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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 2 March 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

School Funding

1. **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of school funding. [901006]

19. **Mr Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that schools receive equitable levels of funding under the national funding formula. [901024]

22. **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that schools receive equitable levels of funding under the national funding formula. [901027]

23. **Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that schools receive equitable levels of funding under the national funding formula. [901028]

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): We are investing more in schools and high needs over the next three years, starting with an additional £2.6 billion, including £780 million for high needs in 2020-21 and £1.5 billion for the cost of the teacher pension scheme.

Bridget Phillipson: While the north-east is home to some of the best performing primary schools in the country, sadly, at secondary level, there are issues with poor outcomes for young people. Rather than reannouncing an initiative from two years ago using existing departmental funding, when will the Secretary of State properly tackle the fact that far too many children in our region are not receiving the education they deserve?

Gavin Williamson: I recently had the great pleasure of visiting schools across the north-east, as well as Opportunity North East, a new programme aimed at raising attainment in the key area of secondary schools. This already seems to be having an impact on schools—that was certainly my impression from conversations I had with school leaders—and we want to continue to build on that across the north-east.

Mr Bacon: Since 2013, the total schools block grant in my constituency has gone down, whereas funding across London regionally has increased by 4.5%. I know that my right hon. Friend recognises the historical imbalances in favour of metropolitan areas, so what reassurances can he give me and the excellent schools in Orpington that the NFF will rebalance funding?

Gavin Williamson: The Department and the Government are working towards a hard national funding formula to ensure fair funding across the country in every single constituency. I know that my hon. Friend has been campaigning hard to raise the issue facing his schools, and we will listen closely.

Giles Watling: I thank my right hon. Friend for his earlier answer. The national funding formula is letting down some of Clacton's schools financially because of the way Essex County Council is rolling it out. Can the Department not have oversight and work with the council to rebalance the books in favour of our hard-pressed schools in Clacton?

Gavin Williamson: I hope that Essex County Council will move towards the national funding formula as rapidly as possible and will see it as clear guidance on what per pupil funding it should be giving at every school. Part of the reason we have introduced a basic minimum at primary and secondary school level is to ensure that those minimums are delivered to every school across the country, but I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this in greater detail.

Alun Cairns: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way he is levelling up spending in schools across England, but teaching unions have identified a significant difference between the funding for schools in England and Wales. My constituency is near the bottom of the league table for schools funding in Wales. Will he use all his influence to encourage the Welsh Government to make more money available to schools for them to spend on pupils as he is doing in England?

Gavin Williamson: It is disappointing to see what the Labour and Liberal Democrat Government in Wales have been doing on education. I hope that every penny of the almost £200 million extra the Welsh Government will receive, which has been as a result of the funding increase for schools in England, will be passported to every school in Wales to start raising standards in Wales for every pupil.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): *The Times Educational Supplement* reported this week that academies in England were putting pressure on older, more experienced and therefore more expensive teachers to leave their jobs in order to save the academies' money. Teachers in England already earn more than £6,000 less than their counterparts in Scotland. What use is any promise from this Government of pay increases when it comes in tandem with such bullying levelled against some of England's most experienced teachers?

Gavin Williamson: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the teaching unions and the headteacher unions for the work they have done with the Department on our recruitment and retention policies, which is making sure we work together across the board to make teachers of all ages and experience understand that they can

have a fulfilling, rewarding and incredibly important career within education for a generation and more. We will continue that work, recognising the importance to the education of every child of having experienced teachers in our classrooms.

Young People: Equitable Opportunity

2. **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure equitable opportunity for young people throughout the UK. [901007]

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure equitable access to opportunity for young people in (a) Staffordshire and (b) the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [901015]

18. **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure equitable opportunity for young people throughout the UK. [901023]

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Levelling up opportunity across the country is my Department's top priority, and we have made progress. We are reforming technical education, backed by up to £500 million of investment in T-levels once fully rolled out. Since 2011, the disadvantage gap has narrowed, and over the next three years we will be investing £14 billion more in primary and secondary education, which will allow for a cash increase of £7.1 billion by 2022-23.

Selaine Saxby: Schools in my constituency face the dual challenge of rural and coastal deprivation, and, despite the welcome increase in funding, Devon will remain in the bottom 10% of local authorities in terms of dedicated schools grant per pupil. Will the Secretary of State work with me to ensure that North Devon schools have the funds that they need to support and encourage the aspirations of every child?

Gavin Williamson: I know that my hon. Friend is very passionate about this issue, having been a teacher herself. I am sure that she will welcome the 6.5% per pupil increase in North Devon, which is making, and will make, a real difference to children's attainment. This is a Government who are delivering extra money for schools throughout the country, but what is also important is that this is a Government who recognise that it is not just about cash—although we are delivering extra cash—but about standards, and about raising standards in every single school for every pupil.

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend and neighbour will know that Staffordshire has been right at the bottom of the pool by comparison with other counties when it comes to money. What good news can he give his schools in South Staffordshire, as well as mine in Lichfield?

Gavin Williamson: As my hon. Friend will know, schools are enjoying an 8.2% cash increase, and schools in Lichfield are receiving an increase of more than 5%. That is to be welcomed, and it is making a real difference. We are also investing in teacher quality and teacher training, and ensuring that the basic starting salary will increase to £30,000. That will be one of the most competitive graduate packages in the marketplace, and will attract the very best into the profession.

Matt Vickers: Levelling up opportunities for young people is a vital part of delivering for constituents such as those in Stockton South. How will my right hon. Friend improve school standards across the north-east so that every child has the best possible chance of succeeding?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend and I saw the reality of the impact in his constituency when we had the privilege of visiting Thornaby Academy. The academy was recently taken over by Falcon Education Academies Trust, which specialises in supporting schools that are experiencing some of the most challenging circumstances. That was a great example of how injecting leadership and extra support can ensure that schools which have had troubles in the past can reach for a new and more positive future.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): In a review published last week, my constituent Sir Michael Marmot argued that a highly educated and well-paid childcare workforce was essential to the improvement of early years provision and the tackling of healthcare inequality. Both are essential if we are to provide equal opportunities for the next generation. However, under this Government early years staff suffered a real-terms pay cut of 5% between 2013 and 2018, and thousands of staff are leaving the profession because of low pay. Will the Secretary of State join me in asking the new Chancellor to pledge more funds for early years provision in the upcoming Budget, so that we can pay our staff properly and the next generation can have equal opportunities?

Gavin Williamson: I am always happy to make representations to Chancellors. I have in the past, and I am certain that I will in the future. I almost thought that the hon. Lady was going to welcome the extra £66 million that we secured last year, and perhaps if she had had the opportunity to go on for a little longer she would have reached that moment.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State seen the report by Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner, in which she points out that between 19% and 20% of kids leaving our schools have no qualifications at all? That is an absolute stain on the conscience of this country. What is he going to do about it?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. I would like to pay tribute to the Children's Commissioner for her incredibly important work in highlighting some of these issues. It is incumbent on all of us in this House to look at what we can do to make a difference to every child. If we look back to 2010 and even before that, we have seen many young people leaving school without the kind of qualifications that we would want for our children. It is incredibly important to note that, although so many more children are now leaving school with the basic English and maths that we would want to see as an absolute minimum, the figure is not high enough. The key element to making that difference is ensuring that we continue to drive standards in schools. That is what we are looking at doing in terms of school improvement and working with organisations such as Ofsted to make a difference.

25. [901030] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): The latest Scottish Government figures show 95% of young people going on to a positive destination. I am proud to say that that is a record figure, and the best in the UK. Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming these figures, and will he tell me what plans are in place to ensure that England learns from Scotland's success?

Gavin Williamson: I would certainly like to join the hon. Gentleman in welcoming any good figures from any part of the United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. I always very much welcome the opportunity to see closer co-operation between schools in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to ensure that we learn from the very best practice across all four nations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I hope that we can now get through the Order Paper a little more quickly. This applies to Members on both sides.

Further Education Colleges: Future Skills

3. **Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure further education colleges are able to deliver skills required for the future. [901008]

11. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure further education colleges are able to deliver skills required for the future. [901016]

16. **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure further education colleges are able to deliver skills required for the future. [901021]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan): My hon. Friend will, I am sure, be glad to hear that further education is at the heart of this Government's plans to level up the skills of the nation by providing high-quality provision and delivering on key policies such as T-levels and apprenticeships. We have been supporting colleges to do this through investment in the further education workforce, and we will increase 16-to-19 funding in 2020-21 as well as investing in the college estate to ensure that colleges are well placed to deliver the skills our economy needs for the future.

Mark Fletcher: The Bolsover constituency currently has no sixth form or further education college. Does the Minister agree that if we are to unleash the potential of young people in my constituency, we need a proper post-16 pathway that is both local and linked to industry?

Gillian Keegan: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I know that he will do everything possible to increase opportunities for young people in Bolsover. Of course, every area needs good provision that meets the needs of local employers and learners. He will be aware that, in addition to the RNN group, there are two general colleges that recruit students from the Bolsover area: Chesterfield College and West Nottinghamshire College, both of which supply a bus for students travelling from Bolsover. There are also a number of independent training providers in the surrounding areas that offer a wide range of high quality apprenticeships.

Stephen Metcalfe: As the Government envoy for engineering, may I welcome last week's announcement of over £14 million to improve college leadership? Does my hon. Friend agree that quality leadership is a vital part of ensuring that colleges are able to deliver the engineering skills our economy will need in the future?

Gillian Keegan: I should like to start by paying tribute to the leadership that my hon. Friend has shown in championing the cause of apprenticeships in his role as a national apprenticeship ambassador, a role that I held myself. On the issue that he has raised, strong leadership and governance are critical to the success of colleges, and this funding will help colleges to invest in current and future leaders. South Essex College, which has campuses around the south Essex area, is just one example of how good leadership can deliver for local businesses and for young people, including many of my hon. Friend's own constituents.

Alexander Stafford: As the Minister is aware, the Dinnington campus, run by the RNN group in Rother Valley, is set to close after over-expanding. What support can she provide to those who are currently studying at the Dinnington campus to ensure that their studies are unaffected and that Rother Valley continues to have a leading FE establishment?

Gillian Keegan: The Further Education Commissioner and the Skills Funding Agency provide a wide range of support to colleges, and both are working closely with the group to discuss the implications of the college's decision to close its campus. It is essential that learning is not disrupted and that good access is maintained, with support for all students. I know that my hon. Friend has already met the FE Commissioner to discuss his concerns, and I will ensure that he is kept closely briefed as we work with the college to ensure that there is good access to further education in the Rother Valley.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am interested to know how much more money the Minister has to throw at T-levels before she accepts that they have created a qualification that is undeliverable in rural areas and in areas dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises, that has been rejected by colleges—including Scarborough Sixth Form College, which the Secretary of State attended—and, worst of all, that fails to offer equality of opportunity for our young people and fails to deliver the skills upgrade that our country needs.

Gillian Keegan: T-levels represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put our technical education system on a par with the best in the world through a scheme that is equal to traditional academic routes. We are just at the start of the T-level journey, and I urge the hon. Lady to support this important change in our technical education provision.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister spoke earlier about the importance of investment in the FE workforce, but many lecturers in FE are working part time on insecure contracts. When will the Government make sure the funding stream is secure enough for FE colleges to recruit people who will actually be able to spend time investing in their career and in their pupils?

Gillian Keegan: Of course, the workforce in FE colleges are a vital part of delivering the high-quality turnaround we want in our technical education. We are increasing the funding in FE colleges, and we have also increased funding specifically for workforce development. These are independent organisations, of course, so we do not set the pay and salary scales.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Apprenticeships are down 46% since the introduction of the levy. What will the Minister do in National Careers Week to turn that around?

Gillian Keegan: Apprenticeships are at the heart of our vision for a world-class technical education system, and we have specifically focused on quality in the past year or so. High-quality starts have increased to 63% from 44% in the previous year. Quality is the most important thing, and we are pleased to say that the number of starts is increasing this year.¹

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend to her place, and I know she is passionate about this issue. Will she join me in welcoming the collaboration in my Mansfield constituency between West Notts College and Nottingham Trent University, which is bringing degree-level nursing qualifications to an area where the NHS is the biggest employer? Does she agree that collaboration between local education providers and business is exactly what we need if we are to fill the skills gap in communities like Mansfield?

Gillian Keegan: One of the key pillars of delivering the new reforms in technical education and further education is the fact that employers are working closely with existing colleges and FE institutions. It is vital that we bridge the gap between what education provides and what businesses need. In our NHS, providing new routes through nursing apprenticeships and nursing degrees that are local to providers is vital.

School Exclusions

4. **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking to tackle the increase in school exclusions. [901009]

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The Government back headteachers to create calm and safe schools by giving teachers the powers they need to enforce discipline and good behaviour. We are taking forward an ambitious programme of action on behaviour, exclusion and alternative provision, which will back headteachers to use exclusion, enable schools to support children at risk of exclusion and ensure that excluded children continue to receive a good education.

Sarah Jones: The Minister knows that school exclusions have increased by 70% since 2012, and he knows that children have not become 70% naughtier in that time. Something is going wrong with the system, and the consequence for society and individuals is extreme. We had a debate in Westminster Hall last week that he was kind enough to attend, but we did not have enough time to discuss all the issues. Will he be kind enough to meet me and members of the all-party parliamentary group on knife crime, which has done a report on the link

between crime and school exclusions? Perhaps the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson), who has done an excellent review of why some of these issues have occurred and what we can do about it, will also want to come.

Nick Gibb: I am very happy to host a meeting, and I would enjoy discussing these issues in greater detail. The hon. Lady will know, of course, that permanent exclusion, at 0.1%, is extremely low, and is actually lower than it was in 2006-07. The research on the link between exclusion and knife crime shows it is more complicated than simply a correlation because, for example, 83% of 16-year-old knife-possession offenders in 2013 had been persistently absent from education at some point during their school career. It is absence from school that is the key factor, which is why this Government so emphasise the importance of children attending school.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The Minister mentions 0.1%, but the Education Policy Institute found that there were 69,000 unexplained exits from school in 2017 alone. Does the Minister really believe that our schools are getting better when there is a crisis of more and more pupils leaving the system? The Minister has yet to commit to implementing the report from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson). Will he now commit to implementing all the recommendations of the Timpson review?

Nick Gibb: As I said in answer to the question from the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), the rate of exclusions today is lower than under the last Labour Government in 2006-07. We take the issues referred to in the Timpson report, such as off-rolling, very seriously. Off-rolling is unacceptable in any form, which is why we continue to work with Ofsted to define and tackle it. Ofsted already looks at the records of children taken off roll. Its new inspection framework, which came into force this September, has a strength and focus on off-rolling that we support.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): When they are used effectively, fixed-period exclusions can help to address the underlying causes of poor behaviour, but when they are not, they are not able to. For some children, that means up to 45 days in an academic year when they are on a succession of repeated exclusions, which is far too long to be out of school. Will my right hon. Friend agree to look at the recommendation in my review—along with the other 29—on how we can reduce that limit of 45 days at the same time as improving practice in this important area?

