue. I hope the Minister will commit to pressing colleagues in the Department for International Trade and 10 Downing Street to do that, and will reassure us that the concerns we have raised about a digital service tax are well understood within the Government, to ensure that no further unintended or collateral harm is done to the Scotch whisky industry.

Every time a small Scotch whisky distiller exports a bottle of single malt Scotch whisky to the United States, it is writing a cheque to the US Government for an additional 25% of its value, to pay for a dispute that has nothing to do with it. We should think about that for a second. On average, one bottle of single malt is exported to the US every second, and every second since 18 October, each bottle has had an additional 25% tax added to it. That equates to 5,400 bottles being taxed over the course of the debate, if it runs its duration. No business or industry could sustain that for long.

The scale of the industry, and its importance to Scotland and the wider UK economy, should focus minds on a swift resolution to this dispute. From my constituency in the south of Scotland, to communities on Speyside and on the islands of Scotland, ambitious small businesses are paying the price for a trade dispute that is entirely unrelated to their industry. That cannot be fair or proportionate, and we cannot allow it to continue.

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): It might be helpful to Members to know that we will start the winding-up speeches at about 2.40 pm. Given the number of people who want to speak, Members should limit themselves to about five minutes, so that everybody has a chance to be called.

1.50 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) for securing the debate, and I am pleased to participate in it. I wish it were not necessary for me to do so, but recent US tariffs are a cause of great concern.

The impact of the 25% tariffs imposed by the US on single malt whiskies on 18 October, despite protestations, has gone unanswered by the UK Government. It is damaging to our distilleries and to Scotland as a whole, given that exports of single malt whisky are worth £1.3 billion. They account for 28% of all Scotch whisky imports, with the US accounting for 25% of all single malt exports last year. The increased price that the tariffs cause can and will cause significant damage to those exports. The Scotch Whisky Association believes that single malt exports to the US will fall by 20% and that vital market share will be lost as a consequence, as the right hon. Gentleman set out.

The finest single malt whisky is distilled on the isle of Arran in my constituency, and the tariffs are a matter of great concern. Ultimately, jobs are threatened, and sustainability of employment is extremely important in island communities such as Arran. Hundreds of Scottish exporters, including our world-renowned Scotch whisky industry, face paying the price of punishing US trade tariffs. The impact of the tariffs is already being felt. In November 2019, the value of single malt Scotch whisky exports to the USA was £25.7 million, compared with £38.6 million in November 2018. That makes a mockery of any pretence of a "global Britain", and it is important that the matter is sorted out urgently.

The Prime Minister vowed to remove tariffs on US whiskey once the UK leaves the EU. In doing so, he is putting his trust in a President who has consistently used punishing tariffs as his first political lever. Scotch whisky is crucial to Scotland's thriving food and drink sector, with the EU market in 2018 valued at around £1.4 billion, which is equivalent to about 30% of Scotch exports. The grim reality is that Scotland will face great vulnerability when it loses its collective bargaining strength because it is no longer a member of the EU.

In such a challenging context, has the Minister considered the possibility of reforming the UK excise duty structures to ensure a fairer tax on Scotch whisky? It is taxed more than any other category of alcohol in the United Kingdom—for example, it is taxed 16% more than wine. Estimates suggest the Scotch whisky industry is larger than the UK shipbuilding industry, and considerably larger than the UK fishing industry. It supports around 42,000 jobs across the UK, including 10,500 people directly employed in Scotland. Scotch whisky is estimated to be the UK's ninth-most valuable export. I hope that the Minister will do all he can to support the industry at this very challenging time, and that he will seriously look at reforming the excise duty structures.

Even the Minister must understand and appreciate that, because we will lose our collective bargaining strength when we are no longer a member of the EU, we are in a very exposed and vulnerable position. We are facing extremely difficult trade conditions as negotiations proceed. We need to have been working with our EU partners. I am very sorry to say that that opportunity has now been lost.

1.55 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Buck. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) on securing this important debate. It is timely not only because of the importance of the issue, but because it is

[Andrew Bowie]

Burns season. I am sure that everybody present is doing their part to support Scotland's biggest export, and that they have been doing so over the past few weeks.

The contribution that the whisky industry makes to Scotland's economy is huge, and exports are a crucial part. The industry exports the equivalent of 41 bottles of Scotch whisky every second, and it was worth £4.7 billion in 2018 alone. The contribution to our national productivity runs at £210,000 gross value added per employee, and the industry supports more than 42,000 jobs across the UK—these are figures we have already heard. The industry directly employs 10,500 people in Scotland, 7,000 of whom are in rural constituencies such as my own in west Aberdeenshire, where we have the well-known and loved brands Royal Lochnagar and Fettercairn. It is important not to forget that the tariffs also adversely affect small or micro-distilleries, such as Lost Loch or Deeside distillery in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.

There is strong support for the whisky industry from every party represented in the Chamber. We all want an end to the unfair tariff regime imposed by the United States. I want the interests of Scotland's whisky industry to be central to future trade negotiations with the United States, and I have faith that the UK Government will champion the industry in those talks. However, we can unilaterally take immediate action, both domestically and internationally, to help the industry through this difficult time. The response needs to come from both the UK and Scottish Governments, because it is not a party political issue. Targeted funding is needed to help the industry weather the tariffs, perhaps by investing in Scotch whisky tourism. We could do something similar to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, which provides the US whiskey industry with funding of over \$1 million to promote American whiskeys in Europe; we could respond to that in kind with our own ring-fenced fund, which could be a cross-government initiative. The UK Government in Westminster have a significant role to play, especially with the Budget coming up.

The industry has welcomed the freeze on duty in every Budget since 2017, and we need that to continue in the next one. When the freeze was introduced, the Treasury forecast that the revenue would increase by 3% in 2018-19. It did not: it increased by more than 10%. We have the fourth-highest spirits duty rate in the European Union, with only Sweden, Finland and Ireland having higher rates. Our producers are competing in suboptimal conditions, which, sadly, look likely to worsen before they improve. I want the Government to engage in radical thinking and to give serious consideration to cutting the duty, perhaps on a trial basis to see how the revenues respond. Ministers might be pleasantly surprised by the results.

As I said, all right hon. and hon. Members here today are champions of Scotland's largest and most successful export. It is time that the parties worked together to resolve the problems and to make the case for Scotch whisky, wherever we are.

1.58 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) for securing the debate. As

he well knows, Scotch whisky is synonymous with the Scottish nation and is vital to the UK Treasury, and tariffs do matter. It is not the case that only some distilleries are already feeling the pain, as other Members have mentioned. It is quite clear that it could be a difficult challenge for the entire sector.

I am reminded of going to meet one of the industry's chief executives—I think she was from Grant's, in the Minister's own constituency—many years ago. The tale she told about tariffs is apposite to what we are discussing today. She explained that, historically, Scottish and Irish whisky exports were at par—they were level pegging until world war two. There was a global lack of whisky following world war two, and the Irish Government, under a particular Taoiseach, decided to try to protect the home market in order to curry favour, as there was an impending election. The consequence was that Scotch whisky took off and Irish whiskey slumped. The tariffs that were imposed on Irish whiskey have meant that it has never been able to match Scotch whisky and will never catch up, so the historical record shows that tariffs can be extremely harmful. Given that I heard that from the chief executive of Grant's, I am sure the Minister will take cognisance of it.

As colleagues including my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said, we face particular risks. Obviously, the backdrop is the dispute between the EU and the USA over Airbus, but Brexit is in danger of hindering, not helping, the position. We will lose the support of the world's largest trading bloc; in return, we are seeking to curry favour and obtain a special deal and a special relationship with the United States of America, which is imposing tariffs. What reason do we have to believe that we will be treated any better on a trade deal than we are on this issue?

We should not be fooled about the supposed special relationship between the UK and the USA: it is mythological. As we have seen recently with Huawei and other things, President Trump wants what is best as he sees it for the United States of America, irrespective of the supposed close relationship between the nations. Anybody looking for evidence of that should look at the relationship between Canada and the United States. If any nation should have a close and special relationship with the United States of America, it is Canada, given that they share a continent and a land border. Yet, not on whisky tariffs but agricultural tariffs, President Trump's behaviour towards Prime Minister Trudeau was reprehensible, bullying and haranguing—frankly, it was disgraceful. Why would he treat the United Kingdom any better than the 40 million or 45 million people who share the continent of North America with the United States?

We are deluded if we think that somehow or other, because the Prime Minister has this supposed special relationship with President Trump, we will get anything beneficial. The real risk, as my colleagues said, is that we not only face the challenges of tariffs—we must learn from history about the dangers that can come about, as the Irish whiskey sector testifies to—but additional challenges. It is quite clear that, in the United States, there are those who do not just want a tariff imposed on Scotch whisky but wish to have their product masquerade as Scotch whisky. We face the problem of US imports undermining the brand that we have to protect.

We have enough difficulties with tariffs; we cannot face the challenges of protecting the brand of Scotch whisky. On that basis, the Minister can rest assured that the Scottish National party will give the Government our full support, but the Government are obligated to protect this national resource for Scotland, which is vital to the UK Treasury.

2.2 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) on securing the debate. It is good to see him making the most of his release from the clutches of the ministerial machine and giving us an opportunity to debate this vital issue.

UK Governments of both shades have for far too long viewed whisky simply as a cash cow to top up the Exchequer's coffers. I welcome the fact that the Government have started to listen to the industry in the past couple of years and have delivered a freeze, but more must be done.

There are more direct and indirect whisky industry jobs in my constituency than in any other in Scotland. That assertion has not been challenged in the nearly five years since my election in 2015, and I think I stand on very solid ground in making it. I have Diageo at Shieldhall and Blythswood; Chivas at Paisley for the time being, until it is moved to Kilmalid in the summer; the Glasgow distillery in Hillington, which I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens); and logistics jobs at many haulage firms across Renfrewshire. Trump's tariffs, following a Boeing-Airbus trade dispute that is wholly unrelated to Scotch whisky, are putting the jobs of my constituents and hundreds of others across Scotland at risk.

The Scotch whisky industry is a modern, efficient, high-value industry that marries tradition with modernity in a way that is rare—in many ways unique. It has brought increasing success and economic benefits to Scotland. As has been said, new distilleries are opening and former ones are coming out of mothballs to come on stream and meet the demands of an industry that has been a roaring success over the past years. I am deeply concerned that, with Trump's re-election campaign looming, those jobs will be collateral damage in the pursuit of electoral college votes, and that further harm will be wreaked not just on the economy as a whole but on local economies such as my constituency and those of many of my hon. Friends, and indeed hon. non-Friends—[*Interruption.*] “Non-Friends” is better.

One example of the impact of the sudden imposition of tariffs and the stark possibility of further tariffs being levied on single malt or blended Scotch comes from the aforementioned Glasgow distillery. In October, a large retailer in the US agreed to take on board its Glasgow 1770 single malt, to be launched this June. It was a planned investment of more than £100,000 to enter the US market, and would have included taking on extra staff and doubling its distillery capacity over the year to help with anticipated demand from the US, at the cost of a further £500,000. Less than 24 hours after the deal had been agreed, the Trump Administration put in place the 25% tariff. The distillery's plans for its

US launch are now on ice until that is resolved, particularly given the threat of a 100% tariff on all Scotch whisky hanging in the air. It also planned to launch a blended malt in March-April, which would allow it to enter the US market with a product not included in the tariff, but it needs clarity on the second tranche of tariffs to plan with any certainty.

I worry that the UK Government, despite some warm words, are doing little to mitigate the impact of Trump's tariffs. As has been mentioned, excise duty on Scotch whisky remains among the highest in the world. Domestic demand is flattening at the same time as the US tariffs are affecting demand across the Atlantic. We need a root-and-branch review of taxation on alcohol to look at the balance to be struck between protecting public health and tackling alcohol abuse, and ensuring that a quality industry such as Scotch whisky and booming sectors such as gin distilling—a massive growth industry in Scotland and elsewhere—are taxed fairly in a way that supports employment.