Nick Gibb: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his review of school exclusions. Both he and I support our headteachers in the use of exclusion, where appropriate, to ensure that they have good discipline in their schools. My hon. Friend is correct that it is possible for children to be excluded from school for 45 days in an academic year, though it is actually rare for children to reach that limit. In 2017-18, just 94 pupils were excluded from schools in England for 45 days in a single year. The Government are considering these arrangements and we will make a further announcement about our plans in due course.

1. [Official Report, 16 March 2020, Vol. 673, c. 5MC.]

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Whether or not the numbers have decreased since the last Government were in office, we still have around 40 children excluded from our schools every day, at a cost of some £370,000 per child. We know that 58% of young prisoners were permanently excluded from school. These excluded children are being left behind—only around 1% get five or more GCSEs, if they get any at all. What is my right hon. Friend doing? Has he seen the report from the Education Committee in the last Parliament on transparency regarding numbers of exclusions and on schools being partially accountable for the pupils whom they exclude?

Nick Gibb: My right hon. Friend is right. We know that we have to give headteachers the tools to ensure that we have safe, calm environments in our schools. No headteacher excludes without giving the matter very careful consideration, with permanent exclusions used only as a very last resort. What is key is that exclusion from school must not mean exclusion from education, so timely access to high-quality alternative provision plays a critical role in improving excluded children's outcomes. Our objective is to improve the quality and capacity of alternative provision.

Bradford University: Medical School

5. **Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the potential merits of Bradford University establishing a medical school. [901010]

The Minister for Universities (Michelle Donelan): The Secretary of State for Education, who is in fact an esteemed alumnus of Bradford University, has not discussed the potential merits of the university establishing a medical school with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. The Government provide grant funding for eligible higher education providers to contribute towards the cost of delivering medical degrees.

Naz Shah: The truth is that the last Conservative Government did not engage with any university in the whole of Yorkshire when they were planning their medical schools. Perhaps now, given that the Tory buzzword is “levelling up”, the Minister might level up Bradford University and Yorkshire, and work with and agree to meet the university, which is very ready to train up medics, given that post-Brexit Britain will have a skills shortage.

Michelle Donelan: The University of Bradford did contribute a bid in 2017. That process subsequently produced five brand new medical schools, which have increased our capacity by 1,500 medical places. Unfortunately, the University of Bradford's application was unsuccessful, but it is not true to say that the Department did not engage with the university, and I am more than happy to visit it.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is wonderful to hear about the plans at the University of Bradford. In addition, the University of Worcester is developing plans for a three counties medical school, which would cover Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. May I urge my hon. Friend also to look into working with the Department of Health and Social Care to support that bid?

Mr Speaker: I think you can answer about Bradford.

Michelle Donelan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We are excited about all the opportunities that are developing around the country. The NHS people plan, which has considered options for growing the medical workforce, will be published later this year.

Mr Speaker: Especially in Bradford, don't worry.

Free School Holiday Activities and Meals

6. **Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase the provision of free school holiday (a) activities and (b) meals for children living in poverty. [901011]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford): This lunchtime, 1.3 million children sat down for a healthy, nutritious free school meal. Last summer, about 50,000 children took part in our holiday activities and food programme. Furthermore, our manifesto commits £1 billion for more wraparound and holiday childcare places from 2021, and we have already started working on the details.

Nadia Whittome: The funding for the Government's holiday activities and food programme is a drop in the ocean, given that in Nottingham alone nearly 11,000 children used food banks for emergency supplies in the past year. Does the Minister acknowledge the sheer scale of child poverty and hunger, which has boomed on this Government's watch? Will she outline how this Government scheme is at least targeting the areas of the country that are most in need?

Vicky Ford: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. All the evidence shows that work offers families the best opportunity to move out of poverty and towards self-reliance, which is why it is such good news that there are 730,000 fewer children in workless households now than a decade ago—that is a record low. Our programme of holiday food and activities is already helping about 50,000 children, and the successful bidders for next summer will be announced shortly.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): May I welcome the new Ministers to their places?

It is a damning indictment of this Government that the United Nations found children in our country regularly turning up to school with empty stomachs, with more than 2 million suffering from food poverty. Hungry children struggle to learn, so it is shocking to see reports that the Chancellor is considering scrapping free school meals in the upcoming Budget. I know that the Secretary of State stated earlier that he would make representations to the Chancellor, but will he state categorically today that he would resign rather than implement such cuts? While he is at it, should he not also adopt our proposals for free school breakfasts, which I know he once supported?

Vicky Ford: The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue of a healthy breakfast, because we know that a healthy breakfast helps children to concentrate, learn and reach their potential in life. That is why we are already investing up to £35 million in our breakfast clubs programme; 1,800 schools in more disadvantaged areas have already

signed up. The programme can be extended to nearly 2,500 schools, and Family Action has estimated that about 280,000 children are already receiving a free breakfast through the programme every day.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): For more than a decade, I have worked with the charity Magic Breakfast to open school breakfast clubs across the country in order to improve the life chances of our young people. What support can my hon. Friend give to expand that breakfast club programme so that it reaches even more young people?

Vicky Ford: Many schools have already opened successful breakfast clubs, and we are investing up to £35 million to improve that provision in disadvantaged areas. Schools are free to use their budgets to fund breakfast clubs. May I also remind my hon. Friend of our manifesto commitment of £1 billion for more wraparound and holiday childcare places from next year?

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the measure of the Government's commitment is in their record? We have already extended eligibility for free school meals on no fewer than three occasions. Hundreds more schools are set to benefit from the national breakfast programme and thousands more children are set to benefit from holiday activities this coming summer.

Vicky Ford: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our programme is already operating in a number of areas and he is right that it has been extended. We can use the programme to help to find out how we can best support children and families during the holidays. A full evaluation of the 2019 programme will be published shortly.

EU Educational and Research Programmes

7. **Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP):** What plans he has to ensure UK access to EU educational and research programmes after the transition period; and if he will make a statement. [901012]

12. **John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP):** What plans he has to ensure UK access to EU educational and research programmes after the transition period; and if he will make a statement. [901017]

The Minister for Universities (Michelle Donelan): I stress that the UK remains open to participation in elements of Erasmus+ on a time-limited basis, provided that the terms are in the UK's interests. The UK will consider a relationship in line with non-EU member state participation in certain EU programmes, including Horizon Europe.

Dr Whitford: As the Minister says herself, the proposal for the future EU relationship suggests that the Government will take part in only certain elements of Erasmus+ and only for a time-limited period. Will she explain what it is about the Erasmus+ scheme that the Secretary of State thinks is not beneficial? Why on earth would participation be on just a temporary basis?

Michelle Donelan: I am sure that we can all agree that the Erasmus scheme offers a wonderful opportunity for international mobility for students. However, it is vital that we utilise our exit from the European Union to ensure that such programmes deliver for everybody in our country, which is why we will make sure that we proceed in our best interests and why we will sign up only if it is on the terms of the UK's interests.

John Mc Nally: The Scottish Government and partners have invested around £85 million in a state-of-the-art college campus in my constituency of Falkirk. Students from all over Europe attend the Forth Valley College. EU students bring a huge economic benefit to the college, Falkirk, Scotland and the UK, and they enrich our institutions, both culturally and academically. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that the UK remains open, attractive and competitive for EU students in the years ahead? I would like the Minister to develop her answer a wee bit more about what steps are being put in place.

Michelle Donelan: We are committed to remaining open to participating in elements of the Erasmus scheme, as I have pointed out. The Government are very positive about the benefits of students coming to this country, which was exactly why the Prime Minister announced that there will be a graduate option from 2021 so that graduates will be able to work in this country for the two years following their degree.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I welcome the Minister to her place—and, indeed, all the new Ministers to their places.

Any participation in EU funding programmes will no doubt depend on the UK's position regarding EU students. As universities are currently recruiting for the academic year starting in 2021, they need clear answers, so will the Minister confirm whether EU students will be treated as international students from 2021 in respect of their fee and immigration status?

Michelle Donelan: I am sure that the hon. Member can appreciate that the details are currently being negotiated. We will update the House as soon as possible.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): It should be clear to the House that our universities have an enviable reputation around the world. Indeed, research and education are two of our greatest exports. In the light of that, what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that that success not only continues but increases?

Michelle Donelan: This is essential. We have a target for 2030 of 600,000 international students coming to this country. We do value their importance as an international facilitator in our education system.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): A total of 32% of 15 to 30-year-olds from the UK can read and write in a foreign language, compared with 79% in France, 91% in Germany and an incredible 99% in Denmark. Does the Minister believe that cutting off access to programmes such as Erasmus will boost or further worsen those dismal figures?

Michelle Donelan: I am sorry that the hon. Member does not seem to have listened because we are going to try to participate in Erasmus, and nobody has talked today about cutting off our ability to do so.

Children's Social Care

8. **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve children's social care. [901013]

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): We are working to make sure that more local authorities are rated as outstanding, with fewer failing, and we are also strengthening the social work profession. As was set out in our manifesto, we will undertake a bold, independent review of our children's social care system so that we can go even further to provide children with the support that they need.

Greg Smith: In Buckinghamshire, our hard-working social workers travel around 1 million miles a year to undertake statutory visits and court attendances. That is considerably more than occurs in urban environments, especially as the family court is now out of area. What further steps can my right hon. Friend take to ensure that children's social services are fully supported in rural communities?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point. That is why we have committed to putting an extra £1 billion into children and adults' social care. I would be happy to speak to him about what more we can do to support rural counties and the delivery of these vital services.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): If the Secretary of State really is serious about improving children's social care, can he explain why a letter sent to him in January, which was signed by 631 experts and me, to request an independent, whole-system review has been completely ignored?

Gavin Williamson: I will certainly take up the issue of why that correspondence was not responded to immediately. I am sure that the hon. Lady recognises that it was in our manifesto—we have already announced it—that there will be an independent review looking at the care system for our children, and that is something that she will perhaps welcome.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Children's social care in Northamptonshire had been failing for some time such that the Government set up a children's commissioner to guide the service into an independent children's trust. This is an extremely serious issue for Northamptonshire. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the children's trust has the resources it needs to sort the system out?

Gavin Williamson: We will certainly undertake to make that commitment. The challenges in Northamptonshire were grave, and it was right that the Government decided to take the action that they did to ensure that we have the very highest quality of services for all children in the county.

Special Educational Needs and Disability

9. **Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the support provided to children and young people with special educational needs and disability. [901014]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford): Every child should receive a world-class education, no matter what their needs. That is why we are investing £7.2 billion this coming year to support those with the most complex needs—an increase of £780 million. Local performance varies across the country, so we are reviewing the entire SEND system and working closely with stakeholders and parents.

Fleur Anderson: I am glad to hear that the system is being reviewed. Cuts to council funding for special educational needs and disability services mean that children in Wandsworth are waiting too long for a diagnosis and for an education, health and care plan. Then, too many do not receive the support they need that is outlined in that plan. This common experience of parents and children was backed up by a recent Ofsted report that said that Wandsworth's EHC plans were of poor quality and that there were significant concerns. There is a cost to cuts. Will the Secretary of State ensure that there is significant additional funding for councils in the Budget for special educational needs and disability services?

Vicky Ford: The London Borough of Wandsworth will receive £47.8 million in high-needs funding in the next year, which is an increase of 8.6%. The performance of local areas in producing education, health and care plans is variable, but over 30 areas do get more than 90% of plans done within the 20-week period which, I note, is a reduction from the 26-week period under the previous Labour Government. Performance does vary across the country. Where it is not good enough, we support and challenge local areas to improve.

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister apologise for her Government's imposition of such irresponsibly severe cuts that the Care Quality Commission has now found that one third of all services for special needs children have significant failings? After 10 years of this kind of failure, what is her plan to sort this national crisis out?

Vicky Ford: As I have just said, there has been an increase of £780 million in additional high-needs funding next year, which is a 12% increase. Performance does vary, but we know that only because of the joint Ofsted-CQC inspections that this Government introduced. The reports do not give a pass-fail judgment, and many of them show strength. Furthermore, when they have been re-inspected following the work of the Government, six of the 17 councils have made sufficient progress in every area.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Opposition are getting upset because Government Front Benchers are taking too long. They should speed up in future.

Topical Questions

T1. [901031] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): This week, I announced a new set of behaviour hubs that are being introduced right across the country to make sure that there are the very highest standards of behaviour in every single one of our schools.

As with all Government Departments right across the country, we are making sure that there are regular communications about the coronavirus. We are communicating to all educational settings to make sure that they have a clear understanding of some of the challenges in dealing with the virus. We are advising that schools should stay open unless advised otherwise by Public Health England, and we are planning for a reasonable worst-case scenario, working closely with other Departments and, of course, Public Health England.

Kate Osborne: In my constituency of Jarrow, headteachers have told me that they are struggling to make ends meet. Cuts to funding for their schools have resulted in overcrowded classrooms, and teaching and non-teaching staff being cut. Buildings are crumbling. Does the Minister believe, like me, that our teachers and children deserve better?

Gavin Williamson: What we are seeing in the hon. Lady's constituency is a 6.1% cash increase in what is going to be going to schools and a 4.8% per pupil increase. That is a positive step forward in making sure that every school benefits from the increases in funding that we announced last year.

T2. [901032] **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the apprenticeship levy has been a fantastic success for many young people across the country—not least for constituents of mine in North Norfolk? What can he do to help more small and medium-sized businesses take up the levy, to ensure that more young people can unlock their potential?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend raises an important point about how we make sure that we get the highest level of training to every business—not just to large businesses but to the small and medium-sized enterprise sector as well. The apprenticeship levy has revolutionised how people think about apprenticeships, and we need to continue to build on that. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to make sure that SMEs get the benefit.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Across the country, hard-working staff in universities and colleges have been forced to strike against effective cuts to their pay and attacks on education that hurt students and staff alike. So far, the Education Secretary's response to the crisis is much like the Health Secretary's response to the coronavirus: wash your hands of it and hope it goes away. Will Ministers finally step in, respond to the urgent letter they received from the University and College Union, urge universities to make a fair offer, and ensure that next week's Budget gives teachers in colleges the pay that they deserve?

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue. I want to see a resolution to this matter as swiftly as possible, and I urge both parties to come to a resolution. The people suffering most of all are the students whose studies are being impacted. We need a

resolution as swiftly as possible, and I urge both the unions and the universities to get an agreement within the next few weeks.

T4. [901034] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): In answer to written question 8315, my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) confirmed that the rate of funding for 16 to 19-year-olds of £4,000 per student in 2013 would be worth £4,435 last year and £4,760 this year. However, the funding is at £4,188. Do Ministers agree that we should increase the rate, as recommended by the Select Committee on Education?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Gillian Keegan): As my hon. Friend knows, the Government have announced increased funding for 16 to 19-year-olds of £400 million in 2020-21. That is the biggest injection of new money in a single year for a decade. As our manifesto made clear, there will be further investment in T-levels and further education college estates, and we will of course be looking again at further education funding as part of future spending reviews.