The UK Government must ensure that jobs in my constituency, across Scotland and right across the UK—the industry has a wide supply chain across the UK—are not sacrificed in their desperation to secure a trade deal. The kamikaze Brexit that they support but that Scotland most certainly does not begin to take effect tomorrow night. Scottish National party Members and many others have consistently warned the UK Government of the real and substantial economic impact that Brexit would have on our trading relationships with the rest of the world. Trump's tariffs are evidence of that. I call on them—as I hope colleagues from all parties will—to put our modern, productive whisky industry near the top of their list of priorities for the coming months and years.

2.7 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck, and to make my second speech in a parliamentary debate. I want to illustrate the impact on the US tariffs on whisky in my constituency. North East Fife is not only the home of golf but the spiritual home of whisky. The earliest written reference to Scotch whisky appears in the exchequer roll in 1494, which says that Brother John Cor, a Lindores monk, was commissioned by King James IV to turn eight bolls of malt into aqua vitae. Today, North East Fife is the proud home of four distilleries: Daftmill, Eden Mill, Kingsbarns and the recently revived Lindores.

Lindores is a fantastic example of the variety of positive benefits that the industry can bring. In addition to its distilling—its first single malt is currently in the vaults—it is a hospitality venue, playing host to weddings, other private events and visitor tours. Eden Mill and Kingsbarns have visitor centres, and as I said in my maiden speech, produce gins, further adding to the diversity of drinks production. Daftmill is a small distiller, located on a working farm, where production is dictated by the seasons. Its output may be small, but it is in high demand. The annual Fife whisky festival, centred in Cupar, is now a well-established event, attracting distillers large and small from across Scotland and beyond to North East Fife. This debate is not just about distillers; the supply chain is affected too. Take Crafty Maltsters—farmers based in Auchtermuchty, who have diversified

[Wendy Chamberlain]

into malting their own barley. Scotch whisky production in North East Fife brings many economic benefits in many ways.

In North East Fife, we feel the impact of larger whisky operations in neighbouring constituencies. I should declare an interest: prior to my election to Parliament, I worked at Diageo for four years. It has a large packaging plant in Leven, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), and some of my constituents are among its employees. During my time there, I saw how larger businesses in industry can, through corporate social responsibility programmes, deliver real benefits. Diageo's "Learning for Life" programme supports unemployed people into careers in hospitality through four weeks of training and a work placement with a local employer, with courses running throughout the UK. One of the most satisfying aspects of my time with Diageo was volunteering for that programme and seeing the difference in attendees over the six-week period.

Producers across Scotland work hard to support the communities in which they operate, so I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) for securing this debate. US tariffs on whisky have had and threaten to have a very damaging effect on the industry and the wider supply chain. As hon. Members have already heard, the US is the largest market for single malt, so it seems unfair that that success story should be put at risk because of a dispute that was not of the industry's making.

As we move further into the 21st century, Britain should be at the forefront of taking down artificial barriers, whether economic, social or geographic. I worry on behalf of my constituents that we are seeing the opposite: the US President Donald Trump's cavalier approach to trade, the barriers that the UK will impose on itself tomorrow night when we leave the EU, or the potential border that the SNP want in Britain with Scotland leaving the UK. As the Government seek a trade deal with the US, they must do all that they can to help the whisky industry by making removing tariffs an immediate priority and, in the meantime, by alleviating financial burdens on distilleries in the Budget. As other hon. Members have said, the Government must make sure that this Scottish success story continues to mature.

2.11 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am very pleased to be speaking a lot sooner than expected, Ms Buck.

Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair): Members have been admirably restrained.

Peter Grant: It is the first time that I have seen so many Members fail to reach the indicative time limit. I will try to reciprocate because the Minister will undoubtedly have a lot to say. I commend the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) on securing the debate and on the very detailed and thoughtful way in which he set out not only the value of the whisky industry to Scotland, but the very serious harm that the tariffs can and have caused.

Very few of us in the Chamber represent constituencies that would make someone think immediately of whisky, yet everybody who has taken part in the debate—and

the Minister perhaps more so—has in their constituencies significant numbers of businesses that rely on the wealth of the Scotch whisky industry. Unfortunately, the debate has clashed with another major parliamentary highlight, the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). I have no doubt that, had he not been in the main Chamber, where he is supported by a number of hon. Members, he would have been here to speak.

Very few manufactured products anywhere in the world are as iconic as Scotch whisky—we are one of the few countries in the world to have a diminutive adjective for nationality that people immediately identify with our best-known export. As has been mentioned, the industry is critical to the economies of Scotland and the whole of the UK. It supports around 42,000 jobs and contributes £5.5 billion to the UK economy in gross value added. That is important to an economy the size of the United Kingdom, so how important must it be to one the size of Scotland?

What surprises a lot of people, no matter how often I remind them—I will continue to remind people and am grateful to the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for doing so, too—is that my constituency in central Fife is one of the cornerstones of that industry and of the wider distilled spirits industry. Diageo's Cameron Brig distillery in Windygates produces 480 million bottles of spirits annually. The nearby bottling and packaging plant at Banbeath in Leven, which the hon. Member for North East Fife mentioned, packs 39 million cases of spirits every year. At the recently opened Cluny Bond warehouse at Begg, 1.1 million casks of the golden nectar are sleeping as they wait for the angels to come and work their magic. Those facilities represent Diageo's recent investment of almost half a billion pounds in my constituency, providing jobs for a workforce that fluctuates between 1,000 and 1,500 people.

The statistics published last week in the most recent Scottish index of multiple deprivation confirmed that parts of Levenmouth, and Buckhaven in particular, are among the most deprived areas in Scotland. Cameron Brig is barely a mile from those communities, and the massive vote of confidence and real commitment to corporate responsibility—rather than just words in the annual report—are welcome signs that things may be starting to improve for thousands of my constituents. They see one of the world's biggest brand names investing in them and their neighbours time and again.

Anything that jeopardises the long-term sustainability of the Scotch whisky industry, or fundamentally undermines the market forecasts on which Diageo has invested heavily in my constituency and others elsewhere in Scotland, is of concern to us all. It concerns me as the SNP Treasury spokesperson but also as a constituency MP that, although Diageo does not yet expect tariffs to cause any problems to the Fife operations, that will change if they are continued or extended to cover blended whiskies and other sprits.

We can already see the impact of the tariffs: during their first full month, there was a 33% fall in malt whisky exports to the USA, as hon. Members have mentioned. If that continues, it will equate to a £100 million drop in annual sales, which could reach £200 million or £300 million if the tariff is also applied to blended whiskies. Although we should not forget the damage that has been done to other exporting businesses, as the

right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale alluded to, it cannot be right that 62% of the entire UK tariff is hitting one industry that had absolutely nothing whatever to do with the escalating dispute. Will the Minister consider producing an analysis of the proportional impact of the tariffs in the different nations and regions of the United Kingdom? I will bet that it bears no relation whatever to the proportional analysis of the nations and regions that benefit from the Airbus operation.

It remains to be seen how effective the UK Government will be at persuading the American Government to think again, as it is very difficult to persuade an irrational President to do anything rational. The UK Government have the chance to use the Budget to help Scotland's world-leading drinks industry to get through what is literally an existential threat to many businesses. The Scotch Whisky Association is asking for a 2% cut in spirits duty, and I hope the Government will give that careful consideration, although in reality, such a cut would return only a small proportion of lost sales revenue.

A more fundamental problem is the continued and inequitable way in which different kinds of alcohol are taxed in the UK. It is not fair, rational or defensible for different kinds of alcohol to be taxed according to how they are made rather than by their alcohol content. If someone at the pub buys a glass of whisky and a glass of wine that contain exactly the same amount of alcohol, they pay 16% more duty on the whisky than on the wine. The only justification for that is it has aye been, and that is no justification at all.

If the Prime Minister is to keep his promise to scrap the import duty on American bourbon, he should make it clear that he expects complete reciprocity from the President of the United States and the complete abolition of import tariffs on Scotch whisky. A number of hon. Members present were there earlier in the week when we met not only senior representatives of the Scotch Whisky Association, but the president and CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. They are determined to see the import tariffs on Scotch whisky and the export tariffs on their product abolished. They do not want a protectionist Government to protect them artificially; they want to be able to compete on fair terms with top-quality spirits, not only from Scotland, but from elsewhere. That is one of the few cases that I have seen in which an industry that would expect to benefit from the imposition of import tariffs is among the first to shout out that they want them abolished.

This sorry affair is yet another indication, for those prepared to look with open eyes, that Britain's place on the world stage—it is currently being debated in the main Chamber—is nowhere near as influential as some people like to think, and that getting any kind of rational trade deal from a wholly irrational President will be neither quick nor easy. I hope that this debate and other exchanges will make it clear to the bully boys in No. 10 and the White House that we will not allow either of them to treat the economy of our nation as a pawn to be sacrificed in the way that our fishing industry was sacrificed.

2.19 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Buck.

I congratulate all Members on such sensible and thoughtful contributions. In particular, I thank the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) for securing the debate and for his broad-ranging and sensible introduction to it. I also congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) on what might have been her first contribution in Westminster Hall, which is a less aggressive place than our other Chamber. I was struck by her comments about Diageo and the European Union. I also thank some of my colleagues in the shadow International Trade team for helping me to prepare for this debate, which is just as much about trade as it is about food and drink.

The Scotch whisky industry is thriving and, as we have heard, incredibly important to the United Kingdom as our ninth most valuable export, contributing £5.5 billion to the UK economy last year and supporting 42,000 jobs across the nation. It is particularly important for Scotland's economy, accounting for the vast majority of Scotland's exports of food and drink, and providing 10,500 jobs, in particular in rural communities involved in the distillation, production and maturation processes.

Having the Scottish whisky industry embroiled in the increasingly tit-for-tat trade disputes that have been festering between the US and the EU over the past 15 years is a cause for profound regret. We can all agree that something is wrong when a trade dispute that originated in alleged subsidies for aircraft has escalated primarily to affect a whisky industry that has been doing nothing but mind its own business and thrive, without tariffs, for decades. With the 25% tariffs that have been slapped on American imports of single malt Scotch whiskies and Scotch whisky liqueurs from the UK, Scotch whisky now pays for more than 60% of the UK's tariff bill arising from the Airbus case. That absolutely cannot be right. As hon. Members have outlined, we are now seeing real impacts of the row on people.

The EU as a bloc remains our largest export market for Scotch whisky, but as an individual country the US is our largest market, and clearly our largest export market for single malt Scotch whisky. The tariffs imposed on those products in October have therefore had considerable impact already, as we have heard, with the value of Scotch whisky exports to the US down 33% in November 2019 compared with November 2018.

Those hit hardest by the tariffs, as we have heard, are disproportionately the small and medium-sized distilleries across Scotland, which only produce single malt and have the US as a key market. The Scotch Whisky Association estimates that the industry could lose as much as 20% of its sales to the US over the next year if the tariffs remain. That would be worth £1 billion. As we are all aware, a decline in the value of our exports to the US of such magnitude will inevitably have knock-on effects on investment, productivity and jobs.

Scotch whisky has not been alone in being hit by the American tariffs, and it is worth repeating that the 25% tariffs also hit a range of our agricultural exports, including pork and cheese. The British Meat Processors Association tells us that they face some real difficulties, and we have already seen the value of UK pork exports to the US fall by 42% between November 2018 and November 2019.

[Daniel Zeichner]

The main subject today, however, is the impact on Scotch whisky. Following the US Trade Representative's announcement of a further review of its tariffs in December, we now face the real possibility of the tariffs on single malt whisky being increased, or their coverage expanded to include the blended Scotch that is currently excluded. That would make an already challenging situation much more difficult.

Such bullying tactics by President Trump are sadly reflective of an approach to international trade that I fear we will only see more of as we leave the European Union. President Trump has made his desire to put America first explicit, and is playing fast and loose with the global rules-based system governing international trade. So far, he has unfairly attacked foreign industries with tariffs, blocked the appointment of judges to the World Trade Organisation's appellate body and, recently, threatened to pull the US out of the World Trade Organisation altogether. We urgently need an end to that tit for tat, and the removal of tariffs on both sides, on both Scotch and American whiskies. The Scotch whisky and American whiskey industries are in clear agreement on that.

The Prime Minister's promise to remove EU tariffs on American whiskey as soon as we leave the EU is welcome, and it is clear that he believes this will go some way to encouraging President Trump to remove tariffs on our Scotch whisky. What is less welcome, and remarkably counter-intuitive, are recent reports that the Prime Minister is threatening both the US and the EU with high tariffs in some bid to speed up post-Brexit trade deals. We are familiar with the Prime Minister preparing completely different positions to cover all eventualities, but will the Minister make it crystal clear that tariffs on American whiskey will be excluded from this threat? If he will not, how can the Government possibly guarantee that pursuing such an aggressive trade stance will not embroil the Scotch whisky industry yet further in a burgeoning trade war?

In the meantime, the Scotch Whisky Association has been waiting nearly three months for a response from the Government on their plans for short-term support for the industry while it is subject to the tariffs. I hope that the Government will confirm today what their intentions are in that regard.

The sad reality is that this entire episode demonstrates just how difficult our upcoming trade negotiations will be once we leave the EU. One of the main economic advantages of being in the EU was the fact that in trade negotiations the UK was part of a trading bloc of 28 countries. Now we are on our own. In a future trade deal with the US, therefore, we will have to face up to the full force of its demands to export to us hormone-treated beef and chlorine-washed chicken. We will also have to ensure that the geographical indicators for our produce—such as Scotch whisky and Cornish pasties—are not lost once we leave the EU's protective framework. The signs to date of the Government's commitment to protecting the good name and value of our regional goods are, frankly, not promising.

Our highly prized Scotch whisky industry is a high-profile casualty in this grim world of retaliatory trade wars between men with big egos, little sense of the damage they cause and even less regard for the wider consequences.

We urgently need a return to a rules-based order to give stability and security. The jobs and livelihoods of people not just in the UK but in nations across the world depend upon it.

2.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Douglas Ross): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) on securing this important debate. I also thank him for his unstinting commitment to the Scotch whisky industry, as a constituency MP and in his roles in the Scotland Office as a Minister and, latterly, Secretary of State for Scotland. This industry, which means so much to everyone who has contributed to the debate, could have had no greater champion in Whitehall and Westminster than my right hon. Friend during his time in office.

I am delighted to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scotland Office. The issue clearly covers several different Departments, such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—with an interest in the GREAT campaign, which I will come on to—and the Department for International Trade. The Minister of State, Department for International Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), was keen to be present to respond to this debate but had other commitments, given the “Global Britain” debate in the main Chamber. I have spoken a lot with him over the past few weeks, and the Scotch Whisky Association met the Secretary of State for International Trade about this issue earlier in the week.

As well as being the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, I am the Member of Parliament with more Scotch whisky distilleries in my constituency than anyone else. The great, iconic Moray and Speyside industry benefits the whole of Scotland and the United Kingdom. Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale, however, I do not go to sleep memorising figures, but I will reiterate some of his.

Global exports reached £4.7 billion in 2018, so we can all recognise what a successful and important industry Scotch whisky production is for Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom. Growing markets stretch from South America to the far east, and Scotch whisky is a key British product recognised for its quality. It is a global success story, our biggest export, our most cherished product and our national drink. Whisky is part of what makes Scotland.

For all the continued success, this is a time of considerable anxiety for the industry, as we have heard today and in the months since the tariffs were applied. The US makes up a significant share of the market—more than £1 billion by value in 2018, of which some 33% was single malt Scotch whisky—so it is particularly disappointing that Scotch whisky has been targeted in this dispute, alongside other important sectors. The trade war is over an industry and area unconnected with the other affected sectors. The other affected industries in Scotland include cashmere. My right hon. Friend mentioned the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), who raised this issue at business questions last week and has been doing work in his local community. UK biscuits are also affected by the

25% tariff, a large proportion of which is Scottish shortbread. Moray is home to Walkers Shortbread, as it is to Johnstons cashmere woollen mills.

I have been fully aware of the problems faced not just by the Scottish whisky industry but by many others since the tariffs were applied at the end of last year. I do not underestimate the effects that those tariffs have, and will continue to have, on the industry, particularly, as others have said, on small and medium-sized businesses. Those include some craft distilleries, which have done so well to break into the market in recent years. I am determined not to allow the tariffs to threaten the jobs, communities and businesses across Scotland that rely on the whisky industry. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) made the point that many of us are fortunate to have distilleries in our constituencies—some more than others—but that the industry affects all our constituencies in Scotland and many more across the whole of the United Kingdom, because of the supply chain.

The UK Government are clear that the tariffs are not in the interests of the UK, the EU or US. We are working hard to support a negotiated settlement. Departments are working together. When the Secretary of State took office, one of his first jobs was to write to the US ambassador on this topic. I will say more about DEFRA and the Department for International Trade a little later. The issue has been raised at the highest level in the UK and the US Administrations. The President and the Prime Minister have discussed the issue on a number of occasions; many hon. Members have reiterated the Prime Minister's comments about dealing with the tariffs. I want to continue to do everything I can to facilitate a conclusion. I am confident that the strong relationship between the Scotch whisky industry and the United States will continue to prosper, as it has done for many years.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) was quite right to mention the work of the Scotch Whisky Association alongside the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. At the reception I hosted at Dover House on Tuesday, there was a strong message: two industries on each side of the Atlantic are working together with a common aim. They have been to the US, Brussels and London on visits. It was a powerful message to show those two organisations working hand in hand. It was said that a light could not be put between the two of them on this issue, and they make a compelling case.

I want to pick up on a few points made by hon. Members. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) made a strong, passionate speech. I am delighted that visits to Moray are ingrained in his memory; his story of his visit to Grant's was important to set the historical context of the debate. As well as mentioning the importance of the Scotch whisky industry to the whole of the United Kingdom, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North came up with a new parliamentary term: his "hon. non-Friends." I hope we can agree on many things and be friendly in our discussions about this issue.

I commend the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for her maiden Westminster Hall speech; it was excellent. I like to claim—correctly—that I have the most Scotch whisky distilleries of any constituency in Scotland, with four. She is a long way behind me, but

having the spiritual home of Scotch whisky is a claim I am not able to make. She made that point very well. Her work with Diageo before coming to this place is extremely useful to this debate. I am sure she will continue to contribute with that same passion and expertise.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes was right about the industry's fear that the tariffs could not only increase on single malt Scotch whisky but go on to blended Scotch whisky. We are acutely aware of that and are doing everything possible to ensure that the Scotch Whisky Association's message on that is heard loud and clear. My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) made a strong pitch for the distilleries in his area, as he always does. He has made commendable efforts—as have others—to promote Scotch whisky since he came to this place in 2017.

As a Government, we are particularly disappointed that the US has chosen to use the WTO compliance panel report released just before Christmas as a basis potentially to increase tariffs. Our view is that the panel has made a number of errors in its assessment of UK and EU compliance, and an appeal has been lodged on that basis. We are clear in all our engagement that tariffs do not benefit any parties, and that the best outcome is through negotiation of specific issues within the Airbus-Boeing dispute. We continue to raise those at the highest levels in the US Administration. It is very helpful that the Scotch Whisky Association is making its case so strongly and is working with industry partners in the US to demonstrate that the tariffs are counterproductive on both sides of the Atlantic.

We recognise the vital generation of jobs that the Scotch whisky industry provides: some 42,000 jobs across both Scotland and the United Kingdom. They are often located in more rural areas of Scotland, enabling those places to thrive through direct employment in distilleries and through ancillary industries such as packaging and haulage, and the wider attraction of tourism right across Scotland. Understandably, tourism has not come up a lot in the debate, but distillery visitor centres have a great impact on local economies. A report last year showed the huge impact that those visitor centres make in communities that host distilleries. That should not be underestimated.

I am aware that Scotch whisky industry representatives have proposed a range of measures to address the potential impact of the tariffs. It is important to note that any such action would have to be within the WTO legal framework. I will continue to work with colleagues across Government to consider all the options.

I see that the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) is typing away; we are all very busy. She might want to type in the Scottish Conservatives' and the Conservative manifesto for the recent general election. She asked me if I considered reforming the taxation system for Scotch whisky. Not only have I considered it, but the Prime Minister has considered it and it was in our 2019 general election manifesto. I know that not only because the Prime Minister announced it, but he did so at the Roseisle distillery in Moray on one of the first days of the general election campaign, in early December.

I say nothing about the hon. Lady missing a key point in the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto—I cannot honestly tell her that I remember every detail of the SNP manifesto—but it was the No. 1 key ask by the

[Douglas Ross]

Scotch Whisky Association of all political parties. I hope I can reassure her that in November, the Prime Minister came up to Scotland to make that commitment. The Chancellor will work with his Treasury colleagues to ensure that the commitment to review alcohol duty more broadly will be taken forward. There will be further announcements about the review in due course.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine rightly mentioned, for the past two years, duty on Scotch whisky has been frozen, largely down to the efforts of Scottish Conservative MPs in dialogue with Treasury colleagues, ensuring that our iconic Scotch whisky industry did not suffer any increase in duty, along with other spirits in the same two Budgets.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) mentioned geographical indications; because Scotch whisky is a vital sector of the UK economy, we have supported and will continue to support it in a variety of ways—in particular the designation as a geographical indication, which affords protection against fraud and any undermining of its renowned quality standards. As part of the withdrawal agreement, the UK committed to protecting all EU GIs unless and until a subsequent agreement superseding it entered into force. That includes third-country GIs recognised in the EU following direct application to the EU. That will help to ensure a smooth transition to the future relationship with the EU. Existing UK GIs, which include Scotch whisky, will continue to be protected in the EU along with other fine Scottish products, such as Scottish farmed salmon and Scotch beef.

I mentioned that this debate over Scotch whisky includes DEFRA. The Government have played their part in promoting our whisky worldwide. The Food is GREAT campaign led by DEFRA, in partnership with the Department for International Trade and VisitBritain, is part of the UK Government's GREAT Britain campaign. The Food is GREAT campaign aims to demonstrate the quality, craft, heritage and innovation of key UK food and drink products to consumers, trade and media worldwide, to help build demand for UK food and drink exports. This is Scotland's No. 1 industry for international exports, so it is vital that the UK Government use their extensive international reach to support the sector's export growth.

I am delighted to say that demand for Scotch whisky is growing around the world. Between 2017 and 2018, demand increased by 10% in Singapore, by 18.5% in Mexico and by 34% in India. Those are just some of the countries in which we have seen significant increases in recent years, and I am sure we all welcome that. We will work closely with the industry across the UK to refresh the UK food and drink international action plan, looking well into this decade and beyond at opportunities to continue to expand our markets and further increase our export ambitions as we negotiate a series of free trade agreements in the years ahead, as several Members mentioned.

The UK and the US are strong partners and allies, and the US-UK economic relationship is crucial. That is acknowledged by the US Administration. Indeed, we have already ensured trade continuity in the whisky industry by signing the agreement on distilled spirits

and spirit drinks with the US. Among other things, that protects Scotch whisky's status in the United States as only

"products of Scotland, produced in compliance with applicable...laws and regulations".

Both countries are committed to mutually beneficial economic arrangements that benefit UK consumers and companies. In pursuing a future trade agreement with the US, there is the opportunity to deepen that relationship and set a global benchmark for how two leading, open and mature economies trade with each other.

We shall also, of course, negotiate an ambitious free trade agreement with the EU and work with global partners to transition existing EU FTAs and other sectoral agreements to ensure that the Scotch whisky industry continues to benefit from such arrangements.