T3. [901033] **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Will Ministers review the operation of the free school meals cash card, because I believe that £2.30 a day is often not enough for the cost of the school meal? I also understand that the money is not roll-overable and Feeding Britain estimates that this means that £88 million went unspent in one year, when it should have been spent feeding children from low-income families.

Vicky Ford: The free school meals factor in the national funding formula will be increased in line with inflation, which is forecast at 1.84%. I will look into the issue further.

T5. [901035] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Barnet has not benefited from the transitional funding for maintained nursery schools. As a result, our maintained nursery schools are under severe financial stress. May I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that Barnet is included in the long-term funding solution that he has promised for the maintained nursery school sector?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend has been campaigning on this issue on behalf of her constituents for a long time. An extra £60 million has been provided for the coming financial year. I know that we are going to be meeting shortly to discuss the particular circumstances that arise in Barnet, and look forward to working with her to find a solution for the maintained nursery schools in her constituency.

T9. [901039] **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): According to the Department's own statistics, Sheffield Music Hub is one of the best in the country, and—alongside Sheffield Music Academy—the only one of its kind not to have a permanent home. There are ambitious plans to create a centre for inclusion and excellence in music education in Sheffield. Will the Minister agree to meet, or ideally visit, the team to see for himself how the project could transform thousands of lives and benefit our city?

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady and her team. The Government regard music education as hugely important. We are allocating £75 million a year to music hubs up and down the country, and hundreds of thousands of children are being introduced to musical instruments through that programme. I would be delighted to have further discussions on this subject.

T6. [901036] **Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): Derwentside College in Consett in my constituency is rated No. 1 in the north-east for satisfaction by both students and local employers. What are the Government doing to support great technical and vocational colleges such as Derwentside to deliver more for students in the future?

Gavin Williamson: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that he did when he was at the Department for Education. I know that this topic is something that he feels very passionately about. The roll-out of T-levels, the expansion of technical and vocational qualifications, and the extra money that we are putting into colleges all make a vital difference. What makes Derwentside College successful is collaboration with local employers—ensuring that it is training people with the right skills really to contribute to the local labour market.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): Last week, one of my local schools in Ilford South had to strike against forced academisation. Will the Minister consider writing to the Catholic diocese of Brentwood and asking it to consider this unwarranted intervention, which does not have the support of the parents or the teachers at that school? Already this year there has been a mass exodus of staff from the teaching profession because of the threat of forced academisation—not just in Ilford, but across the country.

Nick Gibb: Academisation takes place when a school is put into special measures by Ofsted. We want high standards throughout our school system. The academies programme has resulted in standards improving in schools. When we came into office in 2010, 68% of schools were graded good or outstanding. Today that figure is 86%—in part due to the very successful academisation programme.

T7. [901037] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): The Minister will be aware that 9 March is Commonwealth day. Will he undertake to ensure that all schools across the United Kingdom celebrate the Commonwealth's history, that assemblies and special lessons take place, and that schools are encouraged to fly the Commonwealth flag for Commonwealth week?

Nick Gibb: I know that my hon. Friend feels very strongly about this issue. The curriculum gives teachers and schools the freedom to use specific examples from history to teach pupils about the history of Britain and the wider world, and this does mean that there are opportunities to teach pupils about the Commonwealth and Britain's overseas territories.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): When will the Department start mapping the provision of essential services for children with special needs? How else will the Minister recognise that the average spend per child for speech and language therapy is 90p in the west midlands as opposed to £7.29 in London?

Gavin Williamson: We are very happy to look at any suggestions that the hon. Gentleman can put forward, because as part of our special educational needs review we are trying to see how we can best deliver these services for the benefit of every child. If he has some suggestions, I ask him to send them to me.

T10. [901040] **James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): In my constituency of Bury North, we need to strengthen specialist mainstream provision for primary-age children with autistic spectrum conditions and children with social, emotional and mental health needs. Will the Secretary of State or the relevant Minister agree to meet me and representatives of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council to discuss how we can fund two new bases to provide much-needed support for some of the most vulnerable pupils in my town?

Vicky Ford: I thank my hon. Friend for his concern for children with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs. We do understand that there can be challenges for these children in achieving their potential in education, although the vast majority of them go to mainstream schools. Specialist bases within the schools can be a help. We have invested £365 million through the special provision capital fund. I am very happy to meet him to discuss the situation in Bury.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What are the Government doing to ensure that there are enough educational psychologists to assess the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities?

Vicky Ford: I remind the hon. Lady that we are investing a further £780 million in the special educational needs area, and we do work in this area to improve the quality of these skills.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Achieving net zero emissions and the green jobs of the future means having enough skilled workers in electric vehicle maintenance and zero-energy-bill homes construction, so what are the Government doing to make sure that the supply of these vital workers meets the growing demand?

Gillian Keegan: My hon. Friend is a powerful voice for the environment, and it is no surprise to find that in this area he is right. The UK is leading a new green industrial revolution, and we need a workforce with the technical skills for the future. That is why we have introduced T-levels. We are also investing £290 million in 20 institutes of technology, which will be the pinnacle of technical training.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Scottish Government have undertaken a review to consider the experiences and outcomes for young people in care in Scotland. Will the UK Government carry out a similar exercise in England?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady will be delighted to hear that we are carrying out an independent care review. Picking up on the comment made by her colleague, the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), it is really important that all four nations of the United

Kingdom work together and share best practice, and that we look at how we can provide better outcomes for all those children in care.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to my constituency last week, where he saw MIRA Technology Institute and North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College working together. I raised with him and his team another educational establishment in my constituency, Hinckley Academy and John Cleveland Sixth Form Centre, where the roof leaks significantly when it rains, causing half of its lessons to be cancelled. Will he meet me to discuss how we could do something about this?

Gavin Williamson: Of course I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. It was great to be able to join him at North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College and see the amazing work that is being done. I know that he is an incredible champion for all the schools in his constituency, and I look forward to working to find a solution to the problems that he has outlined.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Like many parents up and down the country, I am looking at my phone every five minutes to see whether my daughter has got the place at her first-choice secondary school that we are hoping for. Will the Secretary of State send his best wishes to all the children in Croydon who are waiting to hear and let us know what he is doing in areas of high demand to ensure that people get their first choices?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady highlights a concern at a worrying time for many parents, as they wait in eager anticipation. While I cannot guarantee her child the place that she wishes for, as that would be improper, I very much hope that she gets it. It is vital that we expand the range of educational establishments. That is why the free school programme has been so important not only in areas of London but right across the country, ensuring that we level up in terms of the quality of educational provision.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Adam Afriyie, come on in!

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): In the UK, we have an ample supply of creative and talented people working for our video and online gaming companies. Those companies have mastered the art of creating addictive games such as “Grand Theft Auto”, where young people are driven to the next level. Would it not be great if, in education, our children were refusing to leave their games consoles because they were driven to the next grade for their GCSEs? What is the Department doing to incentivise the industry to create addictive educational games that will help our children improve their scores?

Nick Gibb: Our tech strategy seeks to support teachers to make the right choices about technology that meet the needs of their school and the challenges they face. It was this Government who replaced the ICT curriculum with a computer science curriculum, so that we can lead the world in creating the next generation of computer programmers.

Ministerial Code

3.31 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent apparent breaches of the ministerial code and whether he intends to refer the matter to the Cabinet Office for further investigation.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): On Saturday 29 February, the Cabinet Secretary and head of the civil service received and accepted the resignation of Sir Philip Rutnam as permanent secretary at the Home Office. On the same day, the Cabinet Secretary announced that Shona Dunn—then the second permanent secretary at the Home Office, responsible for borders, immigration and citizenship—would become acting permanent secretary with immediate effect.

Allegations have been made that the Home Secretary has breached the ministerial code. The Home Secretary absolutely rejects those allegations. The Prime Minister has expressed his full confidence in her, and having worked closely with the Home Secretary over a number of years, I have the highest regard for her. She is a superb Minister doing a great job.

This Government always take any complaints relating to the ministerial code seriously, and in line with the process set out in the ministerial code, the Prime Minister has asked the Cabinet Office to establish the facts. As is usual, the independent adviser on Ministers' interests, Sir Alex Allan, is available to provide advice to the Prime Minister.

It is long-standing Government policy not to comment on individual personnel matters, in order to protect the rights of all involved. What I can and will say is that I know that the dedicated ministerial team at the Home Office and their superb civil servants will continue their critical work on the public's behalf, keeping our country protected from the terror threat, bearing down on criminals who seek to do our communities and our country harm, and delivering a fair, firm immigration system that works in the interests of the British people. The Home Office works tirelessly to keep our citizens safe and our country secure, and we all stand behind the team leading that vital work.

Jeremy Corbyn: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to you for granting this urgent question. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reply, but my question was to the Prime Minister. Could we have an answer as to where the Prime Minister is this afternoon? When an urgent question to the Prime Minister is granted, one would expect the Prime Minister to come to this House to answer the question that has been put to him.

It is the Prime Minister's job to oversee the ministerial code. If the serious allegations raised by the permanent secretary at the Home Office, Sir Philip Rutnam, about the Home Secretary's conduct are true—including "shouting and swearing, belittling people, making unreasonable and repeated demands"—that would clearly constitute a breach of the ministerial code.

The Prime Minister himself, in his foreword to the code, said there must be "no bullying and no harassment".

Those are his words in his foreword to the ministerial code, so why, without a proper investigation, has the Prime Minister defended the Home Secretary, calling her "fantastic" and saying he "absolutely" has confidence in her?

It is not enough just to refer this to the Cabinet Office. The Government must now call in an external lawyer, as has quite rightly been suggested by the union of senior civil servants, the First Division Association. A Minister in breach of the ministerial code cannot remain in office and should be dismissed.

These are just the latest in a series of allegations that suggest an unacceptable pattern of behaviour. According to reports in our media, a number of the Home Office clashes have involved demands from the Home Secretary some of which were considered illegal by officials—illegal by officials. Most disturbingly, the Home Secretary reportedly asked officials to reverse a court ruling halting the deportation of 25 individuals to Jamaica last month. If that is the case, was the Home Secretary not trying to push officials into breaching a ruling by the Court of Appeal?

Is it now this Government's policy to bully officials into flouting court rulings? Is it not the truth that this is a Government led by bullies, presided over by a part-time Prime Minister, who not only cannot be bothered to turn up, but simply will not take the vital action required when the very integrity and credibility of the Government are on the line?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for his questions. The Prime Minister is of course in Downing Street, leading our response to the coronavirus, implementing the people's priorities and making sure that the manifesto promises at the general election are delivered. He is governing in the national interest, delivering for the British people. As the Minister responsible for the civil service, I am pleased to be here in order to be able to uphold the ministerial code and to underline our thanks to our superb civil service for the work it does every day, implementing the manifesto commitments on which we were elected.

The Leader of the Opposition asks if this investigation is robust and fit for purpose. Of course it is. The ministerial code is absolutely clear, and the Cabinet Secretary, who polices it alongside the Prime Minister, also has access to Sir Alex Allan to ensure that every part of the ministerial code is adhered to. One of the things that is clear about this Government is that we believe that Ministers, special advisers and civil servants need to work together with confidence, with clarity and in a co-ordinated fashion to ensure that our priorities are delivered.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to media reports. I would have thought that he of all people would be wary of believing what he reads in the newspaper. We make no apology for having strong Ministers in place to ensure the effective delivery of public priorities. There is a stark contrast between the actions that the Home Secretary and her colleagues are taking to keep this country safe, and the danger in which our country would have been placed if he had won the general election and his approach towards national security had been followed.

The final thing that many will reflect on is that it is vitally important that all of us in this House uphold the highest standards of civility and respect for others.

[*Michael Gove*]

However, many people will look at the Opposition Front Bench and reflect on the fact that Labour MPs required armed police protection at their own party conference, and that the shadow Chancellor spoke of lynching Members of this House, and they will draw the conclusion that all of us need to reflect on the importance of restoring civility to public life before we throw around allegations like that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am expecting to run this urgent question for about 45 minutes.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am someone who strongly supports the work that the Home Secretary is doing to make sure we are secure and to have a new borders policy. Can the Government guarantee that this will be a quick process, so that we can get to an early answer and she can get on with the job?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend speaks for many in the country. The Home Secretary is doing a superb job. The new points-based immigration system is in line with what this country wants, and we want to make sure that this process is expedited in a fair way.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The circumstances surrounding the resignation at the weekend were unprecedented, although the Government seem to thrive on unprecedented circumstances. It seems that the Home Secretary may be trying to create a hostile environment inside the Home Office, as well as outside it. We in the House are all managers of staff, and every Member understands the rewards and challenges that brings. There is a world of difference between robust management and bullying, however, and only an independent investigation can establish which of the two has gone on. That is what the FDA union has called for, so why will the Government not agree to an independent investigation? What are they afraid of?

On the whereabouts of the Prime Minister, we know that in the past he was so afraid of the scrutiny of the House that he tried—unlawfully—to shut it down. Is he still afraid of the scrutiny of the House of Commons, or is he in hiding because we are about to lose another Cabinet Minister from one of the great offices of state?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for her question, and she knows that I have enormous respect and affection for the work she does. She is right to say that, as we are all managers of staff and public servants, we must be properly robust and exacting in ensuring that we do everything we can to deliver for those who put us here. All my ministerial colleagues know that their first responsibility is to the British people, and to delivering the manifesto on which we were elected.

The hon and learned Lady rightly said that it is important that any investigation is thorough, rapid, independent, and authoritative. The Cabinet Secretary will be leading the work in accordance with the ministerial code, and with access to the independent adviser, Sir Alex Allan, and that will ensure a proper and fair inquiry. On the presence of the Prime Minister, as I said earlier, the

Prime Minister is determined to ensure that across Government we fulfil our manifesto pledges, and it is right for him to lead that work. As the Minister responsible for the civil service, it is appropriate that I am here answering these questions.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): How does my right hon. Friend think that Margaret Thatcher would have got on if she had been subjected to the same smears and sexism as have been used against the current iron lady in the Home Office?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. We are all aware that progress in the past has depended on strong Ministers, and indeed strong Prime Ministers, setting exacting terms, but it has also depended on having a brilliant and able civil service that can act with confidence and provide candid advice. Those two important pillars of our constitution are at the heart of this Government's operation.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Sir Philip Rutnam's statement said that he received allegations about the Home Secretary's behaviour from other civil servants. Will the Minister say how many allegations there have been, from both within and without the Home Office, and will every one be investigated as part of this inquiry?

Michael Gove: As the right hon. Lady will appreciate, it would be improper for me to go into individual personnel cases, but every legitimately raised complaint will, of course, be investigated.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Anyone who has watched "Yes Minister" will know that profoundly felt differences of opinion can exist between civil servants on the one hand and Ministers on the other. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when a Minister or Secretary of State is implementing Government policy, that must prevail? Civil servants are Crown servants and, as I am sure they would agree, they really do have to carry out the will of the people.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right, and as I and my ministerial colleagues know, when implementing our manifesto commitments it is important that we are robust and clear about what is required, to ensure that we deliver for the British people. It is also true that the effective delivery of Government policy depends on candid advice from civil servants, and that relationship must therefore be one in which both sides respect each other's particular responsibilities, as I know is the case across Government.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman will know that it has now been almost two years since the Windrush scandal. Do the allegations made in relation to the Home Secretary relate to the publication of that long-overdue report? Will this debacle, and the loss of the permanent secretary, mean that that report will now be delayed even longer?

Michael Gove: I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman has been a formidable and effective advocate on behalf of the Windrush generation, but it is important for me to state that I have no evidence that any of the allegations

that may or may not have been made relate to the report. The report is being conducted entirely independently. I understand his anxiety, and the anxiety of many across the House, to see that report published as soon as possible. I know that that is the Government's wish as well.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend take a small piece of advice from me and my family, who have given over 150 years' work to the civil service of our great country? Civil servants give advice, and Ministers and Secretaries of State enact Government policy. The two should not get mixed up, so will he please give our support to our present Home Secretary?

Michael Gove: I am very, very grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a superb Minister. Of course, she is absolutely right. The ethos of public service that she characterises is at the heart of our effective constitution.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): In all my many years in this House, eight of them as a Minister in the Government, I do not think I have ever seen such a resignation announcement from a permanent secretary: actively calling his Secretary of State a liar, accusing her of bullying in the most gross terms, and feeling he had no option but to do so publicly. Clearly, something here has gone extremely wrong and it surely threatens the independence of the civil service if this rot is allowed to continue. What is the Minister, who has responsibility for the civil service, going to do to protect the integrity of the civil service from these kinds of ad hominem political attacks?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady was herself a distinguished Minister and I know how high was the regard in which she was held by her civil servants. I completely agree with her that it is vital that all of us seek to uphold the independence of the civil service. It is absolutely vital that the civil service is able to offer candid advice to Ministers. I know myself, having worked with the Home Secretary and others, that we have benefited from that candid advice in seeking to implement Government policy. However, I think it is also important to acknowledge that Sir Philip, a distinguished public servant, has indicated that he may initiate legal proceedings against the Government, so it would be inappropriate for me to say more about the particular statements he made on Saturday.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I believe we have an excellent and dynamic Home Secretary who deserves our unwavering support. Does the Chancellor recall, just a few months ago, Labour MP after Labour MP going on the record publicly telling us about vicious bullying and antisemitism in the Labour party? Should not the Leader of the Opposition therefore remove the plank from his own eye?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. First, the Home Secretary is doing an outstanding job. Secondly, while the Labour party remains under investigation from the Equality and Human Rights Commission for some of the practices that have occurred under the leadership of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), it is important that there is an appropriate sense of proportion and humility in his comments.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): If what the Minister has told us today is correct, then Philip Rutnam is being either severely misleading or widely mistaken. Which of those two is it?

Michael Gove: The first point I would make is that because Sir Philip has made a particular statement as a prequel to potential legal proceedings, it would be wrong for me to provide a commentary on his words. What I will say is that he is a distinguished public servant and I thank him for his service. It is also important for me to place on record my knowledge that the Home Secretary is an outstanding Home Secretary who deserves our support.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): What plans does my right hon. Friend have to reform the civil service to promote greater accountability?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. It is vital that we first acknowledge that the civil service does an outstanding job. If one looks over recent months at, for example, how the Department for Transport dealt with the collapse of Thomas Cook or the response of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency to recent flooding, we see people going above and beyond to serve the public. But all of us can do better in every area. I look forward to working with the Cabinet Secretary and other leaders of the civil service to ensure that we can support the civil service to do even better in the future.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The allegations of bullying on the part of a Cabinet Minister are incredibly serious. We all saw the breakdown of that relationship at the weekend and that requires an immediate investigation. However, the ministerial code also states that Ministers have

"a duty to give fair consideration and due weight to informed and impartial advice from civil servants".

There are now reports of an alleged hitlist of senior civil servants whom No. 10 is seeking to replace for political reasons—a list that reportedly included Sir Philip Rutnam. That is clearly incompatible with that duty. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether such a list exists?

Michael Gove: No such list exists. It is the case that having worked with a variety of permanent secretaries and other senior civil servants across Departments, I have personally benefited from their robust—sometimes very robust—advice, and I have always been happy to come to this House to acknowledge when I have been wrong and others have been right.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Is it not the case that this all started with briefings from unknown sources against the Home Secretary, not the other way around? My constituents want fair immigration and fairness for the taxpayer. They want 20,000 more police on our streets. Does this not have the nasty whiff of an establishment who are trying to stop these policies?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. I suspect that many people watching our debates and knowing that we are discussing home affairs and the Home Office will be asking, "Why are MPs not

[*Michael Gove*]

concentrating on improving our migration system? Why are MPs not doing more to ensure that our police are supported in the fight against organised crime? Why are MPs not making sure that we take an even stronger stance against terrorism?" It is vitally important, of course, that the ministerial code is upheld and defended, but it is also vitally important, as he points out, that the Government deliver for the people on their manifesto promises.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I gently caution the Minister against his two central arguments: first, that a strong and exacting Minister can pretty much get away with anything, and secondly, that the Home Secretary is charming, so that is all fine. The truth of the matter and the experience in this House—and my personal experience when I was a Minister—is that the way bullying normally happens is that somebody one minute is extremely charming, praises you to high heaven, and then the next day humiliates you in front of staff and colleagues or behind your back. That is the nature of bullying and I urge the Minister not to dismiss all this talk of bullying, because too many people out in the country still get bullied.

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We do not dismiss any allegations or concerns about bullying. It is vitally important that Ministers, special advisers and civil servants all work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. He is right that bullying can occur in any workplace and we must be vigilant about bullying behaviour, but I also say that simply because allegations have been raised or complaints have been made, it should not automatically be the case that people then, whether through trial by media or other means, attempt to besmirch the reputation of someone who is an outstanding public servant.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): The Home Secretary has been doing a fantastic job on child sexual exploitation and grooming gangs. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that Ministers will not find directions given to civil servants blocked or diverted?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend has done outstanding work in drawing attention to those issues, and it is the case that the work of the Home Office, its ministerial team and its superb civil servants goes on uninterrupted. One of the most important things that the Home Office can do is safeguard the most vulnerable in our society from the type of exploitation that she has so vigorously campaigned against.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Of course there is a world of difference between having a difference of opinion with somebody and being shouted down or humiliated by that person. We have a situation where impartial civil servants may feel that they cannot operate in an impartial way. How will the Minister guarantee that they can continue to do the job that they are supposed to do when they are concerned that their advice may result in bullying or abuse?

Michael Gove: It is my experience, and the experience of my ministerial colleagues, that the civil service is clear that it can offer robust, impartial advice and provide counters from time to time to propositions that are put

forward by Ministers, confident in the knowledge that we as Ministers respect the civil service for its independence and integrity. It is vitally important that anyone within public service who feels that the atmosphere in which they work is not conducive to that has the opportunity, which this Government provide, to make sure that their concerns are properly expressed and, if necessary, properly investigated.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition mentioned some press reports, but he never touched on the fact that the policies pursued by the Home Secretary were voted for overwhelmingly in December and are extremely popular. People voted for 20,000 extra police and a managed immigration system. Her real offence is that she has upset the Opposition and the establishment. Can my right hon. Friend guarantee, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) touched on, that this inquiry will have the necessary resources to be finished quickly so that our greatly respected Home Secretary can crack on and deliver the job we were voted in to do?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend, who was an outstanding Cabinet Minister, makes an important point. The comments from some—some—on the Opposition Benches suggest they are very happy when attention is shifted away from our focus on delivering our manifesto commitments, but we will not be diverted from delivering on those manifesto commitments, and the Home Secretary is committed to ensuring we do just that.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Is this not the honeymoon period for a new Government? In less than three months, the Government have lost a Chancellor and now the head of the Home Office. How does the Minister think things are going for the Government?

Michael Gove: It is probably fair to say that different people enjoy different types of honeymoon.

Chris Bryant: Tell us about it.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): No, please don't.

Michael Gove: A candidate for the deputy leadership of the Labour party, the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), invites me to go further than I would want to at this moment, but I shall not.

Angela Rayner *indicated dissent.*

Michael Gove: On a more serious note, the vital thing that we all recognise is that all Governments face entirely understandable and legitimate media scrutiny, but the real test of any Government is not what may preoccupy commentary at any given moment, but the delivery of the people's priorities, the keeping of manifesto pledges and making life better for the people of this country, and that is our relentless focus.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I was a civil servant at three Departments. On the day of the Brexit referendum result, I was told at the Foreign Office by multiple senior civil servants that it was the wrong

decision and that the people had got it wrong. Is it not right that sometimes, sadly, Ministers do need to be robust with civil servants to make sure the people's priorities are always delivered?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right. Of course, we will all have different opinions about the wisdom of particular policies as individual citizens, but as a Government we are united in delivering the manifesto on which we were elected. One of the strengths of our system of government is that the civil service works energetically and determinedly to ensure that the agenda of the Government of day agenda is fulfilled. I am grateful to the civil servants with whom I and other Ministers work for being so dedicated to ensuring that the public's wishes are followed.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary herself has admitted that her

“actions fell below the high standards that are expected of a secretary of state”

and

“below the standards of transparency and openness that I have promoted and advocated.”

Of course, that was the last time she had to resign from the Cabinet—as International Development Secretary. What has changed since then? Given the Minister's interest in the work of the Home Office, can he say who has replaced Shona Dunn as the second permanent secretary, given that person's important role in dealing with the immigration system?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman refers to events in the past, but it is also fair to say that since then we have had a general election at which the public endorsed our clear manifesto commitments to an additional 20,000 police officers, a points-based immigration system and a tougher line on organised crime. We need tough and determined Ministers pushing that agenda, but we also need great civil servants, which is why I am so glad that Shona Dunn, with whom I have had the pleasure of working in the past, is now leading in the Home Office.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): As a general point, recruitment for several permanent secretary posts is either ongoing or imminent. What role do the Government envisage Secretaries of State playing in that recruitment process, and would that role necessitate any changes to the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010?

Michael Gove: There are well-laid-out procedures for the role of Secretaries of State in the appointment of permanent secretaries. We have a superb cadre of permanent secretaries and senior civil servants, who I know will maintain the very high standards that characterise the work of our civil service.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Is it Government policy to comply with the rulings of the courts?

Michael Gove: You betcha.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what has traditionally been referred to as robust and forceful exchanges is too often routinely referred to as bullying nowadays, and that while there is no place for bullying within Government, effective government does need robust exchanges?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Let us consider Ministers who were successful in the past. No one would accuse Denis Healey, for example, of having been a shrinking violet when it came to ensuring that effect was given to the policies of the Labour Government of the day. However, it is also vital to acknowledge that in every workplace we must show respect to every individual and ensure that the people who work in the civil service are confident that their views are respected and their wellbeing safeguarded, and that is at the heart of everything that we do.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): May I ask the Minister what financial settlement was offered to Sir Philip Rutnam? What was the figure?

Michael Gove: It would be wrong for me to go into those details, given that Sir Philip—who was, as I mentioned earlier, a distinguished public servant—has indicated that he may initiate legal proceedings. I would not want to say, and I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want me to say, anything that would prejudice the appropriate conduct of those proceedings.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not the place of civil servants to choose their Secretaries of State, and that any attempt to do so is wrong?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The key—[*Interruption.*] I see no reason why, in a debate in which we are considering the importance of civility, people should attempt to criticise my hon. Friend for asking a fair and robust question. She has made a critically important point. It is Ministers who are publicly and electorally accountable. Ministers hold office as a result of a general election, and it is important that we respect the popular will and the popular mandate of any Government in making sure that the people's priorities are delivered.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Were any complaints received by Downing Street in respect of the conduct of the current Home Secretary when she was Secretary of State for International Development or when she was a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions, and if so, were they investigated?

Michael Gove: The inquiry that is proceeding will look at all complaints that may have been made. I cannot say more than that.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): A huge number of people in North Cornwall and around the country want the Government to deliver on the people's priorities. Is it not therefore right for Ministers to be tough and robust with their talented civil servants and officers to ensure that they can deliver on those priorities?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is vital for Ministers to be energetic and determined in pursuit of the manifesto commitments on which the Government were elected.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): As a former senior civil servant who served under various Ministers in both Labour and Conservative regimes, I find it hard to express how unprecedented the actions of Sir Philip Rutnam are. This is completely unheard of. Although the Minister will not comment on the specifics, will he at least accept that this is completely unprecedented? Does he also agree that there is a pattern of behaviour here, and that whether we are talking about the civil service, the BBC or the judiciary, this Government are more interested in picking fights than in doing the right thing for the country?

Michael Gove: With respect to the hon. Lady, who was a very distinguished civil servant, I disagree. The first thing to say is that because Sir Philip Rutnam has made it clear that he wishes to pursue a particular legal route, it would be wholly inappropriate for me to provide a commentary on his remarks. As for the hon. Lady's broader point, absolutely not: far from being pugilistic, the Government are concentrating on delivering on their manifesto commitments.

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should not be distracted by fielding stones thrown from the glass house of the Opposition Front Bench, but should concentrate on delivering the points-based immigration system? Will he assure me that that will still happen, notwithstanding the issue that is before us today?

Michael Gove: It absolutely will. The Minister for Security has been working with other ministerial colleagues in the Home Office to ensure that that vital reform of our immigration system proceeds apace.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Despite all the bluster from his Back Benchers, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that all the talk of manifesto pledges and implementation of policies is no excuse for a Secretary of State or Minister to behave how they want or to bully and intimidate people? Also, can he confirm that the Government are not beholden to Dominic Cummings' plans to disrupt and dismantle the entire civil service?

Michael Gove: I am not aware of any such plans. It is not bluster; it is an absolutely key democratic commitment to fulfil our manifesto pledges, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that everyone deserves to be treated with courtesy and civility in public life, and Ministers across Government are committed to just that.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is predictable, sadly, that the Leader of the Opposition should accuse those on this side of the House of bullying when he himself is in charge of a party that is rife with it, and I find it shaming that he has made that allegation. I am a friend and colleague of the Home Secretary, and I find this leaking, innuendo and smear unacceptable, as I am sure we all do in this House. Surely there must be an internal procedure to ensure that this is done behind

closed doors. If there is evidence of bullying, fine. If there is not, the matter will have been dealt with. Can we please ensure that this is done quickly?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is vital that this investigation is concluded as quickly as possible in the interests of everyone involved, so that we can concentrate on ensuring that no justice is delayed, and no justice is denied.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Has the Home Secretary ever asked officials in her Department to act in breach of court rulings?