It is clear from the debate that there are many great opportunities for growth for the Scotch whisky industry. The message coming through to us is that the spirits sector—as we heard, this is not just about Scotch whisky; gin and other spirits are booming—and the Scotch whisky industry in particular stand ready to take those opportunities. I am very grateful for that, and I have no doubt that the Scotch whisky industry will continue to flourish both at home and across the globe, but we need to do our part as well. There is no doubt that the tariffs that have been applied are already having a severe effect. If they continue, their projected effects are stark; it has been said that they may cost up to £100 million a year.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale did an outstanding job of presenting the case on behalf of the Scotch Whisky Association and the industry. Perhaps the most telling figure he used, notwithstanding that the debate may finish slightly early, was that during a 90-minute debate, 5,400 bottles of Scotch malt whisky will leave the UK to go to the US. Each and every one of them will be subject to a 25% tariff, which the producer has to pay to the US Treasury. That is what happens in just 90 minutes, which shows the cumulative impact that the industry has faced in the 90 days or so that have elapsed since the tariffs were applied.

The Government are determined to do everything we can to support the industry. I believe our efforts have been aided not only by the strong message put forward by my right hon. Friend, but by the generally consensual nature of the contributions by Members of all parties. We must continue to highlight this issue and work on both sides of the Atlantic to remove these tariffs, so that not only Scotch whisky but other products, such as cashmere and shortbread, can continue to be iconic, sector-leading Scottish brands that are sold around the world, rather than being punished for being exported to the United States. We must nurture and continue to work with those markets, which have so many benefits, and I want to see Scottish products continue to lead the way. If we can remove these tariffs, we will be able to do that.

On that note, I thank you, Ms Buck, for your chairmanship of the debate, and I thank my right hon. Friend for securing it.

2.44 pm

David Mundell: Thank you, Ms Buck, for your chairmanship of the debate. By Scottish political standards it was very consensual, and I am grateful to the Members

who took part. It was a particular pleasure to be, for the first time in 15 years, in a parliamentary debate that involved the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill). In a different life, we used to spar in the Scottish Parliament.

It was also good to hear from the new hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), who brings a great deal of experience of this industry to Parliament. She touched on the importance of the whisky industry in rural communities. The industry provides jobs of a quality that is not otherwise available in rural communities. Across large swathes of Scotland, the whisky industry is the only industry that can provide such jobs, which is why it has huge importance way beyond simply the revenue it can generate.

Having heard other Members mention the whisky interests in their constituencies, I realise I was remiss in not mentioning those in my own. I should, of course, have referenced the revitalised Annandale distillery on the outskirts of Annan, which produces two whiskies: Man O'Words and Man O'Sword. I think we have kept mainly to the Man O'Words tradition today. I also have in my constituency a large maturation facility near Poniel in South Lanarkshire, which is part of the Bacardi group under the Dewar's label. Both are very important to my constituency.

I was pleased by the contributions from across the Chamber, but I was particularly pleased by the Minister's remarks. He committed to responding to the SWA's proposals about support for the industry. As he alluded to, that work should be done in conjunction with the Scottish Government; both Governments have levels of responsibility here. He also touched on tourism, and the whisky industry has raised issues about making distilleries more carbon-neutral. There are a number of

issues. Duty, however, is very important, and his restatement of the Conservative party manifesto commitment to a duty review is extremely welcome. Given the hard work that he, others and—if I may be so bold as to say so—I put into getting that commitment, we want to see it followed through.

I hope that those in the Treasury, the Prime Minister and others take on board my points on concerns about a digital services tax and how that might impact whisky and other products. I hope we will be able to follow through on the Prime Minister's commitment—which, as the Minister said, was made at Roseisle distillery in his constituency—that the UK, once it is legally able to, will remove tariffs on bourbon and other US whiskeys. That would be a huge sign of our commitment to free trade and our positivity about resolving this issue. As I said in my opening speech, I want us to get to the point that we can go into trade talks with the US clear that there will not be duties on whiskies, whether they are from Scotland or the US.

I hope this debate has been a positive contribution to the ultimate resolution of this issue. It is clear that Members from Scotland representing all parties want to see this issue resolved and want this industry, which is vital for our country and our communities, to prosper in the way it has in the recent past. That can be achieved through the removal of US tariffs and the non-application of further tariffs.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effect of US tariffs on the Scotch whisky industry.

2.49 pm

Sitting suspended.

Flooding: South Yorkshire

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I beg to move,

That this House has considered flooding in South Yorkshire.

I want to speak about the floods that occurred last November, nearly three months ago, that caused devastating damage to my area of Barnsley and across South Yorkshire. Over a period of 24 hours, heavy rainfall, equal to the amount expected for the entire month of November, caused the Dearne, Don and Dove rivers to burst their banks. Thousands of people were affected and, sadly, one person lost their life. My thoughts are with their family

Areas such as Fishlake village were accessible only by four-wheel drive vehicles or boats. Roads, bridges, train lines and stations had to be closed, causing huge travel disruption, and over 1,000 homes and 565 businesses across South Yorkshire were affected. In Barnsley, 89 houses sustained flood damage and 25 roads were closed, but in Doncaster alone nearly 4,000 evacuation notices were issued, with more than 780 properties affected, and the residents of 242 properties were unable to return home for Christmas.

This is not the first time in recent years that South Yorkshire communities have been hit with severe flooding. To give an example from my area, the residents in Low Valley in Wombwell have had to be relocated twice in the past 12 years, during the floods of 2007 and now those of 2019. They need assurances that everyone is doing their utmost to prevent this from happening again.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), who is my parliamentary neighbour and Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, for his continued work on our region's flooding crisis. He has campaigned for more money for flood defences and given a voice to the devastating impact of floods on people, businesses and communities. While people were being forced from their homes, he pressed the Government to recognise the crisis for what it was: a national emergency.

I will focus on what we need in areas such as mine, where we have become all too familiar with the damage that severe flooding causes, so that we can recover and be protected from flooding on this scale again. In the short term, the communities directly affected need financial support from the Government. Households and businesses are facing real hardship now. The people of Yorkshire have a proud history of coming together when times are tough. More than half a million pounds has been donated by members of the public, local authorities and community organisations to South Yorkshire's community foundation. The generosity of my neighbours and friends from Barnsley and further afield is both unsurprising and commendable.

The Government committed to match any money raised by the foundation to help victims, but I am genuinely dismayed that the Government are insisting on only providing match funding when both the Mayor of Doncaster and the Mayor of the Sheffield City Region have said that £3 million is needed. On the

current match funding formula, the Government will only contribute around half a million pounds. Will they reconsider? The Government can and should commit more funds for flood victims, rather than relying on donations from the very people affected by flood damage. Quite simply, that will ensure that the basic needs of all households and businesses can be met. I note the Government have not yet applied to the EU solidarity fund, which is available to respond to major natural disasters. I ask the Minister, has an alternative equivalent capital fund been established for the vital repairs to local roads and infrastructure?

Despite the recovery efforts from the blue light services, the Environment Agency, local authorities, Government agencies and communities—I place on record my thanks to them all—a number of residents still cannot return to their homes. More than 148 properties have been affected in my borough alone, in areas from Wombwell to Hoyland and Darfield to Burton Grange. Of these properties, 29 do not have insurance or sufficient insurance to cover the cost of repairing flood damage.

Communities are still pulling themselves back together while dealing with damaged homes and fighting insurance battles. People from Doncaster and Rotherham, which were among the areas hardest hit by the floods, are now fighting to get the insurance money they are owed.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. As an MP, I went through similar circumstances in 2007, when we had thousands of people out of their homes for weeks, months and, in some cases, years. What thought has my hon. Friend given to the impact on people's mental health and wellbeing, and the need for the NHS to provide support? As well as dealing with practical matters, there is an emotional cost to flooding.

Stephanie Peacock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and she raises a crucial issue. There are families who have lost everything. For example, some are now living in caravans parked on their driveways. They need all the support we can give them. Many depend on recovery grants while they wait in hope of an insurance payout. I know of elderly residents who have had to call off life-changing surgeries because they do not have a place to recuperate. Cancelled insurance plans and unscrupulous insurance companies have left many residents at their wits' end, unsure about how they are going to get by.

More needs to be done to improve access to insurance plans that can meet the needs of households in South Yorkshire. A comprehensive plan, with investment, needs to be developed to support the people who are still struggling to get by nearly three months after the floods. Across South Yorkshire, rising housing demand has not kept pace with the construction of affordable housing. It is crucial that careful attention is paid to proposed housing locations, particularly those on known floodplains. Housing needs and aspirations should be met, but in secure environments with low flood risk.

In the long term, the South Yorkshire region needs investment to ensure that communities are better prepared and protected against flood damage. In the face of some of the largest cuts in the country to its day-to-day

funding, Barnsley Council helped to co-ordinate a multi-service and agency response. Staff worked 24/7 to provide emergency accommodation, clear roads and highways, carry out property recovery assessments and undertake utility safety checks, as well as offering support to vulnerable people. Moreover, it provided an additional £250 per property, on top of the funds committed by the Government, to relief grants to support flood victims.

I thank the firefighters who worked tirelessly to save lives, properties and communities. Despite cuts of £3.3 million, leaving them with nearly half the control operators they had in 2012, the crews on the ground went above and beyond to keep people safe. That included the touching story of two firefighters who used a large pole to hoist an elderly woman's shopping bag through her window. If South Yorkshire fire brigade funding continues to spiral downwards, that will further limit response times and capacity to help clean up flood damage. The Government must commit to review the funding formula, to ensure the South Yorkshire fire brigade has the resources required to respond to the needs of our region.

Can the Minister reassure my constituents that action is going to be taken across the board to protect South Yorkshire communities? People from our area deserve to feel secure in the knowledge that their homes and businesses, which they have worked for their entire lives, are protected from future extreme weather events. There is more than twice as much flood investment in London and the south-east compared with the north. Quite frankly, that is a disgrace and must be acted upon immediately.

Councils across the region, such as Barnsley Council, have had their budgets slashed, restricting their ability to manage potential flood risks. Despite contributing more than £2 million over the last decade to flood protections, the lack of resources afforded to the council has left it struggling to carry out maintenance work. I welcome the council's decision to invest an additional £1 million for the cleaning of gullies and other essential works, but it is clear that we need a fully funded, long-term investment plan that will support the communities directly affected and improve the region's resilience to future flood events.

Without a fully integrated approach to flood defence management, reinforced by major investment and support from the Government, the homes and livelihoods of the people of South Yorkshire are at risk. A long-term catchment-wide approach will be crucial in the coming years. That will include natural flood management measures across catchment areas to slow water discharge, from trees and habitat flooding to peat bog renewal. The Mayor of Sheffield City Region and the four South Yorkshire local authorities are working in conjunction with the Environment Agency to produce a consolidated South Yorkshire-wide investment programme in our flood defences. The programme is likely to cost in excess of £200 million. We need sustained funding in flood defence infrastructure to improve the resilience of regions such as ours to climate change and escalating flooding risk.

We cannot escape the fact that climate change is directly linked to severe flood events happening more often and more severely. More needs to be done to tackle climate change and its impact. People from my

area feel let down by the Government's reaction to the crisis. It is time the Government took flood risk more seriously.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that a major cause of flooding is inappropriate development on floodplains? Will she work with the cross-party group to work with local councils in Rotherham, Barnsley and Sheffield to ensure that we do not build on our floodplain?

Stephanie Peacock: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point—one that I referred to earlier in my speech.

On the Government's response to the crisis, the Prime Minister might have visited during the election, but he is yet to hold the flood summit that he committed to, so I ask that he make good on his promise.

I have numerous questions for the Government on helping flood victims in Barnsley and across South Yorkshire. First, will the Government commit to additional funding to support flood-damaged communities? Hundreds of households and businesses are struggling to make ends meet, and local roads and infrastructure need immediate attention. In the short term, capital funding is urgently required, from the £3 million requested by the Doncaster and Sheffield City Region Mayors to the potential resources from the EU solidarity fund or alternative Government funds, so that the ongoing effects of the floods can be dealt with. Will the Government reconsider the match funding of the South Yorkshire community fund?

Secondly, will the Government invest significantly in the coming months and years to prevent flood events such as November's, which caused such great devastation? It means acting now to mitigate flood risk, rather than employing a sticking-plaster approach that barely deals with the damage that floods cause. Sustained investment in flood protection over the long term should be made available so that councils have the resources they need to undertake flood prevention works. It will require serious investment.