Michael Gove: I have absolutely no reason to believe that that is the case.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there seems to be a pattern involving the appointment of female Home Secretaries and vicious briefings against them in the media? Is it possible that some of these unelected men have a problem with taking instructions from powerful women?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are fortunate in this country to have had a succession of strong female Home Secretaries. Jacqui Smith, the former Member for Redditch; my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May); Amber Rudd, the former Member for Hastings and Rye; and now my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) have all been distinguished public servants. They all demonstrate the evidence that the job of Home Secretary is exacting, and we are lucky to have had four powerful and effective women performing that role.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that everyone has a duty to treat colleagues with respect, but that we ought not to take lectures from the Labour leadership on how to deal with bullying and harassment?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The experiences of Luciana Berger and Louise Ellman remind us all that the Labour party has a job to do to ensure that bullying is removed from its own ranks in order to improve the health of our democratic life.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): My right hon. Friend has acquitted himself well on the Front Bench in explaining the circumstances of this investigation. The Home Secretary has our full support in implementing our policies, but will my right hon. Friend remind the House whether there is an ongoing investigation into the leaks from the civil service about the Home Secretary?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is important that everyone in public life behaves with the maximum degree of civility, courtesy and consideration to others. It is also important, however, that confidentiality is respected during the robust discussions that take place between Ministers, special advisers and officials, and leaks are therefore to be deprecated.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): We on this side of the House are certainly not frit of strong women. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the demanding

work between Ministers and officials is vital and that we could not begin to accomplish things and deliver people's priorities without the fantastic minds of those in the civil service?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend gets the balance absolutely right. Effective government, whether by Conservative or Labour Prime Ministers, has been driven by having strong Ministers who are exacting and demanding, and by having robust and professional civil servants who provide impartial advice with full integrity.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that allegations, when made, are just allegations—allegations that must be carefully investigated—and that, at all costs, we must avoid any sense of a trial by media?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When there are briefings and counter-briefings, the most important thing is to ensure that the facts are established and that we, as a Government, uphold the highest standards in public life and ensure that the public whom we serve have the manifesto pledges they want to see implemented, implemented energetically and in full.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly says that civil servants have the right to give good advice without fear or favour but, similarly, Ministers have the right to expect at least a modicum of competence from their civil servants in delivering on their policies. Too often, the reward for serial incompetence is an interdepartmental cha-cha to another role in another Department. If not in the ministerial code, will he assure me there are robust measures in place to hold civil servants to account more accountably?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Ministers are rightly accountable here at the Dispatch Box and, at general elections, at the ballot box. Our civil servants ensure that the policies on which we stand, and for which we stand, are delivered effectively but, as Ministers, we also need to do everything to ensure that civil servants are supported to provide the most efficient service possible. That work is ongoing, and the Cabinet Secretary and others are ensuring we do everything we can to make sure that civil servants have the support and the capacity required to be as efficient as possible.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): It may be a bit of my northern bias, but I know that what the media report on here in London does not necessarily reflect what people are talking about in my constituency of Bishop Auckland and, I am sure, in many constituencies represented by my hon. and right hon. Friends.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that this issue should not become a distraction from delivering on our manifesto, which was overwhelmingly supported by our communities, and delivering a points-based immigration system and more police?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course it is important that, in Whitehall and Westminster, high standards are upheld by everyone involved in delivering for the public, but our most important duty is to make sure that the people of Bishop Auckland have the policies for which they voted implemented effectively.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall the stories of alleged phone throwing and shouting at officials by a former Prime Minister? Does he remember which party that former Prime Minister represented?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend invites me to go down memory lane, and the point he makes is a fair one. People who are dedicated to doing their best for the public have, in the past, occasionally shown a degree of exasperation. As we look back, we can learn from them and say that their commitment to public service was admirable but that we all need to make sure that we treat those with whom we work with appropriate respect.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the steps he is taking in tackling this head-on, but what does he intend to do, as part of his reforms of the civil service, to make sure that civil servants are accountable and are seen to be accountable?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Obviously, Ministers are directly accountable for the actions of their Department—that is the appropriate constitutional principle—but it is also right that we should work with the civil service to ensure that individuals of talent have an opportunity to contribute in every way. I am confident that the approach being taken by the Cabinet Secretary and others in the Cabinet Office to ensure we provide civil servants with all the support they need will ensure that the civil service is even better equipped in future to help us and, indeed, all future Governments to deliver.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend, like me, find it extraordinary that, at a time when uppermost in our constituents' minds are an international virus that will cause chaos, our many homes that are under water and the important trade negotiations that are about to start, the priority of the Opposition is to raise the resignation of a public servant of whom most of our constituents have never heard? Having sat here for several years watching industrial-scale bullying from the Chair, through which they remained silent, they go into overdrive the minute the allegations involve a strong woman who does not curry favour with their stereotype.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is clear sighted and robust in expressing his point of view, and I know that there will be many people who will thank him for being so candid.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): With the general election being so recent, the clear demand from the general public is to deliver on immigration and law and order. We on the Government Benches have got it. Is my right hon. Friend certain that the civil service—they are an excellent civil service—have also listened to the general public and will deliver on their priorities?

Michael Gove: One thing that I should say is that part of my role before the general election was to make sure that this country was prepared if we had to leave the European Union without a deal. Of course, we have secured a good deal and we have got Brexit done, but during that process I was consistently impressed by the

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energy and determination of civil servants in making sure that we were ready for any eventuality. Many of those same civil servants who worked tirelessly in the civil contingency secretariat at that time are also now engaged, having dealt with flooding, in work to make sure that we deal effectively with the threat of the coronavirus. We simply could not keep this country safe and its people healthy and secure without their work, and it is really important that we all remember how dedicated those individuals and their colleagues are.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): We are enormously blessed to have an independent and diligent civil service, but would my right hon. Friend join me in speculating that if the Home Secretary had asked her Department to release more criminals from prison early or check fewer entrants at our border, we might not be having this conversation today?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend reminds us that the Home Secretary and, indeed, this whole Government were elected on the basis that we would take a tough line on law and order with a firm but fair migration policy, and making sure that that we implement those policies is absolutely critical.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Whatever the Government do in relation to this matter, may I please have some reassurances that we will not take any lessons from the Labour party? When they were faced with allegations from their staff in relation to misconduct and antisemitism, they did nothing but fill the airwaves, undermining them, questioning their credibility and doing what some might call bullying them.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. It is absolutely vital that we all do everything we can to ensure that we treat other people with civility. I know that in the debate over the future of the Labour party, the regrets that have been expressed about how antisemitism had been dealt with will, I am sure, be addressed by the future leadership of the Labour party to ensure that that stain is wiped away.

Airport Expansion

4.17 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on airport expansion.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Kelly Tolhurst): The Secretary of State is very sorry that he is unable to be in the Chamber today, but he is visiting the north, as part of a long-standing commitment, for discussions with northern leaders following the Government's takeover of the Northern franchise. It is a pleasure to respond on his behalf as Minister for aviation.

Airport expansion is a core part of boosting our global connectivity and levelling up the UK. It is crucial that vital infrastructure projects, including airport expansion, drive the whole UK economy. This is a Government who support airport expansion, but we will only permit it within our environmental obligations. This Government have been clear that Heathrow expansion is a private sector project that must meet strict criteria on air quality, noise and climate change, as well as being privately financed, affordable, and delivered in the best interest of consumers.

Last week, the Court of Appeal ruled that the designation of the airports national policy statement did not take account of the Paris agreement, of non-CO₂ emissions or of emissions post 2050, and therefore has no legal effect unless and until this Government carry out a review. This Government have taken the decision not to appeal the Court's judgment. We take seriously our commitments on the environment and reducing carbon emissions. It is a complex and important judgment that the Government need time to consider carefully. At this stage the Government will not be able to make any further comment beyond what was set out in the written statement on 27 February from the Secretary of State for Transport. Following the judgment, scheme promoters have applied for permission to the Supreme Court to appeal this decision. The Government will not comment on an ongoing legal case.

Aviation will play a key role in leading our economic growth and driving forward the UK's status as an outward-facing trading nation, attracting investment and growing our trade links with new overseas markets. Today, our airports support connections to more than 370 destinations, in more than 100 countries. Aviation drives trade, investment and tourism, contributing £14 billion to our economy and half a million jobs. The next decade will mark an unprecedented moment of opportunity for the UK. That is why we are investing in transport and infrastructure across the country: investing in our strategic road network; proceeding with HS2; and committing £5 billion of funding to improve bus and cycle services outside London.

Airport expansion is a core part of our commitment to global connectivity, but we are also a Government who are committed to a greener future, as the first major economy in the world to legislate for net zero emissions by 2050. This Government are therefore committed to working with the aviation sector to make sure we deliver on the opportunities available to us, while meeting our environmental commitments, be it on

modernisation of our airspace, innovation in sustainable fuels, or research and technology. This will ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for the whole country, and the House will be updated on next steps as soon as possible.

Andy McDonald: I welcome the Minister to her place. Last week, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Government's Heathrow expansion plan was unlawful as it failed to consider their Paris climate agreement commitments. I would like to thank those who fought the case, not the least of whom was the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan. That we must rely on environmental campaigners and the courts to protect us from illegal and environmentally destructive policies is clear evidence of the Government's lack of real concern about the climate crisis.

The Court's ruling was the right one. At the time of the airports national policy statement, Labour warned that the plans would cause the UK to miss its climate targets. We said that the Government were failing to take account of their commitments and that this would result in legal challenges—we were dismissed, but we were right. Why did the then Transport Secretary fail to consider the Paris climate agreement in his plans for airport expansion? What legal advice did he receive? Was the advice flawed or simply ignored? The Government said that they will not appeal the decision but will focus on "overall airport expansion". What does that mean?

If the Government accept the ruling, they should rule out airport expansion. It would be unacceptable to amend the national policy statement to include a reference to climate commitments while simultaneously paving the way for policies that will cause them to be missed. The Government should not hide behind the courts or industry; they must say what their policy now is. It is their NPS, not Heathrow airport's. Will the Government indemnify Heathrow Airport Limited and its backers for their wasted investment if runway three does not go ahead? What are the implications for the Government's planned almost £30 billion road building programme, which also fails to consider the UK's climate commitments? Those plans will significantly worsen emissions, at a time when there is a legal requirement for them to fall. What legal advice has the Minister had as to whether those astronomically expensive and environmentally destructive plans are not similarly unlawful?

It is already clear that the Government's transport policy of road building, cutting aviation tax and airport expansions, will put the UK even further off track to meet its climate targets. This is morally indefensible, and last week's ruling means it is likely to be legally indefensible too. Will the Minister take this as a wake-up call, by ruling out climate-busting airport expansion; introducing a frequent flyer levy; and investing in public transport, electric vehicles and active travel? The future of the planet is at stake.

Kelly Tolhurst: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments about last week's judgment, but I should point out that the Government were clear in our manifesto that the Heathrow expansion project was a private sector project and needed to meet the strict criteria on air quality, noise and climate change and to be privately financed in the best interests of consumers. Airport expansion is a core part of the Government's commitment to global connectivity and investing in our infrastructure.

We welcome the efforts of airports throughout the UK to come forward with ambitious proposals to invest in their infrastructure, under our wider policy of encouraging them to make the best use of their assets.

We want the UK to be the best place in the world and we are forming new trading relationships with the European Union and negotiating free trade deals around the world. Last week's judgment is an important step in the process. Heathrow Ltd is obviously able to apply to the courts to appeal, but we take our environmental commitments seriously and they are important to how we reach our objective of net zero by 2050.

I highlight for the hon. Gentleman the fact that we are committed to the decarbonisation of aviation, as that is an important part of our efforts on climate change. That is why we are maintaining momentum by investing in aviation research and technology. We are investing £1.95 billion in aviation research and development between 2013 and 2026. In August last year we announced a joint £300 million fund, with industry involvement, for the Future Flight Challenge. We will introduce a Bill that will modernise the country's airspace, reduce noise around airports and combat CO₂ omissions.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the advice given to the Secretary of State. I understand that that advice may form part of one of the grounds of appeal of another party in the Supreme Court, so I am unable to comment while the proceedings are ongoing, but I will not take lectures from the Labour party when even Labour-supporting unions such as the GMB have called Labour's plans "utterly unachievable". As I have already outlined, airport expansion is a core part of the Government's commitment to global connectivity and levelling up.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): There are many who take the view that big-ticket infrastructure projects such as Heathrow expansion will provide both the funding and the challenge to allow our scientists, engineers and innovators to deliver not only that project but similar infrastructure projects and market them around the world in places where they really do leave a big carbon footprint. The Minister has rightly said that this issue is a legal matter for the determination of the courts and a commercial matter for Heathrow; will she confirm that, if Heathrow is successful at the Supreme Court, the Government will not intervene to stop expansion occurring?

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we do lead the way in technology and innovation in this country, which is why we are investing in aviation research and development. I assure him that the outcome of any Supreme Court ruling will be respected.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In his letter to all MPs on Friday, the Secretary of State for Transport said that the Government lost in the Court "on only one aspect" and that that was climate change. That "only" suggests that he is kind of missing the point. The Government cannot argue that the development is private and that whether to appeal is therefore up to Heathrow, while at the same time saying that airport expansion is important to the Government. A key aspect of the ruling was that expansion did not comply with the Paris agreement, which is a Government responsibility. We know that there are splits in the Government over

[Alan Brown]

Heathrow; is it the Government's plan to sit back, do nothing and let events take control of themselves, rather than actually having to make a decision?

Heathrow has its own net zero plans; have the Government reviewed those plans to see how realistic they are and how they comply with the Government's net zero plans? The Government talk about decarbonising transport, but carbon-based aviation fuels are still duty free; how will that incentivise the use of biofuels and other carbon-reduction measures? If expansion goes ahead, what plans do the Government have to protect the extra slots for Scottish airports? Finally, when are we going to get a net zero plan that encompasses all of transport, including international aviation and international shipping?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that we lost the judgment on the one aspect of climate change, which was brought forward by Friends of the Earth and Plan B. It is true that the joint action by the Mayor of London, the five London boroughs that surround Heathrow and Greenpeace on the strategic environmental assessment and the impact on habitats was dismissed, as was the rival scheme from Heathrow Hub Limited. I have outlined to the House the Government's commitment to decarbonise transport. We will issue our plans for decarbonisation across all modes of transport. As I have outlined, the global aviation emissions offsetting scheme, sustainable aviation fuels, greenhouse gas removal and, eventually, electric flights—the first such flight is expected later in the year—all show that this Government are committed to growing the UK economy and also to meeting our commitments as the first major economy to introduce the target of net zero by 2050.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. We have another half an hour to go on this urgent question, so I plead for short questions and brief answers.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to her new position. It is a difficult job, and she is doing it very well at the Dispatch Box. A total of 40% of all exports outside the EU are dealt with at Heathrow airport. Any future trade deals depend on Heathrow expanding. Given that the UK Civil Aviation Authority already has a net-zero policy, does my hon. Friend agree that it is compatible for Heathrow airport to expand and for us to meet our net-zero targets?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for the support she has given me in this role in the Department for Transport. I also want to thank her for the work that she did during her two years as maritime Minister. She is absolutely right: airports are important not only for our economy, but for how we trade with the rest of the world. It is right to say that, obviously, the judgment took into account our concern over the Paris agreement, but it did not judge that airport expansion was incompatible with climate change.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Paragraph 285 of the judgment rightly stated:

“We have not decided...that there will be no third runway at Heathrow.”