Thirdly and finally, will the Prime Minister honour his commitment to hold a flood summit that brings together regional partners and stakeholders, as well as the relevant Secretary of State, mayors and local MPs? We need to reflect on the lessons learned from the past few months and come up with a multi-agency strategy with aligned investment to plan for the future. The cameras might have stopped rolling, but to the people of Barnsley and South Yorkshire, the effects of the floods continue to be a daily reality.

3.11 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, particularly as your mother resides in my constituency, so this debate has particular relevance to your family. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this important debate, and it is good to see the Minister in her place. I know she takes the issues around climate change and the climate emergency very seriously and is a sympathetic listener, as I hope she will be today.

[*Edward Miliband*]

My constituents will scrutinise the debate today very closely, because the lives of so many of them have been turned upside down as a result of the flooding that occurred in November last year. As my hon. Friend said, the whole village of Fishlake was underwater, with hundreds of families affected. A sizeable part of the village of Bentley was flooded, with people driven from their homes. Homes in Scawthorpe were similarly affected, and other parts of Doncaster, too. Nobody can really understand the effects of flooding—the fear, disruption, misery, pain—until it actually happens to them or they see it with their own eyes. Doncaster Council estimates that 1,500 people have been affected, either driven from their homes or flooded. That is 1,500 stories of pain and loss. Then there are the businesses whose livelihoods have been damaged: 141 in Doncaster alone. As my hon. Friend said, what makes it even worse for some in my constituency, in Bentley and in Scawthorpe, is that this is the second time it has happened to them. It happened in 2007 as well. They thought, and they believed they had been told, that it would never happen again.

I want to put on the record my thanks to the emergency services and all public sector workers for the extraordinary job that they did: the firefighters from all parts of the country, the police, ambulance staff, the Environment Agency, local councillors and council staff who worked all day and all night; the Salvation Army, who offered temporary accommodation; railway workers who cleared lines; the Army and the RAF, who were eventually called in to help with the crisis. The private sector also stepped up with food, clothing and cleaning supplies. Indeed, people across the country provided donations.

Above all, it is right on this occasion to single out the heroism of the communities in Doncaster for the solidarity that they showed. The people of Fishlake kept the place going, even while it was underwater, including the local pub, the Hare and Hounds. The people of Bentley Town End rallied round each other with a makeshift hub of a local business, Custom Windows and Doors. The people of Stainforth and Moorends in my constituency—villages largely unaffected by the floods—worked day and night to get supplies into nearby Fishlake when it was cut off. Indeed, people across Doncaster helped. The people of Doncaster have set the benchmark for what solidarity looks like. The task now is for us in the House, the Government, insurers and others to do the same.

I want to raise questions similar to my hon. Friend's. I have five sets of issues that I want to put to the Minister. First, I want to ask about Government help for people who were flooded, including for the uninsured and those with insurance excesses, which can be as high as £7,500 in one case that I know about; and for people who find that they have small print in their insurance policy, which means they have not been covered. The Prime Minister rang me on 12 November, a few days after the flooding began, to ask what were the big issues, and I emphasised insurance in my response. I said that although some people would say it is a moral hazard to help out people who did not have insurance, that ignored the fact that many people could not even get affordable insurance because they had been flooded before. They were offered exorbitant premiums to get

themselves insured after the flooding of 2007. He assured me that he would override any objections and would make sure people were properly helped.

Dame Diana Johnson: On the Flood Re scheme that was introduced to try to deal with the problem of people who could not access insurance because they had previously been flooded, is it not time now to have a proper review of how the scheme is working, because several groups are not covered by it? It has not helped some of my right hon. Friend's constituents at all.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I was going to mention the Flood Re scheme, of which awareness is very low. I think I am right in saying it does not cover businesses; it covers residential properties. There is a real problem. People find they cannot get insurance with a private company, but they do not even get told about Flood Re and are not aware of it.

The Prime Minister went on to say publicly:

"I know there will be people who are worrying about the damage to their homes, who will be worried about the insurance situation, worried about the losses they face. All I want to say to those people is that there are schemes to cover those losses."

That is the context in which we should see the up to £1 million that the Government are offering the South Yorkshire community foundation. Any money is of course welcome, but all the evidence is that that money is not enough. According to Doncaster Council, the cost of helping the 188 uninsured or underinsured properties is estimated at an average of £31,000 per property, or nearly £6 million. That is the figure for Doncaster alone. Will the Minister explain how the Government intend to keep to the Prime Minister's promise and his public statement that there are schemes to cover the losses? If she cannot explain, can she signal today that she is willing to look again at the amount required with the relevant local authorities?

Even worse than the amount of money being given is that the Government have said that they will pay out the £1 million only if match funds are found. I do not believe it was the Minister's decision, but that really is an insult. More than £500,000 has been raised from local businesses and people. Are the Government really saying that unless the amount raised gets to £1 million, they will not pay out the promised money? In other words, the less money is raised from other sources, the less money the Government will provide to help the victims. It makes no sense. Let us imagine a disaster happening overseas in a developing country. If the Government said they would contribute only if the host country found matching funds, there would rightly be outrage. We are not talking about large sums here. I simply ask the Minister to make sure that the Prime Minister's promises are kept, and that more money is provided.

Secondly, I want to raise some specific questions about the targeted payments for families, where the Government again need to look at what they are doing. There are council tax rebates for people who have lost half their home and are living upstairs, and that is welcome, but there is a limit on those payments of three months. The council tax rebate scheme ends on 7 February—a wholly arbitrary cut-off date, because there are still people living upstairs because the work has not been done, through no fault of their own.

There is also the issue of the flood resilience grant of £5,000 to prevent future flooding. I have constituents who live in areas that were flooded and who may have narrowly avoided being flooded themselves, and they are being told they are not eligible for the grant, but the measure is preventive and they are clearly in areas of risk, because the areas were not just flooded in 2019, but in 2007 as well. I ask the Minister to consider taking a common-sense approach, so that those in flood-hit areas are eligible.

Thirdly, I want to raise significant issues about the performance of insurance companies. I acknowledge that some insurers have acted speedily, including drying out homes and rehousing residents, but there have been many other bad experiences, which the Minister should be aware of—slow pace of response, drying out of properties not being properly carried out, and attempts to claim that people are underinsured so they are entitled not to the full amount, but only a large fraction of it. I want also to draw attention to particular problems that have been reported to me, about RSA Insurance aggressively driving down people's claims—something about which I have written to the company. I want the Minister's assurance that she stands ready to engage on those questions with insurers that are failing in their duties and with the Association of British Insurers. I also want her to engage with the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) raised about Flood Re, of which there is very low awareness.

Fourthly, I echo the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East made about the large costs over and above the Bellwin scheme that councils face. Doncaster Council estimates those costs to be in the region of £4.5 million to £5 million: £4 million relates to damage to paths and highways. In that context I should like the Minister to explain—this is perhaps the week to do it—the position on the EU solidarity fund. When the 2007 floods happened, the Labour Government applied successfully and received funds to the net benefit of £31 million. When flooding hit in 2015, the Conservative Government successfully applied for £15 million-worth of funding. The recent flooding, for the avoidance of doubt, happened while we were in the European Union, and the Government have 12 weeks to apply for the funding. The deadline appears to be this Friday, coincidentally. My understanding is that all that the Government need to do is to signal an intent to apply by this Friday. I urge the Minister in the strongest terms to do that—or at least to explain why the Government will not do it, and how the money will be made up.

Fifthly and finally, I want to raise the issue of future flood defences, which my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East rightly raised. My constituents want answers. Why did what happened in 2007 happen again? How can we minimise the chances of its happening again? Will the Government put their money where their mouth is and fund what is necessary? The Environment Agency has estimated that we should be spending an average of at least £1 billion a year on flooding and coastal change infrastructure. I believe that in the last financial year £815 million was spent. My constituents deserve to be better protected, and they deserve to know that the Government will deliver. The South Yorkshire Mayor has estimated that a programme in excess of £200 million will be necessary. What does the Minister have to say about that?

Nothing can make up for the trauma that my constituents have gone through, but the Government can show that they have learned from what was, frankly, too slow a response and an inadequate response by properly resourcing the needs of our constituents at the moment, and by fulfilling the promises that have been made. I hope very much that the Minister will take heed of this debate and come back with answers for my constituents.

3.22 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): There is a double pleasure for me in being here this afternoon, Mr Davies—first in serving under your chairmanship and secondly in speaking for the first time from the Front Bench as the new shadow Minister for fisheries, water, coastal communities and flooding.

There may not have been many speakers in this debate, but I am sure you will agree, Mr Davies, that the calibre of the debate has been extremely high. We heard clearly and eloquently from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) about the impact in her constituency and across South Yorkshire of the floods that took place three months ago. Most of us in this place spent November 2019 knocking on doors in the coldest, most miserable general election in recent memory. However, my hon. Friend and her constituency neighbours knew it as a time of heartache, pain and loss for many in that part of the world. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), whose knowledge and expertise in the area of environment and climate change is unparalleled, made a wide-ranging and comprehensive contribution to today's debate. I trust that the Minister will take on board his points of concern.

We heard today about the more than 1,000 homes and 565 businesses affected by the floods, and the fact that many roads, bridges, train lines and stations were closed. Like my colleagues, I want to take the opportunity to extend my best wishes to all those who have been affected, and my warmest thanks to the emergency services and all the local authority staff across South Yorkshire who stepped up and provided much-needed support and assistance to those in need. They saved lives, property and communities, and they deserve the appreciation and thanks of Members from across the House.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), who is no longer in her place, for the important point she made about the emotional and mental stress that affects victims following flooding incidents. I agree wholeheartedly with the point that she made. There is an emotional impact to flooding, and the NHS must have the resources to provide the support that people may need.

The biggest obstacle to providing a proper flood strategy for South Yorkshire and the UK more generally is the fact that the Government just do not seem to take flooding and its consequences seriously. To restore trust for the people of South Yorkshire a joined-up approach is required, across regional water authorities, local government and regulators, to provide a single flood plan for an area to manage flood risk and better co-ordinate the response to flooding. There is a climate emergency in this country and across our planet. We see it every day and we hear from our constituents about it every

[Ruth Jones]

day. Our planet is getting warmer and the chance and frequency of extreme and deadly weather events and patterns increases day by day. Her Majesty's Opposition will continue to make the case for Britain to be more prepared, as we can be through habitat restoration and by returning floodplain to a more natural state. That would help to prevent the risk of flooding and allow floodplain to absorb more water. That point was made by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) earlier in the debate.

Alexander Stafford: Does the hon. Lady agree that if we had restored, as we should, more of the floodplain to natural habitat, areas such as Whiston in Rother Valley would not have been so badly affected? I am happy to work with any Members of the House to make sure that Rother Valley and places across South Yorkshire are not hit by floods again.

Ruth Jones: I agree. The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the local area is obviously much more detailed than mine, but I am happy to work with anybody to ensure that the floodplains do their job and absorb water more clearly and effectively. The Government cannot necessarily change or stop the global impact of climate change, but actions can be taken here by the Minister and in this Parliament to mitigate the impact of flooding on the people who live in South Yorkshire, and others across the United Kingdom.

There is an important point to be made about resources. After the floods of 2015 the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, said the immortal words, "Money is no object". If only the actions of his and the current Government matched those words. Austerity has had a devastating impact on our environment. There have been unprecedented cuts to the budgets of local authorities across the country, including South Yorkshire. There have also been cuts to organisations such as Natural England and the Environment Agency. Staffing levels at the Environment Agency have fallen by around 20% since the Tories came to power in 2010. Natural England has had its budget slashed by more than half, from £242 million in the last year of the Labour Government to just £100 million in 2017-18, resulting in the loss of more than 1,000 jobs. All of that has seriously undermined the ability of the United Kingdom to tackle the environmental crisis facing our country and to deal with the impact of climate change more generally. I say to the Minister that we have no time to waste, because flooding is not going to go away, so we need a comprehensive plan for every community at risk of flooding.

I should like the Minister to address several specific points. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North asked, what funding will the Minister make available to local councils to deal with flooding incidents? Secondly, does the Minister agree that there needs to be a multi-organisational approach to responding to floods? Thirdly, what discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Chancellor ahead of the Budget on 11 March about increased funding for the Environment Agency? Finally, I welcome the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East about the idea of a flood summit that will bring key stakeholders together. I support those calls wholeheartedly.

Lessons must be learned, and the people affected must be listened to. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East gave voice to the people in her area and across South Yorkshire today. The Minister, I hope, will give them and my hon. Friend the respect they all deserve by acting now.

3.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Davies.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this debate on flooding in South Yorkshire. She has spoken up passionately for her local constituents about this. I am well aware of the terrible impact that flooding can have not only on communities, homes and businesses, but on individuals—on people and their wellbeing. I have experienced that myself, coming as I do from Somerset and having been very involved in the flooding that happened in 2012-13.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) talked about how the people in his constituency rose to the occasion and set the bar in rallying together. That is also what the people of Somerset did, so I thank all those people for their involvement. That brings me on to say early in my speech that I know the whole House will join me in thanking all those people who have been involved in the emergency services and helping people in those situations: the police, the fire brigade, the Environment Agency and all those who respond at such times. We are very grateful to them.

As the hon. Member for Barnsley East said, heavy rain fell and flooding took place across parts of South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire from a weather front that was sitting over Yorkshire on 7 and 8 November last year. More than 2,500 properties were flooded, including 850 in Doncaster alone. The autumn of 2019 was the wettest on record in the Don catchment, so it truly was an unusual weather incident.

By the start of November the ground was already saturated, standing water was widespread and river and reservoir levels were extremely high. Further persistent rain fell over the Don catchment area in South Yorkshire, exceeding 150% of the average November rainfall in the area. That rain shed rapidly off the already saturated land and river levels rose in response.

The Environment Agency swung into action, issuing seven severe flood warnings along the River Don, indicating a risk to life. The agency has an exceedingly well-functioning system for such warnings. Rotherham and Doncaster experienced the highest river flows on record, which had a devastating impact on communities, as defences were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of water overtopping on to the surrounding land. As we have heard, emergency responders evacuated 1,200 properties, or around 1,600 people, in Bentley and Fishlake.

I know that this will be of little comfort to those who were flooded, but around 22,275 properties nationwide were protected by flood defences in November, including nearly 7,000 properties in Yorkshire alone. To put that into context, in the previously mentioned 2007 floods in South Yorkshire, which were of a similar magnitude, around 6,750 properties and 1,300 businesses were flooded. That demonstrates that defence work carried out after the 2007 incident made a difference, with fewer people

affected and fewer properties flooded. That is not to take lightly at all what happened this time around, but it is to put it in a bit of context, lest people think no action has been taken.

Needless to say, while it was all devastating, I understand that 90% of those people have been safely returned to their homes, although they still face months of disruption. Sadly, I must report the death of one woman in Matlock, who was caught in flood waters in the early hours of 8 November. That demonstrates how flooding is a real threat to life—a threat that we should never ignore.

The Government responded very quickly to activate support for the local areas affected, so I take issue with accusations being levelled against the Government that action was not quite taken quickly enough. I believe it was taken extremely fast and a whole raft of measures were set into place. I will outline them all, because I have time.

The Bellwin scheme was activated to help local authorities with the immediate costs of mitigating the impacts of flooding, including urgent things such as rest centres, temporary accommodation and staff overtime. That particular Bellwin scheme is for just those emergency things, and it was activated here. There were three Cobra meetings, three at official and two at ministerial level, to assess impacts and oversee the Government's flood recovery role. The flood recovery network was triggered and six grants were made available.

I will outline what the flood recovery network is, because I am not sure that hon. Friends and hon. Members know quite enough about it. It was developed following lessons learned from the 2015-16 floods, which were also severe. The network contains a range of funding measures to enable the Government to be ready to respond to major flooding incidents. I have been asked a number of times about the EU fund, but we are leaving the EU, and we have our own framework for putting into operation a whole raft of measures, which I will touch on in a minute.

The Government activated this framework for the first time on 12 November, as a result of the incidents that we have heard about today, through collaborative agreement across Departments—it was not just the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—and announced a series of measures to support the recovery of communities and businesses. The November floods triggered the framework by meeting the agreed criteria: the impact must be widespread over multiple locations, with 25 or more houses severely affected in each district. It is worth noting that weather incidents with localised impacts will not usually trigger this very broad recovery support package.

The flood recovery package includes six grants. The first is the community recovery grant, under which those severely flooded are eligible for £500 per household. Secondly, the Government will reimburse local authorities for the cost of a 100% council tax discount for a minimum of three months, or longer if floodwater entered their home or their home was otherwise considered unliveable for any period of time, and for the cost of a 100% council tax discount on temporary accommodation for anyone unable to return to their home.

Thirdly, the Government will reimburse local authorities for the cost of providing 100% relief from business rates for a minimum of three months, or longer if the business is unable to resume trading from the property. Fourthly,

the business recovery grant offers financial support of £2,500 per eligible business for recovering local small and medium-sized enterprises. Fifthly, DEFRA triggered the farming recovery fund and announced it would make up to £2 million available to hard-hit farmers in south Yorkshire. That fund had already been applied to parts of north Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

Sixthly, the DEFRA property flood resilience scheme provides up to £5,000 to help people to make their properties more resilient in future. Eligible local authorities—that is, authorities with more than 25 houses affected—are in the process of working with communities to enable them to make adaptations to their homes and businesses as part of the repairs to protect against possible future flooding. In addition to those funds, the Government are also committed to matching the funds raised by the South Yorkshire Flood Disaster Relief appeal fund up to the value of £1 million, as referred to by the hon. Member for Barnsley East.

Stephanie Peacock: I do not want to pre-empt the Minister, because she might be going on to mention this, but the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and I made was about the matched funding. We simply do not believe that it is fair. Can she commit today not to match funding, but to give the money that is required? Is our understanding correct that, if our local residents raise what currently stands at half a million pounds, the Government will match just that, or does the fund have to reach £1 million before the Government pay out? Can she not just scrap the matched funding and give us the money we need?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I have listed a very large range of packages that were swung into action. Perhaps her councils are still discussing and talking to our officials about those, and I recommend that they continue to do so. I commend her local people for raising the money, and she can write to me about that afterwards, but I think that at the moment that matched funding stands, as it says, up to the value of £1 million.

Edward Miliband *rose—*

Stephanie Peacock *rose—*

Rebecca Pow: I will carry on, because I want to talk about Flood Re, which was raised earlier and is an important issue. Flood Re was launched in 2016 to improve the availability and affordability of household insurance for people who live in high flood risk areas, and it has made an enormous difference. Flood Re was set up as a result of learning from what had happened in previous flooding situations, when people reported that they could not get the right insurance. Indeed, many people from my own area of Somerset fed into the setting up and the working of Flood Re.

In the 2018-19 financial year, Flood Re reinsured more than 164,000 household policies, and 250,000 properties have benefited since its launch. Before its introduction, only 9% of householders who had made prior flood claims could get quotes from two or more insurers, as was commonly highlighted, and none were able to get quotes from five or more. However, since

[Rebecca Pow]

October 2017, after the setting up of Flood Re, the availability has improved so that 100% of households could get quotes from two or more insurers, while 93% could get quotes from five or more. By May 2019, 95% of those with flood claims could choose from at least 10 insurers, with 99% receiving quotes from five or more, which shows that the system is working.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North mentioned some people reporting that they are unable to get insurance, and there are anecdotal reports that there was no flood insurance in Fishlake, Bentley and Doncaster. The Secretary of State announced a review into what happened there, why it was not available and all those things, and I look forward to its findings. We want Flood Re to function effectively, so I am happy to meet colleagues to go over issues about how it is working and how to make it work better.

Edward Miliband: I welcome what the Minister says about Flood Re, but I return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East. I know that the Minister cannot commit to making this money available today, but I ask her to go with us a little bit on the logic of this. If only half a million pounds is raised from local people and businesses, less money will be available for flood victims. It makes no sense, when up to £1 million has been allocated, for the Government to then say that they are only going to give half a million pounds. As I said earlier, that would not be acceptable if we were helping a developing country, and it should not be acceptable here at home. I know the money was originally from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government resources, so will she go and talk to her MHCLG colleagues about this and about actually getting the money out of the door? South Yorkshire's community foundation has not yet received even the half a million pounds to get the scheme going.

Rebecca Pow: I recommend that hon. Members go to MHCLG themselves to raise this issue. I have put my case for the amount of finance coming through in the flood recovery package. I will leave that there, but I am listening to what hon. Members say, and I commend the people raising the money.

The Government have absolutely committed to investing in flood risk, to the tune of £2.6 billion, and continue to play a key role in protecting the people affected. Talking about MHCLG, the right hon. Gentleman raised new houses on floodplains and the increase in flooding risk, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford). Planning authorities are responsible for giving the go-ahead for new housing, and they always seek Environment Agency advice on all these things, but planning also comes under MHCLG.

Alexander Stafford: On insurance, the Minister knows that Whiston, in Rother Valley, was affected by flooding in November. Can she guarantee that, under Flood Re, those people affected by flooding will be able to get insurance in the future?

Rebecca Pow: I hear what my hon. Friend says about his constituency. I urge all those constituents to go to insurers themselves. A huge number of insurers now

offer flood cover. That is why Flood Re was set up. There is a bona fide system, and I urge those constituents to go through it.

While the Government are committing money, partnerships will also form a key part of delivering our flood resilience. Partnership funding is expected to attract more than £600 million of additional investment, as well as funding more than 1,000 flood defence schemes to better protect 300,000 homes. Lots of these partnerships are already demonstrating that they are working well across the country.

Of course, it is not just about urban areas. The Government's investment will also better protect 700,000 acres of agricultural land, which is really important, too. That will help to avoid more than £1.5 billion of direct economic damage to agriculture, which will then benefit surrounding rural communities.

Lest not spending enough on flood schemes in South Yorkshire is levelled at the Government, of that £2.6 billion, £36 million has been allocated to flood schemes in South Yorkshire to better protect 6,480 homes. To name a few of the schemes, the Environment Agency is investing—over a six-year investment period between 2015 and 2021—£12.5 million in the Sheffield Lower Don valley flood scheme, to protect businesses in South Yorkshire, and £9.7 million in the Bentley pumping station refurbishment, which is currently well advanced. I believe that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North visited it, so he can report back that it is progressing well and is due to complete the summer of 2020, reducing the risk to potentially 1,669 residential properties, which is not insignificant. In addition, £8 million is being spent refurbishing existing defences, with nine locations already completed, reducing the risk to a further 3,772 properties.

Stephanie Peacock: The Minister mentioned £36 million, but it is estimated that a long-term strategy across the four boroughs in South Yorkshire will cost in excess of £200 million, so £36 million is clearly not enough money. What can she do to reassure us that that extra money will come forward?

Rebecca Pow: The hon. Lady leads me neatly on to my next point. I am confident that the Environment Agency, working together—it is constantly working with the councils and all the different bodies—with the South Yorkshire lead flood authorities and Sheffield City Region, which are, I am pleased to say, using a very wide catchment approach, will find the additional funding needed to secure a strong plan. Several Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley, referred to the need for that, which pleased me. I know that everyone is keen that we have joined-up thinking on this, and I suggest that affected MPs from South Yorkshire meet me to talk about this and see what the overall picture is.

In the meantime, the Government are of course looking at funding arrangements and needs beyond 2021, when this funding window ends. We will continue to work with the Environment Agency and others to consider future investment needs and the role of Government in supporting resilient communities. In addition to what I call conventional flood defence mechanisms, a wide range of other mechanisms are being used, and will increasingly be used, to reduce

flooding, using a catchment approach, and particularly nature-based approaches. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North is vociferous on climate change—absolutely rightly; we have done much work together on that front. This is all interlinked with that agenda and will help towards the whole climate change issue.