As a Member whose constituency is dependent on jobs from Heathrow, I voted, on balance, to support expansion at Heathrow. Paragraph 285 goes on to state that

“the consequence of a decision is that the Government will now have the opportunity to reconsider the ANPS in accordance with the clear statutory requirements that Parliament has imposed.”

It seems to me that that should be the responsibility of Government. Therefore, aside from the appeal being progressed by the scheme's promoters, what precisely is the reason that the Government are choosing not to do so?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady is quite right that the court's judgment was not to determine whether a third runway should take place, so she is right on that point. The court's judgment was based on the consideration of climate change in the Paris agreement. As she knows, and as I have already outlined at the Dispatch Box, the judgment ran to more than 100 pages. It is a complex judgment, which we are looking at and considering, and we will come forward with our next steps as soon as possible.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I, too, welcome my hon. Friend to her place. I support the expansion of Heathrow with the extra runway for the economic benefits that it brings, particularly to the north of England. I also strongly support the actions being taken in respect of our pledge on net zero by 2050, and I do not see the two as incompatible. Does my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the aviation industry's plan for net zero by 2050 and does she commend Heathrow's plan to play its part in that progress?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that point and raising the profile of what the industry and sector wish to do. As I have said this afternoon, we are committed to achieving the net zero target, and aviation—indeed, all modes of transport—has an important part to play. As I have outlined, we will bring forward the transport decarbonisation plans and work with industry to make sure that we are able to achieve that.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): One of the reasons why I supported Heathrow expansion was the increased connectivity it would bring to regional airports such as Liverpool John Lennon and Manchester, and the associated jobs and business opportunities it would provide in places such as St Helens. Does the Minister understand the uncertainty and concern that these developments have caused in the north-west? Will she undertake to update political and business leaders there as well as in the rest of the country?

Kelly Tolhurst: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are absolutely committed to increasing connectivity throughout the UK and levelling up and investing in infrastructure; that has been seen through our proposal for investment in roads and our rail network. As I mentioned, we are doing important work with our network of regional airports around the country. They are really rising to the challenge of their ambition: making the best use of the assets that they already have. I very much support that as the aviation Minister.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): Businesses in the north of England—in places such as Scarborough and, indeed, Middlesbrough—are keen to

play their part in delivering a global trading Britain. However, they are frustrated by the absence of slots into our main hub airport and have to use Schiphol, Paris or other airports. How does it help achieve our greenhouse gas emissions targets or get the best result for UK plc if they have to use foreign flights to Schiphol, Charles de Gaulle or Frankfurt?

Kelly Tolhurst: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to make sure that the whole UK benefits from economic prosperity, particularly in the north; that, hopefully, is what I will be working on in the coming months in this role. It is absolutely true: as I have said, will repeat and will keep repeating, airport expansion is a core part of our increasing UK connectivity—not just in the UK, but abroad.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): As a result of the judgment by the Court of Appeal, we now know that a third runway at Heathrow flies in the face of the Government's climate change commitments. We know that a third runway at Heathrow and the associated emissions and noise will have a significant detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of my long-suffering constituents in Twickenham, and many well beyond. We know from a New Economics Foundation report last week that expansion at Heathrow will actually take money and jobs out of the regions, which flies in the face of the Government's levelling-up agenda. Is it not now high time that the Government revisited their national policy statement and ruled out not only a third runway at Heathrow once and for all but all other runways at other airports in the UK, given the impact on climate change?

Kelly Tolhurst: I am sorry that the hon. Lady is against our desire and ambition to make sure that prosperity and connectivity reach all parts of the UK, particularly given the importance of the south-east to the economy and being able to introduce the investments that we need in the north. As she outlined, we—this Government—are committed, under this Prime Minister, to make sure that we adhere to our environmental obligations. We have been clear that any expansion of Heathrow airport would need to meet the strict criteria around noise, climate change and pollution.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that regional connectivity, such as the connectivity from Teesside International, which was duly saved by Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, is important? It is critical to levelling up and providing one nation government—a pledge that this Government were elected on. What steps is the Minister taking to achieve that?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the great work of our Teesside Mayor. The work that is being done to improve the economy up there is quite exciting; I look forward to visiting soon. In my new role as aviation Minister, I feel particularly passionate about connectivity around the country and levelling up. I am completely in line with the Prime Minister, and will be spending my time over the next months ensuring that we are able to push the boundaries and deliver on the ambitious target that we have set ourselves.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): This is embarrassing. The Government have to come off the fence on this issue. We know which side the Prime Minister

would like to fall on; perhaps the Minister should follow his example. She just said that the ANPS is of no legal effect until the Government conduct their review. She must at least give us a timetable for that review, and tell us when we will get the decision so that we can put Heathrow out of its misery.

Kelly Tolhurst: As I have said, the judgment is over 100 pages long and is extremely complex. It is right that the Government take time to consider that and come back to the House with the next steps. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would not want a Government to make a quick decision on such an important topic.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend reassure the House that this decision does not reopen the prospect of a Thames estuary airport which, as she well knows, was very much opposed by colleagues and constituents in north Kent and south Essex?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for raising this matter. She knows very well my position on the Thames estuary airport proposal—prior to being appointed Minister for aviation.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I am disappointed at the new hands-off approach to Heathrow expansion that the Minister has outlined today. It is vital for regional connectivity from airports such as Newcastle. As the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) said, stopping the expansion of Heathrow will not stop the expansion of Düsseldorf, Brussels or Amsterdam—exporting jobs and prosperity abroad, rather than actually affecting our own economy. When will the Minister publish the new airport strategy because, without Heathrow, the Government will be driving a cart and horses through the present strategy?

Kelly Tolhurst: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the decision was taken by the courts last week. We are analysing the complex judgment and will bring forward the next steps. I have been quite clear that airport expansion is a key part of levelling up and increasing the national economy. We are determined to deliver on investing in our infrastructure and aviation, and airport expansion is a part of that.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): May I welcome the aviation Minister to her new role and wish her more luck in the job than I clearly had in it? Can she name a global metropolis city that has successfully operated a twin hub airport?

Kelly Tolhurst: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, with whom I have worked closely in other roles. I thank him for the work that he has done on this portfolio, and will look to him for advice and support. He is quite right that airport connectivity and hub capacity are important in the UK and beyond, and I will be taking a close look at that. I will also be looking to report back to the House on the next steps in relation to last week's judgment.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Many people will be bewildered and disappointed by the Government's attitude towards the judges' decision on this nationally important project, which is also important to places like

[Sammy Wilson]

Northern Ireland in terms of a hub for international connectivity. Given its importance, why are the Government not challenging this judicial interference in investment policy? Does the Minister not realise that by not doing so she is giving a green light to the environmental Luddites who will use the insidious Climate Change Act 2008 as a means to smash every major investment project in this country?

Kelly Tolhurst: The right hon. Gentleman will know that we have been very clear: the Heathrow expansion project was a private sector project financed privately and not at a cost to the taxpayer, but it had to be done in the best interests of consumers. We were clear within the ANPS that any proposal that was brought forward would need to meet the strict criteria with regard to noise, pollution and climate change. We understand that Heathrow Ltd will potentially appeal this decision. That is something for it to do, bearing in mind that this is a private sector project.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): May I congratulate the Minister on the way in which she is responding to the questions that have been asked? Does she recognise that it is innovation and technological advances that will help us to meet our climate change challenge? Does she further recognise that the expansion of Heathrow is a key plank of economic development opportunities on the western side of the UK?

Kelly Tolhurst: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct that the way in which we are able to reach our target of net zero is with technology and research, investing in that technology and research, and really backing industry leaders and the talented people we have within the aviation sector to develop these technologies that will help not only the UK but other countries to reach their emission reductions. Absolutely one of the things that I am most excited about is the potential of the first electric flight this year.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Last week, the New Economics Foundation released its report, “Baggage claim”, in which it found, using DFT aviation forecasts, that if runway 3 at Heathrow goes ahead, there will be 17 million fewer passengers departing from non-London airports and 27,000 jobs locating to London as a result of that expansion? Does the Minister agree that not expanding Heathrow is an opportunity to rebalance the north-south divide and to continue economic and transport support for non-London regions?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady will know that we are committed to delivering economic development and levelling up the whole of the UK. That is why we are already investing in our rail and our roads, particularly in the north, which is why the Secretary of State is unable to be here today to answer this urgent question. We are committed to airport expansion, as we believe that it is a core part of our plan. I will make sure that we are hopefully able to continue to deliver on that.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): The Minister will recognise that because of the court judgment there are huge amounts of uncertainty in places across

the whole country in relation to their own airports and potential options for expansion. As somebody campaigning against the expansion of Luton airport, can I ask her to be very clear that any expansion of any regional airport in Luton or anywhere else must meet stringent environmental criteria on climate change, pollution and the rest? Will she make that point firmly at the Dispatch Box?

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend is correct, yes.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): The Minister has talked about the Government’s ambitions, shall we say, to reach net zero, but they are way off meeting their targets, and we do not need communities that live near airports such as Heathrow to tell us about the environmental impact that it can have on their lives. Will she join me in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who has campaigned on this issue on behalf of his constituents for a long time? Will she make an assessment of what implications the Court judgment on Heathrow might have for major road building projects?

Kelly Tolhurst: As I have outlined, we will look carefully at the complex judgment and bring forward next steps. I would like to highlight the fact that we will shortly introduce a Bill on the modernisation of the country’s airspace, with the objective of not only reducing noise around airports but combating CO₂ emissions.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): This judgment will potentially simply export carbon emissions to our competitors, together with UK jobs and prosperity, and it is particularly bad news for the south-west. What analysis has the Minister done to determine whether regional airports—particularly Bristol airport—can now take up some of the potential that airport expansion offers?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is right: regional airports and connectivity around the country are key to many parts of the UK, not just the north. I am from Kent, and we are blessed with many airports locally. I have a small airport in my constituency—Rochester airport—and I see how much such airports contribute to the local economy, enabling business growth and enabling people to get around the country and go abroad. In this role, I would like to assess regional capacity, to ensure that all parts of the UK benefit.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): However much Government Members might wish it were otherwise, there is no quick technological fix that will solve this problem. The Committee on Climate Change is really clear that zero-carbon aviation is “highly unlikely” to be feasible by 2050, which means that demand management and, indeed, demand reduction will be essential. Can the Minister set out what steps the Government will take to reduce aviation emissions by reducing the demand for flying—for example, by introducing a frequent flyer levy, which is a fair way of distributing the ability to fly?

Kelly Tolhurst: The hon. Lady will probably not be a stranger to the fact that this Government are investing in roads and rail, to increase connectivity. This Government

have now pledged their commitment to HS2, which is why the Secretary of State is in the north. We have, of course, been carefully considering the advice of the Committee on Climate Change, but transport and the use of airlines by our consumers—our constituents—who want to travel around the country and globally is something that I am not prepared to put a curb on today.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): What is the Government's policy on Gatwick airport?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I refer him to our policy statement. We will continue to look at airport expansion and connectivity throughout the UK.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Minister mentioned air quality and noise, which is a serious issue and health concern for residents in my constituency who happen to live under the flightpath of both London City airport and Heathrow. When will the Government introduce regulations to prohibit soundwaves from exceeding acceptable World Health Organisation limits?

Kelly Tolhurst: As the hon. Lady will have heard me say, we are committed to publishing a Bill on modernising our airspace, which we hope will tackle some of residents' concerns about noise.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): This further delay will be a great disappointment to businesses in Cornwall, particularly as we are about to lose our current Heathrow slot. Does the Minister share my view that the expansion of Heathrow is essential to us achieving our global Britain ambitions, but that this is not the end for Heathrow, and it is right to appeal against this decision? Will she join me in wishing it well in that appeal and confirm that Government policy on Heathrow has not changed?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his absolute defence and representation of the south-west. He always talks about connectivity and about people in the south-west being able to move around the country. I have said a number of times at the Dispatch Box today that this Government are committed to airport expansion and levelling up. It is a core part of the Government's commitment to delivering on our global connectivity and investing in our infrastructure, and also—and this is key—making sure that it can be delivered within our environmental obligations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I wish the Minister well in her new position? I support a third runway at Heathrow, which can benefit the whole of the United Kingdom, and particularly Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister promised connectivity for all parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The tried and proven flight connections between Heathrow and Belfast City airport could do even better, boosting the economy and creating more jobs, and it is vital that they are built on. Can the Minister confirm that airports in Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged because of this decision?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and he will know that my predecessor was able to make a number of visits to the airports in Northern Ireland. He

will also know that, in my role in Government, I will always take into consideration Northern Ireland, and the concerns and wants of businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland, in how we develop the strategy.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I know that hand washing is now *de rigueur*, but that should hardly extend to the Government's approach to their own NPS, approved by a large majority in this House, when the judgment addressed the narrow point that the NPS had not been assessed against commitments made by the Government in Paris. The Government's desertion of Heathrow at this point is very bad news for early delivery of global Britain in reality, and it is very bad news for confidence in the whole of the Government's commitment to their own national infrastructure plan.

Kelly Tolhurst: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I just want to reiterate that we are committed to airport expansion. We took the decision not to appeal, because it was a private sector delivery scheme, being privately financed. Of course, the instigators will be issuing an appeal. I understand his frustration, but it is right that any airport expansion or infrastructure project of this nature meets the key criteria for environmental protections. As I have already said, we are analysing the judgment and we will come forward with the next steps as soon as possible.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I very much welcome the Government's commitment to levelling up our transport infrastructure across the country. Having given HS2 the green light, does the Minister agree with me that we now need to crack on with Northern Powerhouse Rail and the TransPennine rail upgrade going through my local town of Huddersfield? Does she agree that regional airports such as Manchester and Leeds Bradford airports also have important roles to play in global connectivity?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend, and he is absolutely right. He will note that the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), who is the Minister responsible for Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2, is sitting on the Front Bench and has heard his comments. Our recent announcements have been on our ambition for Northern Powerhouse Rail, High Speed 2, the A66 northern trans-Pennine link and the £5 billion of funding to improve bus and cycle services outside London. We are really proud and motivated to make sure that all of the UK benefits from the investment of this Government and that we do achieve such levelling up.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): The Minister has confirmed that the Government will give support to regional development and the expansion of regional airports, which I assume will include Carlisle Lake District airport. If the airport is to succeed—it has only been open for a year—it is going to need Government support and a degree of subsidy until it is fully established. Will the Minister give that support?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend, and I am very happy to meet him to discuss his newly formed airport. I very much look forward to watching that and working together to make sure that that regional airport is a success.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. India and China have 320 new airports planned for the next 10 years, yet here we are once again with a continuing national debate about the expansion of just one. Is my hon. Friend aware of the potential of Manston airport on the border between the constituencies of North Thanet and South Thanet? It is spade-ready to deliver important aviation infrastructure for a new global Britain in the shortest possible time.