On funding, we recognise where deprivation is highest through higher payments when flood money is handed out. That is obviously important in urban and rural areas. Obviously, climate change, which will give us more extreme weather events and impacts on the environment, is a crucial national priority, and also a really important international priority. The UK is already demonstrating that we are leading the fight on this, and we are delivering our world-leading target for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, adapting to the inevitable changes brought about by climate change is vital. We are taking robust action to improve the resilience of our people, our economy and our environment through investment, not least through the commitment of £2.6 billion over six years to better protect communities from flooding and erosion.

This has been an insightful and useful debate, and I thank all the contributors. Thank you, Mr Davies, for overseeing our proceedings. I end by again thanking all the services that swing into action when there is flooding to help to protect us all.

3.49 pm

Stephanie Peacock: I thank the Minister for her response to the debate and I thank all the hon. Members who took part, including my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), on the Front Bench, and especially my good and right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). As he closed his speech by saying, nothing can make up for the experiences of the people of Barnsley and South Yorkshire. It is incumbent on us in this place to do what we can to ensure that they do not have to go through that again.

A number of important issues were raised about the support that can be given to our constituents, about insurance premiums and people who are not covered, and about the support for some businesses and groups not being enough. One example in my constituency is a local community football club. It suffered damage to

fencing, to the pitch and to facilities, and it is crowdfunding because it just has not been able to receive the support that it needs. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) mentioned that mental health support in the NHS is also crucial.

We have therefore talked about many different and important issues. I appreciate and acknowledge the various schemes that the Minister mentioned. That support is of course welcome, but I am still concerned about the issue of match funding and I hope that the Minister will respond to a letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North and me. The issue about match funding is important, because it is in the context of both local, regional Mayors saying that £3 million is required, which means that the match funding would not be enough even if it were to reach £1 million.

I welcome what the Minister said about long-term investment. The money that she outlined added up to about £36 million. However, it is clear that a lot more of that is needed, and I hope that the four authorities, along with the Environment Agency, can ensure we have a plan that is well funded.

I really welcome the Minister's offer to meet us, but I would like to pick up on the issue of a flood summit. The Prime Minister spoke, during the general election campaign, to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and assured him that he would hold a flood summit. That was nearly three months ago, but the Prime Minister has not convened that group, so I hope that the Minister will relay to the Prime Minister that he made that commitment to bring together all the stakeholders. I hope that he will show that his Government are serious about that, and that the flood summit will be held in the near future.

I thank everyone for taking part in the debate. I hope that we can move forward and ensure that people in Barnsley and in South Yorkshire get the support that they really need.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered flooding in South Yorkshire.

3.52 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 30 January 2020

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 21 January 2020

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sajid Javid): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) Council was held in Brussels on 21 January 2020. The Council discussed the following:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 20 January meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU. Following this, Ministers took stock of the process of nominating a European candidate for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) presidency.

Current financial services legislative proposals

The Croatian presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Presidency work programme

The Croatian presidency presented its work programme for January to June 2020.

European green deal

The European Commission presented the economic and financial aspects of the European green deal.

European semester 2020

To launch the new European semester exercise, the European Commission presented the annual sustainable growth strategy, the Alert Mechanism Report, and the Euro area recommendation.

Tax challenges arising from digitalisation

The Council held an exchange of views on the state of play of negotiations in the OECD on tax challenges arising from digitalisation.

[HCWS83]

DEFENCE

War Pensions Scheme Up-rating

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): The new rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2020 are set out in the tables below. The annual up-rating of war pensions and allowances for 2020 will take place from the week beginning 6 April. Rates for 2020 are increasing by 1.7% in line with the September 2019 consumer price index.

War Pensions Rates

	Rates 2019 £	Rates 2020 £
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)		
WAR PENSIONS		
Disablement Pension (100% rates)		
Officer (per annum)	9,904.00	10,071.00
Other ranks (weekly amount)	189.80	193.00
Age allowances payable from age 65		
40%-50%	12.70	12.90

War Pensions Rates

over 50% but not over 70%	19.55	19.90
Over 70% but not over 90%	27.80	28.25
Over 90%	39.10	39.80
Disablement gratuity (one off payment)		
Specified minor injury (min)	1,209.00	1,230.00
Specified minor injury (max)	9,028.00	9,181.00
1 – 5% gratuity	3,019.00	3,070.00
6 – 14% gratuity	6,711.00	6,825.00
15 – 19% gratuity	11,737.00	11,937.00
SUPPLEMENTARY ALLOWANCES		
Unemployability allowance		
Personal	117.30	119.30
Adult dependency increase	65.20	66.30
Increase for first child	15.15	15.40
Increase for subsequent children	17.80	18.10
Invalidity allowance		
Higher rate	23.20	23.60
Middle rate	15.10	15.40
Lower rate	7.55	7.70
Constant attendance allowance		
Exceptional rate	143.20	145.60
Intermediate rate	107.40	109.20
Full day rate	71.60	72.80
Part-day rate	35.80	36.40
Comforts allowance		
Higher rate	30.80	31.10
Lower rate	15.40	15.55
Mobility supplement	68.35	69.50
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	71.60	72.80
Therapeutic earnings limit (annual rate)	6,838.00	7,280.00
Exceptional severe disablement allowance	71.60	72.80
Severe disablement occupational allowance	35.80	36.40
Clothing allowance (per annum)	245.00	249.00
Education allowance (per annum) (maximum)	120.00	120.00
WIDOW(ER)S BENEFITS		
Widow(er)s' - other ranks (basic with children) (weekly amount)	143.95	146.40
Widower(er)s' - Officer higher rate both wars (basic with children) (per annum)	7,656.00	7,786.00
Childless widow(er)s' U-40 (other ranks) (weekly amount)	34.48	35.07
Widow(er) - Officer lower rate both wars (per annum)	2,659.00	2,704.00
Supplementary pension	96.31	97.95
Age allowance		
(a) Age 65 to 69	16.40	16.70
(b) age 70 to 79	31.55	32.10
(c) age 80 and over	46.80	47.60
Children's allowance		
Increase for the first child	22.60	23.00
Increase for subsequent children	25.30	25.55
Orphan's pension		
Increase for first child	25.85	26.30
Increase for subsequent children	28.25	28.75
Unmarried dependent living as spouse (maximum)	141.60	144.05
Rent allowance (maximum)	54.20	55.10
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	110.65	112.55

[HCWS79]

EDUCATION

Initial Teacher Training: Application System

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): In the teacher recruitment and retention strategy, published in January 2019, the Government committed to helping great people become teachers by introducing a new application system for initial teacher training. This application system will be easier to use and designed to better meet the needs of potential trainees. The new service will also ensure universities and schools delivering teacher training can make accurate decisions on whether their applicants are right for the courses they are offering.

I confirm that the pilot for this new service has started and will involve a number of schools delivering school-centred initial teacher training. My Department will continually improve the service, based on feedback from candidates and those schools and universities delivering teacher training. Universities providing teacher training will also be able to join the pilot from October this year.

The Government's new service will fully replace the existing UCAS teacher training service from the October 2021 admissions cycle.

[HCWS75]

School Funding

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): Today I am laying the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, which ensure that in 2020-21 every secondary school will receive at least £5,000 per pupil, and every primary school at least £3,750 per pupil—on the path to £4,000 the following year. As I confirmed in my statement of 20 December last year, this additional funding is provided through the national funding formula (NFF) and included in local authorities' dedicated schools grant allocations. The new regulations require local authorities to deliver the minimum per pupil funding levels to all schools in their area.

The change will level up the lowest funded schools across the country so that all schools are able to provide an excellent education for their pupils. It forms one part of the Government's increases to school funding, which will see an extra £14 billion in total invested over the next three years—starting with an additional £2.6 billion in 2020-21 and rising to £7.1 billion more by 2022-23, compared to 2019-20 levels. That is on top of the £1.5 billion we are providing each year to fund additional pensions costs for teachers, bringing the total schools budget to £52.2 billion in 2022-23.

As well as delivering on a key Government pledge made during the general election campaign, the mandatory minimum per pupil levels mark an important step towards our commitment to deliver a "hard" NFF, whereby school funding is determined by a single formula, so that it is fair and equitable for every school in the country. We will consult on the further steps needed to complete this transition in due course.

The Department for Education has also launched a new website which allows the public to see the funding that has been allocated for individual schools through the NFF in 2020-21. The national formula directs money where it is most needed, based on schools' and pupils'

needs and characteristics. Compared to 2019-20, every school is attracting at least a per-pupil increase in line with inflation, with an average increase of over 4% per pupil. The new, user-friendly tool is available to use from today at: <https://skillsfunding.service.gov.uk/national-funding-formula/2020-2021/start>.

In addition, today I am confirming that all pupil premium rates, which are funded outside the NFF, will increase in line with inflation in 2020-21. This will ensure that this targeted funding can continue to support the most disadvantaged children in our schools.

The Department has also published an official statistics report on school funding over the past decade on our website. This reaffirms our commitment to transparency and aims to support public understanding of school funding by providing a consistent and comprehensive set of statistics. The report shows school revenue funding for five to 16-year-olds for 2010-11 to 2020-21, and school-level funding allocations for 2019-20.

Finally, we have published a Government response to the consultation undertaken last autumn on clarifying the specific grant and ring-fenced status of the dedicated schools grant.

[HCWS78]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Bill

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Theresa Villiers): I am pleased to announce that today we will be introducing the Government's flagship Environment Bill. There is a clear and urgent scientific case and growing public demand for acting decisively to address biodiversity loss and climate change, which this Bill responds to.

We first introduced the Environment Bill on 15 October 2019. It continues to form a central part in the Government delivering a step change in environmental protection and recovery and will help deliver the Government's manifesto commitment to deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth. It will also support recent legislation to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 by minimising our waste, cleaning our air and water, and restoring habitats to allow plants and wildlife to thrive.

Taken together the measures in the Bill will help to manage the impact of human activity on the environment, create a more sustainable economy, and enhance wellbeing and quality of life. The Bill will engage and empower citizens, local government, and businesses to deliver environmental outcomes and create a positive legacy for future generations. I set out the measures in the Bill below.

Environmental governance and targets

We will establish a new system of green governance and accountability, creating an environmental watchdog in the office for environmental protection, and embedding environmental values at the heart of Government policy making. To ensure the UK continues to drive forward

ambitious action to tackle climate change, we are bringing climate change legislation within the enforcement remit of the Office for Environmental Protection.

The Bill will also implement a new statutory cycle of target setting, monitoring, planning, and reporting to help deliver significant, long-term environmental improvement. This will include environmental improvement plans, the first being the 25 year environment plan, and a framework for setting legally binding targets in four priority areas: air quality, waste and resource efficiency, water, and nature. Together they will drive action by businesses and wider society to deliver environmental improvement alongside sustainable growth.

The Bill will include a UK environmental protections policy which will allow for greater transparency and give Parliament greater scrutiny over new environmental legislation. Ministers will be required to make a statement to Parliament setting out the impact of new primary environmental legislation on existing levels of environmental protection. These statements will be published and open to scrutiny by Parliament, environmental stakeholders and the broader public.

We will also review significant developments in the environmental protection legislation of other countries and prepare a report for Parliament every two years. This will ensure we keep abreast of international developments in driving forward our environmental protection legislation.

Waste and resource efficiency

The Bill will drive a major shift in maximising resource efficiency, minimising waste, and moving towards a more circular economic model. We will introduce measures based on the “polluter pays” principle, create a simplified approach to recycling, and tackle waste crime. Powers to introduce new extended producer responsibility schemes will make producers responsible for the full net costs of managing their products at end of life, encouraging them to design their products with re-use and recycling in mind. New Government powers to set resource-efficiency standards for products will drive market and consumer behaviour towards durable, repairable, and recyclable products. To tackle plastic pollution, the Environment Bill will enable the creation of new charges for other single-use plastic items, similar to the carrier bag charge, which will incentivise a shift towards reusable items. We are taking powers to establish deposit return schemes which will further incentivise consumers to reduce litter and recycle more. The Bill also sets out how Government will mandate weekly collections of food waste for every household, subject to consultation. The Environment Bill also contains powers which will enable the Government to ban the export of polluting plastic waste to non-OECD countries, consulting with industry, NGOs, and local councils on the date by which this should be achieved.