Kelly Tolhurst: As my hon. Friend is aware, I know Manston airport, and I know his passion for it, and that of his neighbours, regarding the ability of that small regional airport to come back on stream. He is right: regional airports, connectivity—everything that I have mentioned and spoken about today—are key to levelling up and to economic growth throughout the UK. This Government are determined to deliver and invest, and I am extremely excited to be part of how we deliver that in the future.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to her place and wish her well in her new role. The last time that judges interfered with decisions made in this place, there was outrage. There is a strange muteness from the Government about this latest decision, despite a decision being made in this place, after many years, with four to one in favour of the extension going ahead. Can I persuade the Government to get on with this? We are leaving the EU, and we need this expansion for the economy and future prosperity of this country.

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend is correct. For us to be out-facing and truly global, we must ensure that our connectivity, transport and infrastructure is able to deliver not only on levelling up, but on playing a big part in our economic growth and trade with the rest of the world. This is an exciting time for the UK, with lots of ideas and ambitions. I assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to deliver on that, and ensure that airports are part of that solution.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) to ask her urgent question, it may be helpful to say that Mr Speaker has been advised that there will be a statement in the House tomorrow on coronavirus. This urgent question is very narrow, and relates only to the matter of prisoners held abroad.

British Citizens Imprisoned Overseas and Coronavirus

5.2 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British citizens who are imprisoned abroad in countries where coronavirus is spreading rapidly.

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will respond to this urgent question on behalf of the Foreign Secretary, who is travelling in the middle east.

Protecting British citizens at home and abroad is a top priority for the Government, and amid the outbreak of coronavirus, known as covid-19, the UK is leading the response. First, we are providing support to British citizens abroad, which includes travellers and their families in countries around the world. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is closely monitoring coronavirus throughout the world, through its diplomatic network. We are providing travel advice to British nationals, so that they can be sure of the facts before deciding whether to travel, and sure about what to do if they are affected by an outbreak of covid-19 while travelling.

The UK has introduced measures to ensure that travellers returning from abroad do not spread the virus further. We have put in place enhanced monitoring measures at UK airports, and health information is available at all international airports, ports, and train stations. We have established a supported isolation facility at Heathrow to cater for international passengers who are tested, and to maximise infection control and free-up NHS resources.

For British nationals caught up in the initial outbreaks of the virus, we have co-ordinated repatriation for those impacted in Wuhan, and passengers of the Diamond Princess cruise ship. We are working with the Spanish authorities and tour operators to support the return of British nationals affected by the situation in Tenerife.

We also continue to assist our British nationals who are detained in countries such as Iran, which has seen reports of a high number of cases of coronavirus. France, Germany and the United Kingdom have expressed their full solidarity with those impacted by covid-19 in Iran. We are offering Iran a comprehensive package of both material and financial support to stem the rapid spread of the disease. Today, a plane departed the UK with vital materials, such as equipment for laboratory tests, as well as other equipment including protective body suits and gloves.¹ The E3, namely the UK, France and Germany, has also committed to providing urgent additional financial support close to €5 million to fight the covid-19 epidemic affecting Iran. This will be through the World Health Organisation or other UN agencies.

We will continue to support global efforts to combat the outbreak of covid-19. Our support is directed to help the most vulnerable across the globe and to strengthen the global health system to protect our own nationals. We have provided £40 million of investment in vaccine and virus research, and £5 million to the World Health Organisation. We will continue to do all we can to help to keep British nationals safe and healthy around the world.

1. [Official Report, 4 March 2020, Vol. 672, c. 8MC.]

Tulip Siddiq: I have raised the concerns about the health of my constituent Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe several times in the Chamber, but today the situation is potentially fatal. The prison in which Nazanin is being held hostage has reported cases of coronavirus. She is seriously ill and is displaying symptoms associated with the virus. Her family are desperately worried about her and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not blame them.

Coronavirus is spreading through Iran at an alarming rate, as the Minister has just said, and Iran has actually pulled some of its own prisoners out of jails. Britain is pulling its non-essential staff out of the Tehran embassy in Iran. Yet the Iranian authorities are point-blank refusing to test Nazanin for coronavirus or any other British citizens in their jails. The United Nations Human Rights Council has made it clear that, under both Iranian and international law, Iran must provide medical treatment to Nazanin and British citizens like Nazanin.

What representations has the Minister made to Iran to test Nazanin specifically for coronavirus and to provide the full results? What assurances can he give that any results given by the Iranians will be reliable? The key point is that if we leave British citizens in harm's way for long enough, they will come to harm. The Government face important choices over Nazanin's case in the coming months. They must do everything possible to secure her permanent release and bring her back home.

Bearing that in mind, what instructions has the Prime Minister given to departmental and Government lawyers to resolve the debt that Britain owes to Iran? I read with interest the Iranian ambassador's comments this afternoon about co-ordinating with British authorities to purchase urgent medical items—the Minister referred to that in his answer. Will he set out what humanitarian supplies the UK is providing to Iran to help it to tackle its growing public health crisis? Was my constituent's potentially fatal medical condition mentioned in negotiations?

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's life hangs in the balance. I urge the Government to act and to act now.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is right to raise this case. Things may have moved on a little bit today in terms of the testing with Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. The hon. Lady will appreciate that we are unable to comment on any medical assessments without the permission of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe. We are in touch, and have been in touch today, with her husband. I can assure the hon. Lady that we are in close contact with the Iranian authorities to urge them to secure a temporary release for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe on medical grounds. We clearly do not think she should be in prison in Iran in the first place.

The hon. Lady referred to the debt. We do not share the view that the IMS—International Military Services—debt, or any other bilateral issue, is the reason for Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's detention. We expect Iran to live up to its responsibilities under international human rights law and the Vienna convention on consular relations, and to release Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and all other dual nationals that are in Iran.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I know that the whole House will be thinking about the British diplomatic staff in Tehran. What they are doing now is a reminder that it is not just the military but our

diplomats, who put themselves in harm's way in the national interest, and we are all very grateful to them for that.

Does not what is happening now highlight the moral bankruptcy of Iran's position? It has taken a British citizen hostage and put her in jail completely wrongly, where she is then subject to catching, potentially, a very dangerous disease. My simple question is, has the Prime Minister called the President of Iran to make representations that Nazanin should be tested alongside the other dual nationals in Evin prison, or has the Foreign Secretary called his counterpart in Iran to insist on that happening? If they have not, it is absolutely essential that they do.

Nigel Adams: My right hon. Friend makes a fair point, which I agree with. On the point about our consular staff, we reduced the number of staff at the embassy in Tehran on 1 March. Some staff were temporarily withdrawn due to the ongoing outbreak, but essential staff needed to continue this critical work will remain. I assure him that we have been engaging—today, in fact—with the deputy Foreign Minister and that our ambassador is working on behalf of all our dual nationals in that country.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for applying for it.

In the short time that I have, I want to make a heartfelt plea to the Government of Iran. We all have long memories in this House, and if I was to mention certain Iranian place names, such as Manjil, Rudbar or Bam, they would conjure up images of people diligently digging through rubble, searching for surviving earthquake victims. Among them were British firefighters, doctors and aid workers, supported by donations from the British people. They were all desperate to do their bit and were moved by nothing but mercy and love for their Iranian brothers and sisters. They never stopped to think about politics, sanctions or diplomacy; they just saw a humanitarian need and acted—acted on the common bonds of kindness and compassion that unite our two peoples.

When we address Tehran today, we can only ask it to do the same. For once, do not see Nazanin as a political football. Do not see Nazanin as a bargaining chip. Instead, see Nazanin the way the rest of the world does, particularly facing this new and terrifying threat to her health. See Nazanin as the loving mother desperate to get back to Gabriella. See Nazanin as the devoted wife in need of Richard's care. See Nazanin as we saw those innocent people lying helpless in the rubble of a humanitarian crisis. You today have it in your gift to save her. Nazanin does not deserve this fresh suffering. She deserves only to come home today.

I hope that the Minister will join me in that plea and make a solemn commitment that if Tehran acts with compassion and generosity today, we will not forget our obligations to act with fairness and justice in resolving the other issues of dispute between our two countries.

Nigel Adams: The right hon. Lady makes a very heartfelt plea, which Government Members will find it difficult to disagree with. It is important that we continue

[*Nigel Adams*]

the dialogue. That is incredibly difficult because the Iranian authorities do not recognise Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's dual nationality, so we do not get full consular access, but I assure the right hon. Lady that we continue to lobby on behalf of Nazanin and all other dual nationals. In a spirit of cordiality, I agree with everything that the right hon. Lady said.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I, too, welcome the words of the shadow Foreign Secretary, who is right to talk about Nazanin being a mother and wife, not a political football, but could we not extend that to the Iranian people, who for too long have been the victims of this tyranny and in many instances incarcerated by these theocratic despots, much like Nazanin? Would this not be a good moment for Her Majesty's Government to reach out and offer assistance and care to the ordinary people of Iran? We have seen the deputy Health Minister in Iran fall ill with coronavirus and the Ayatollah's chief medical adviser allegedly die of it. Surely this is the moment for the UK to reach out and say, "We are with the Iranian people, and always have been, and they will always be our friends."

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee makes a very good point in the best of terms. He will no doubt have been encouraged by what I said in my answer to the urgent question about how, alongside France and Germany—the E3—we are providing almost €5 million of support directly to the people of Iran. From the UK, that means up to £2 million of financial aid and funding for technical expertise to UN agencies. I am very glad he would support that.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I commend the Minister on the statement outlining the international efforts the United Kingdom is taking part in to combat this outbreak—now is the time for us all to work across party boundaries and international borders—but can I reiterate the question about Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe? Will he respond to the question about the Prime Minister's involvement? Will he reassure the House that he will urge the Prime Minister, if he has not done so already, to intervene in her case directly to make up for his earlier interventions?

Nigel Adams: As I just explained, it is very difficult when the Iranian authorities do not recognise dual nationality. The Prime Minister has met Nazanin's family, as the hon. Gentleman will know, but we do not have full consular access; we use our people on the ground instead. The ambassador and the staff there are doing a fantastic job in trying circumstances. We are intervening: not only have we spoken to Mr Ratcliffe today—the Foreign Office is in regular contact with the family—but we have made very strong representations today on behalf of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe stating that she should get the right treatment and indeed be released from that prison.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) is right to raise the plight of her constituent and other dual nationals wrongfully detained in Evin prison. Can the Minister say how the welcome €5 million pledged by the E3 will be spent and indicate whether the authorities in Tehran are prepared to accept it?

Nigel Adams: I can. I know that my right hon. Friend and former holder of my post takes a keen interest in this area. We are offering Iran a comprehensive package of material and financial support to halt and combat the rapid spread of this disease, and this support is being delivered through the World Health Organisation and the UN. I am pleased to report that I understand that the Iranian ambassador to the UK has tweeted his support for our support.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for asking this urgent question and for the great support she has shown to the family. Is the Minister aware of how many dual UK-Iran nationals there are in Iran and in Iranian jails, and whether any of them have compromised immune systems? I know that is very technical, but it does matter. Could he also give any advice to dual nationals or UK citizens in Iran about how they should go about contacting consular staff if they are concerned?

Nigel Adams: I am not in a position to give the hon. Lady those full details, as she will appreciate; it is certainly not right for any Minister to comment on anybody's medical situation. I can say, however, that our consulate in Iran is there and able to telephone and email. I hope people have access to the internet. We have a team there and they are very much prepared to help. We are also offering help to dual nationals in the UK and advising Iranian-British dual nationals not to travel to Iran. That is a bit of advice we have updated in recent days.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I underline the positive suggestion made by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat)? We have a very large overseas aid budget. Surely the foreign affairs ministerial team should see this as an opportunity to offer practical medical assistance to the country, and, in so doing, improve the relationship, with beneficial consequences for the prisoners who are being held, justifiably or, more probably, not.

Nigel Adams: My right hon. Friend has made a fair point. We are doing an awful lot in terms of support. As I said in my statement, we have provided £45 million in aid thus far, on top of the €5 million through the E3. We are taking our responsibilities very seriously. The sheer fact that the ambassador has reached out in the way that he has is very encouraging.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Even allowing for probable under-reporting, the rate of death from coronavirus in Iran is probably the worst in the world, currently running at about 7%. Of course, our concerns are primarily with Nazanin and her family, but they must surely reach all the people of Iran as well. In expressing those concerns and in seeking to find a way to bring those people some relief, will the Minister undertake to work not just through the normal channels of diplomacy, directly and bilaterally, but with our many other friends in the Gulf region who are well suited and well placed to assist?

Nigel Adams: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I am sure that, as the Foreign Secretary continues his travels in the Gulf this week, the question of how Iran's neighbours, along with us, can provide that support will be very much on the agenda.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): Can my hon. Friend confirm that, while dealing with Nazanin's case, Her Majesty's Government will continue to advocate the release of all our dual nationals detained by Iran? Will he also update the House on the welfare and security of Her Majesty's ambassador, and of all Crown servants and other British embassy staff and their dependants who are in Tehran?

Nigel Adams: As I mentioned in my statement, we have reduced the number of staff in our embassy in Tehran. That was a precautionary but very much a temporary measure. Our essential staff will continue to do their critical work, and they will remain in post.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure the Minister will agree that this coronavirus is a dreadful thing. It will probably come here much more than it is doing at present, but the people of Iran are suffering greatly, and we should do everything that we can for them during this crisis because that is the right thing to do—not as a quid pro quo, but in building a better relationship with Iran. Will he please push this as hard as he can? We want to be generous to the Iranian people, and to rebuild trust with that nation.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is spot on. That is exactly what we want to do, and it is why we have reached out with assistance today, alongside France and Germany. At a time of global crisis such as this, it is incredibly important for countries to come together to support the most vulnerable. Given the number of cases and the number of deaths experienced by Iran, we will of course take that into consideration, and that is why we are offering our support.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): May I associate myself with the comments of the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry)? Using mothers as political footballs is rarely a good look, but she finds herself in a difficult position, in part because of the failure of some of the medical staff and the overview that the Iranian Government have. Does the Minister agree that Professor Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer, and his team have done the most wonderful job since before Christmas, and we should be very grateful that we have them as part of the British association?

Nigel Adams: Indeed so. This is the most challenging health issue that this country—and in fact the world—has faced for as long as I have been in this House, and the pressure on our chief medical officers and all our professionals must be immense. But, having attended the Cobra meeting this morning, I can say that we are very well served by some absolutely professional, superb civil servants.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What reassurance can the Minister give me that my constituent, an employee of the British Council, which is part of the Foreign Office, will have care that is just as good as that of anyone else in Evin prison? I commend the fact that the Government have given extra money to the international effort to tackle coronavirus.