Air quality and environmental recall

We already have a strong track record of tackling air pollution—for example, direct action on nitrogen dioxide has led to emissions falling by almost 29% between 2010 and 2017 and they are now at their lowest level since records began. The Bill will further enable greater local action on air pollution, ensuring responsibility is shared across local government structures and public bodies; better enabling them to tackle emissions from burning coal and wood; and bringing forward powers for Government to mandate recalls of vehicles and

machinery when they do not meet relevant legal emission standards. The Environment Bill makes a clear commitment to set a legally binding target for the pollutant with the most significant impact on human health, fine particulate matter.

Water

The Environment Bill will help to secure long-term, resilient water and wastewater services. It will introduce additional requirements for water company planning for future water supply and wastewater and drainage networks, enabling more resilient solutions to drought and flooding. In a changing climate, these measures will ensure the water regulator has the powers it needs to respond to new priorities. The Bill enhances flood and coastal erosion risk management, allowing for the expansion of existing internal drainage boards or the creation of new ones where there is local appetite to do so. We are reforming elements of abstraction licensing to link it more tightly to our goal of restoring water bodies to as close to natural state as possible, and are creating a power to update the lists of substances and their respective standards which are potentially harmful to surface waters and groundwater.

Nature and biodiversity

The Environment Bill supports and enables action to create or restore wildlife-rich habitats to enable wildlife to recover and thrive. The Bill introduces mandatory biodiversity net gain, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and help deliver thriving natural spaces for communities. This will also support certainty in the planning system and therefore the delivery of new housing, while retaining and providing habitats that can enhance biodiversity. Provisions requiring the development of local nature recovery strategies across England will support better spatial planning for nature recovery, by setting out priorities and opportunities for protecting and investing in nature within a local area. The Bill also strengthens a duty within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to ensure public authorities play their part in conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Chemicals

The Environment Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to amend two pieces of legislation regulating the use of chemicals in the UK (REACH 2008). This will allow the Secretary of State to take further steps where necessary to ensure a smooth transition to a UK chemicals regime following the UK's exit from the EU. It will also make it possible to keep the legislation up to date and respond to emerging needs or ambitions for the effective management of chemicals.

The Environment Bill is the result of extensive public consultation. In July 2019 we published six Government responses to consultations on measures in the Bill. And in October 2019 we published the Government response to the consultation on protecting and enhancing England's trees and woodland, covering measures to increase the transparency and accountability in the process of felling street trees.

Over half of all measures in the Environment Bill are to be extended beyond England and adopted across the devolved Administrations. The positive extent of the join up demonstrates our ambition in working with the devolved Administrations across the UK to better protect the environment and strengthen the Union, while respecting the devolution settlement. This co-ordination is the

result of extensive engagement with the devolved Administrations over the past year by both Ministers and officials during which we have discussed all policy areas of the Bill.

This Environment Bill is a landmark commitment to protecting and improving the environment for future generations. It grasps opportunities created from leaving the European Union and I hope that it will deliver a step change in environmental protection and recovery.

[HCWS80]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

International Agreements

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): The UK has strong partnerships with virtually every country around the world and aims to strengthen them as we leave the European Union.

During the UK's membership of the EU, important aspects of these relationships have been governed through EU arrangements: through formal and informal co-operation and collaboration; dialogues; memoranda of understanding; regulatory arrangements; and in some cases through international agreements or treaties.

The Government have been committed to preserving the relationships governed by these agreements and arrangements. Accordingly, article 129 of the withdrawal agreement specifies that, for the duration of the transition period, the UK will remain bound by the obligations under existing EU-third country international agreements. In addition, the asterisk to article 129(1) provides for the EU to issue a notification to its treaty partners stating that the UK is to be treated as an EU member state for the purposes of those agreements.

Following signature of the withdrawal agreement on 24 January, the EU has now issued the notification described above to its treaty partners, as well as to the depositaries of multilateral agreements to which it is a party.

This notification provides an important platform for continuity. Some EU treaty partners may choose to respond publicly to the EU's notification, but this is not a precondition for continuity provided a treaty partner intends the UK to be covered and continues to act accordingly.

If businesses or other stakeholders find that these arrangements, for whatever reason, are not being implemented smoothly, they should make their concerns known to the relevant UK authorities.

As of 1 February, the UK will also become bound by any obligations stemming from EU international agreements which are concluded or provisionally applied during the transition period. The Government expect that the arrangements above will also apply to such agreements.

To prepare for the end of the transition period, the Government will continue to work to transition those international agreements which are relevant and necessary, where there is mutual interest to do so. In some cases, this will be through a formal successor treaty between the UK and a third country or group of countries. In other cases, this will be through another type of arrangement, for example a memorandum of understanding.

I will be depositing a copy of the EU's notification (in the form of a note verbale and covering letter) in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS82]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

General Affairs Council: 28 January 2020

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Christopher Pincher): Andreja Metelko-Zgombić, Croatian State Secretary for European Affairs, chaired the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Brussels on 28 January. I represented the United Kingdom.

Adoption of A items

A number of A items were considered, including on accession negotiations with Serbia, the EU position on TIR convention and the safeguarding of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. A full list can be found on the EU Council's website at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2020/01/28/>.

Presentation of priorities of the Croatian presidency

The presidency presented on their priorities for their presidency. These include: sectoral and horizontal legislation related to the next multiannual financial framework; enlargement policy, particularly in the run-up to an informal EU-western Balkans summit in May; implementation of the EU strategic agenda; cohesion; and promoting the EU as a community of values. The presidency also listed as a priority enabling an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU and starting negotiations on a future partnership.

Conference on the future of Europe

There followed a substantial discussion on the proposed conference on the future of Europe, including its content, scope, composition and functioning. This followed recent communications from both the Commission and EU Parliament setting out their position on the conference.

Any other business

I intervened, on the occasion of the last attendance of a United Kingdom Minister at an EU Council, in relation to the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. In doing so, I reiterated that while the United Kingdom will be leaving the EU, we will not be leaving Europe; and that while we will have a different relationship, we will continue to stand together as sovereign equals to defend our shared values. I further reiterated the United Kingdom's hope that we can deliver on our joint aspiration for a high quality free trade agreement to be agreed by the end of the year.

[HCWS77]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission Report

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission has published its final report today. I am depositing this report in the Libraries of both Houses and have made it available on www.gov.uk. I would like to thank the commissioners for all of their hard work in producing the report. The Government will provide a response in due course.

[HCWS81]

JUSTICE

Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): The Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council under the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU took place on 23 and 24 January 2020 in Zagreb.

I represented the UK on Justice Day. My colleague right hon Friend the Minister for Security, attended the meeting for interior day.

Justice day began with a discussion on the future of EU justice and home affairs in the fields of freedom, security and justice, with a focus on the following justice policies: fundamental rights and the rule of law; civil judicial co-operation; judicial training and criminal justice.

Over lunch, Ministers considered the role of the European judicial network in civil and commercial matters, recognising its importance in facilitating judicial co-operation.

Ministers then discussed judicial training. I provided an overview of judicial training in the UK, including the independent role of the judiciary in assessing the required learning and development. I highlighted that our approach to providing training for the judiciary is in accordance with the separation of powers, in that training is under the control of the judiciary and not the Government.

The first agenda item of interior day discussed the future of EU justice and home affairs activity, focusing on the home affairs area. The Minister for Security intervened to highlight issues relating to end-to-end encryption, drawing attention to the open letter to Facebook from the Home Secretary.

The Minister for Security also encouraged member states to ensure that the voice of their law enforcement agencies and interior Ministries was heard during discussions on the EU's negotiating mandate for a future internal security agreement with the UK.

Interior Ministers then discussed implementation of legislation on the interoperability of EU JHA databases.

Over lunch, Ministers discussed tackling organised immigration crime in the western Balkans, including a proposal to create a regional western Balkans system similar to the Eurodac database (which stores fingerprint and biometric data of asylum applicants).

The afternoon session focused on implementation of the European Border and Coast Guard agency, which the UK does not participate in.

[HCWS84]

TRANSPORT

Local Lines

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): Today I am announcing the preferred route for the Bedford to Cambridge section of the east-west rail line between Oxford and Cambridge. This follows a public consultation last year on five route options.

The preferred route, route E from the consultation, would link Bedford Midland, a new station between Sandy and St Neots, a new station at Cambourne and Cambridge station. The route would provide improved connectivity between towns and cities across the Oxford-Cambridge arc, improving passenger journey times and supporting the Oxford-Cambridge arc to fulfil its economic potential as a world-class strategic innovation arc.

The Bedford to Cambridge section of east-west rail has been designated a nationally significant infrastructure project.

The preferred route will now be the focus for further development. This further development work will include environmental and engineering studies to identify potential route alignments on which the railway could run, within the preferred route option and will lead to the Government making a final decision on whether to take this project forward, and to make an application for a developed consent order. In advance of submitting the application for a development consent order, we will confirm that there are no material changes that might have affected our preferred route choice.

[HCWS76]

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 30 January 2020

WORK AND PENSIONS

In-Work Poverty

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 27 January 2020.

Neil Gray: I am unsurprised that the Minister did not know the answer to that question because, in response to a freedom of information request from the Poverty Alliance, the Government said that they did not hold that information. Following on from the National Audit Office saying that there is no evidence that universal credit has any link to increased employment levels, we now know that the Government have done precisely nothing in an area in which MPs, expert charities, the Scottish Government and local authorities are screaming for change. Will this Minister encourage the UK Government to open their tin ears and fix universal credit?

Will Quince: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman visits his local jobcentre and speaks to work coaches, because they will tell him about the impact of universal credit. More people are getting into and staying in work. Importantly, we do listen to hon. Members from across the House and to stakeholders within the Department. In addition to the measures I mentioned earlier, we now have a two-week run-on for housing benefit and will have a run-on for other legacy benefits as of October next year.

[Official Report, 27 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 519.]

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray).

The correct response should have been:

Will Quince: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman visits his local jobcentre and speaks to work coaches, because they will tell him about the impact of universal credit. More people are getting into and staying in work. Importantly, we do listen to hon. Members from across the House and to stakeholders within the Department. In addition to the measures I mentioned earlier, we now have a two-week run-on for housing benefit and will have a run-on for other legacy benefits as of **July this year**.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 30 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
TRANSPORT	905	TRANSPORT—continued	
Bus Services: Staffordshire	910	Railway Stations: Accessibility	911
Crossrail Delays	914	Road Network: England	909
Decarbonising Transport	919	Road Safety	905
Foot and Bicycle Journeys.....	916	Southeastern	912
Oxford-Cambridge Expressway.....	915	Topical Questions	920
Rail Connectivity: Burnley	910	Train Fares.....	918
Rail Infrastructure	913	Transport Investment: Regional Disparities	907

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 30 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	37WS	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	44WS
War Pensions Scheme Up-rating	37WS	Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission Report.....	44WS
EDUCATION	39WS	JUSTICE	45WS
Initial Teacher Training: Application System	39WS	Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council	45WS
School Funding.....	39WS	TRANSPORT	46WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	40WS	Local Lines	46WS
Environment Bill	40WS	TREASURY	37WS
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	43WS	ECOFIN: 21 January 2020.....	37WS
International Agreements	43WS		
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	44WS		
General Affairs Council: 28 January 2020.....	44WS		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Thursday 30 January 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>
WORK AND PENSIONS	7MC
In-Work Poverty	7MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Thursday 6 February 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 30 January 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 905] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Transport

Middle East Peace Plan [Col. 927]
Answer to urgent question—(Dr Murrison)

Royal Assent [Col. 940]

Business of the House [Col. 941]
Statement—(Mr Rees-Mogg)

Environment [Col. 959]
Bill presented, and read the First time

Global Britain [Col. 960]
General debate

War Widows' Pension Scheme [Col. 1037]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Scotch Whisky: US Tariffs [Col. 363WH]
Flooding: South Yorkshire [Col. 385WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 37WS]

Ministerial Correction [Col. 7MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