Nigel Adams: I can absolutely give the hon. Lady that assurance. We are aware of the additional number of dual-national prisoners, including the constituent to whom she refers, who was an employee of the British Council.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): I am sure the Minister will agree that a huge part of containing the virus internationally is quick decision making at the Foreign Office, so what organisational changes has he made at the Foreign Office to monitor and protect British nationals overseas who are at risk of getting coronavirus, and to act quickly once they are identified?

Nigel Adams: The Foreign Office has not been slow to respond to this threat. I can assure my hon. Friend that the crisis response team, which is headquartered in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has been working round the clock with our teams and embassies throughout the world. We are providing consular assistance to British nationals affected in areas that have the virus and, crucially, we are working with our partners across the world to co-ordinate those responses.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I first commend my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing this urgent question today and for her persistence on behalf of her constituent? I also want to ask the Minister what direct briefings he has had from the Department of Health and Social Care about the advice that it has been able to give to British citizens who are imprisoned abroad on how to protect themselves from contracting coronavirus.

Nigel Adams: When prisoners abroad fall under the jurisdictions of the countries where they are, our embassies and our consular network stand ready to give support to those who are imprisoned. It is important that we keep up that dialogue. It is irrelevant whether the people in prison are British nationals or otherwise; they are still entitled to support, should they request it, and in some cases they have been requesting it.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): There have been great concerns about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's health over the years. Could the Minister just tell us: when was the last time the Government specifically asked for her release on humanitarian grounds?

Nigel Adams: Those requests happen on a regular basis, I can assure the hon. Gentleman. Given the concern over the potential health of Nazanin, we have been asking for her to be released on medical grounds, but the point remains that we do not believe she should be there in the first place, and she should be released forthwith.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of the sanitary conditions inside Iranian prisons, including Evin prison, where Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is being held at the moment?

Nigel Adams: As the hon. Lady will appreciate, it is impossible for consular staff to gain access to the prison. We are in contact with Nazanin's family and the families of other detainees at Evin prison, so we get reports back from the families and they provide incredibly useful intelligence when we are making our representations to Foreign Ministers from Iran.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Considering the serious nature of the outbreak of coronavirus and the deterioration of the health of my constituent, Mr Ashoori, who will soon turn 66, what will the Government's

[Janet Daby]

response be, should there be a serious risk to his health because of coronavirus and to the health of other British nationals because of this outbreak?

Nigel Adams: I am not sure that I picked up where the hon. Lady's constituent is imprisoned.

Janet Daby: Mr Ashoori is also in prison in Iran.

Nigel Adams: As I mentioned previously, we continue to have dialogue with the Iranian authorities. We have been speaking with them today. Under any international rules system, prisoners should be afforded the best possible treatment. We are in constant contact with the Iranian authorities and I can assure the hon. Lady that her constituent will be getting equal attention in terms of our consular efforts.

UK-US Trade Deal

5.30 pm

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Today, we are publishing a suite of documents that mark a crucial step in beginning the formal negotiations for a free-trade agreement with our largest bilateral trading partner, the United States. These documents comprise the Government's negotiating objectives, our response to the public consultation and an economic scoping assessment. They are available online and in the House of Commons Library.

The UK stands at an historic moment, building its independent trade policy for the first time in almost half a century. This Government will seize the opportunity to be an independent free trading nation with a simple message: that free trade is good for all nations and will deliver benefits for businesses, households and consumers across the UK. We aim to have 80% of UK trade covered by free trade agreements within three years, starting with the EU, the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Seeking these agreements is key to our efforts to level up, deliver opportunity and unleash the potential of every part of the United Kingdom.

The US is one of our largest friends, the world's largest economy, our closest security and defence partner and one of our oldest allies. We are the biggest investors in each other's economies. An FTA represents a fantastic opportunity to strengthen and deepen our strong trade, investment and economic relationship, bringing us closer to the world's economic powerhouse. In 2017, 1.7 million people worked for US companies in the UK, and 1.3 million people worked for UK companies in the US. UK-US total trade was valued at £221 billion last year, representing 19.8 % of all our exports. An ambitious free-trade agreement with the US could deliver a £15.3 billion increase in bilateral trade and a £3.4 billion lift to the economy.

The negotiating objectives we are publishing today are underpinned by one of the largest consultations ever undertaken. We received the views of more than 150,000 respondents, all of which have informed our approach and negotiating objectives. We have scaled up our trade negotiator expertise, with a similar size of team to the US Trade Representative, including a wealth of experience from the private sector, trade law, Commonwealth nations and World Trade Organisation experts ready to deliver for the UK.

My Department's analysis shows that every single part of the UK could benefit from the US deal, delivering improved access for businesses, more investment, better jobs and higher wages. For Scotland, it could lock in the salmon and whisky trade and support new market access for beef and lamb. Wales stands to gain access for its lamb, and reduced tariffs in red tape for steel and ceramics. Northern Ireland can benefit from improved access to agriculture and furniture tariffs. Every region in England stands to benefit, particularly the midlands and the north-east with their strong manufacturing base in cars and machinery. We also expect significant gains in the tech sector across the country, with a bespoke digital and data agreement.

North, east, south and west, from agriculture to the creative industries, we find that a US trade deal can deliver for all parts of the UK economy. It means more choice for consumers at lower prices, new opportunities

for businesses and more high-skilled jobs. It has the potential to slash trade barriers and tariffs of some £451 million, and it could boost British workers' wages by £1.8 billion.

Small and medium-sized businesses are increasingly international traders in their own right. In 2018, 97% of goods exporters were SMEs, and 30,000 SMEs across the UK already trade with the US. We are going to make it a priority in these trade negotiations to support UK SMEs. We will do that with a dedicated chapter for SMEs. We will ensure that SMEs have easy access to information, and we will make sure that there are SME-friendly provisions, cutting red tape on customs and tariffs in services and goods.

We are also looking to rewrite the game on digital trade, to create a world-leading ecosystem that supports businesses of all sizes across the UK. This could include provisions that facilitate the free flow of data and prevent unjustified data localisation requirements, while maintaining our ability to protect users against online harm. We can ensure that customs duties are not imposed on electronic transmissions, and create great opportunities in areas such as blockchain, driverless cars and quantum technology.

In these trade talks, as in all future trade talks, this Government will drive a hard bargain on behalf of the British people. The NHS, the price it pays for drugs and its services are not for sale. There will be no compromise on high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. Throughout these negotiations, this Government will continue to engage collaboratively with Parliament, the devolved Administrations and the public. I can also assure the House that now that the UK is free to negotiate outside the EU, we will be aiming to begin negotiations with the US as quickly as possible. The appetite is clear on both sides. We welcomed the US Government's negotiating objectives, particularly on developing "state-of-the-art" provisions in financial services and digital trade. We also welcome the enthusiasm, both in the US Congress and in the US Administration, as was made clear during my discussions with the US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, last week. We see this as not just an opportunity to deepen our bilateral trade and investment relationship; it is also about setting an example to the world, about how two leading, open, free-market democracies can trade with each other.

As an independent trading nation, the UK will champion free trade and lower trade barriers at every opportunity. Striking free trade agreements will give our businesses the opportunities, certainty and security they need to prosper. The greatest opportunity to do that is with our closest ally and largest single trading partner, the United States. We have a mandate and we have the team. With these documents we are publishing today, we have the tools. And with hard work, I believe we can get it done. I commend this statement to the House.

5.37 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): May I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of her statement? We on this side of the House support ambitious trade agreements that unlock economic growth, create new jobs, and elevate rights and standards, so I congratulate her and her officials on the publication of today's negotiating mandate for the Government's flagship post-Brexit trade agreement. A year after the US equivalent, it has been greatly anticipated.

Some 20% of our current trade is with the US. It is our second biggest market, and we have enjoyed decades of two-way trade without an underlying trade agreement. The Government predict GDP growth of 0.07% to 0.16%, or £1.6 billion to £3.4 billion, as a result of this agreement. To put that in context, the Government's own figures suggest a fall in GDP of about £150 billion as a result of the type of trade deal being proposed with the EU. Would it not be sensible to prioritise minimising losses of £150 billion, rather than chasing much smaller gains of £2 billion to £3 billion? How much will be added to GDP by the trade agreements with Japan, Australia and New Zealand, to which the Secretary of State referred? Will she confirm that countries on the other side of the Atlantic or further afield simply cannot come close to replacing what will be lost in the type of trade deal being proposed with the EU?

The negotiating objectives contain references to a level playing field with the US and a commitment to prevent either side from enjoying an artificial advantage—a commitment not being offered to the EU. Does the Secretary of State believe that the EU has not noticed? Or does she think the EU does not have access to translators? Dispute mechanisms are used by the US in international trade agreements to enforce its standards as a matter of course. It is noticeable that the EU negotiating objectives specifically exclude environmental protections and workers' rights from the proposed dispute mechanism, but no such exclusions have been set out in the objectives published today, so will the UK end up having to back down, or are the rights and protections really the red lines that the Secretary of State would have us believe? Will she insist that the US signs up to International Labour Organisation conventions? How will the agreement reinforce the UK's commitment to net zero by 2050?

The Chancellor's adviser said yesterday that we do not need a farming industry or a fishing industry; who should we believe—the Chancellor's adviser or the Secretary of State? The Government say that they will not allow chlorine or acid-washed chicken—processes used only because of insanitary conditions in the United States—but they also say that such produce is safe; which of those is the Government's position? Will they make the necessary commitments in law to protect our consumers by adding them to the Agriculture Bill?

The US trade representative says that the US will demand greater market access for US pharmaceutical businesses, which could drive up the cost of medicines. Meanwhile, the provisions of trade agreements can apply inadvertently to public services and lock in privatisation measures, against public concerns and the public interest. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she will ensure that explicit wording rules out liberalisation measures from applying to our NHS and to all public services?

The mandate published today appears mainly to be about tariffs; mucking about with tariffs does not constitute an international trade agreement. The current round of trade tariffs has damaged leading British exports, including Scotch whisky, and caused great concerns in our ceramics and steel sectors. The Government have already spelled out their plans to drop tariffs to zero; where is the incentive for the United States to do the same? What is to stop them walking away from a deal because we have given them everything that they want without the need for an agreement?

[Bill Esterson]

The Secretary of State mentioned Congress, so on the subject of scrutiny she must recognise that her statement does not constitute adequate parliamentary engagement on this process. Will she tell NHS patients, farmers, manufacturers, consumers and workers just how she intends to enable scrutiny of this and all other international trade agreements?

Elizabeth Truss: I am pleased that the Opposition have acknowledged that there is value in trade deals and, indeed, in a trade deal with the US, because previously many of them have voted against trade deals with Canada and Japan. It is hard to understand who they actually want to do any business with.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the trade arrangements with the EU; the simple answer is that we want a good trade deal with the EU and a good trade deal with the US. That is absolutely possible. Canada has an excellent trade deal with the EU and we want similar terms to it, and it also has a very good trade deal with the US, with an advanced digital chapter. It should be perfectly possible for us to seek such an arrangement that enables us to unlock the economic benefits of a deal with the US.

It takes a party with the economic literacy of the current Labour party to think that £15.3 billion of additional trade is not worth having. Why does the hon. Gentleman not tell that to the people of Stoke-on-Trent and the ceramics factories that could benefit? Why does he not say that to the midlands car manufacturers who want easier testing procedures? Why does he not say that to the people of Scotland, which is one of the regions that would benefit most from a free trade deal with the United States?

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the other deals that we are seeking—[*Interruption.*] Does he want to hear the answer to the next bit? He asked me about the other deals that we are working on at the moment. I will, in due course, be laying out our proposals for a deal with Japan, Australia and New Zealand. I can assure him that we will be publishing the full economic scoping studies, as we have for the United States, and we will be publishing objectives for those arrangements as well, in line with the commitments that we have made to Parliament. I am fully committed to working with Parliament on these arrangements. Of course, a treaty is an Executive prerogative, but at the same time I will be working with the International Trade Committee and making sure that we have proper scrutiny. We have been working with the devolved Administrations. My right hon. Friend the Minister for trade policy has had regular meetings with his colleagues in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have heard what I said about food standards and animal welfare. We will not be diminishing or lowering our standards as part of a US trade deal, and we will not be paying more for drugs prices in the NHS. That is clearly laid out in our objectives for everyone to read. Were the US to demand that—I do not believe that that will be the case—we will simply walk away. As he pointed out, we are already trading well with the US. If we do not get what we want from this agreement, we will walk away.

Finally, I want to make a point about British agriculture. As a former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I am a great believer in the fantastic

products that we produce in this country. I believe that they should be available in more countries around the world. I want UK beef and lamb to be on US shelves. I want the tariffs on dairy products, which can be as high as 18%—[*Interruption.*] Indeed, on cheese products as well. I want those tariffs to be lowered so that we can get more of our fantastic products into the US market. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads today's scoping assessment, which shows that UK agriculture will benefit economically from a trade deal with the US.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement. Will she confirm not only that UK exports to the United States currently attract half a billion pounds-worth of tariffs, the removal of which will be an immediate boost to the UK economy, but that the opportunities are even greater? We are currently involved in retaliatory tariffs as a result of the EU-US steel dispute and we are subject to tariffs that the US never wanted to apply to the UK. As we separate ourselves from the European Union, we can remove ourselves from that ensnarement, which will enable us to remove many other tariffs, which would be beneficial to consumers and businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. May I thank him for the work that he put in as Trade Secretary, which has got us to this point where we are able to launch these negotiating objectives, and for doing all the fantastic work that he did with our colleagues in the United States? I know the Labour party does not seem to think that tariffs are important, but that is not so for a pottery manufacturer in Stoke-on-Trent who is facing 28% tariffs on their dinnerware going into the US. If we get those tariffs removed, that will mean that that factory is able to employ more people, grow its business and invest. Yet again, that is the Labour party refusing to understand how enterprise works and where wealth comes from in this country.

My right hon. Friend is right about the steel industry. It is currently facing £300 million-worth of tariffs a year. If we can get those tariffs removed, that provides a brilliant opportunity for our steel industry to sell more products in the United States.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Minister for her statement and early sight of it. It is true that the analysis published today, which forms part of these documents, does provide some very useful information. It tells us that the maximum tariff reduction will be less than half a billion pounds, that the maximum increase in UK GDP would be 0.16%, that the maximum increase in gross value added for Scotland would be less than half a per cent—0.4%—and that, in the long-run, financial services GVA might actually go down. Yet in order to achieve these decidedly underwhelming targets, the UK will have to leave the European Union, surrender around 5% of GDP growth, and risk around 20% of UK global trade.

More worryingly, a pattern is emerging in the UK's approach to trade negotiations. In the document on the future relationship with the EU, the UK seeks to exclude subsidies, competition policy, and environmental, tax and labour provisions from any dispute resolution mechanism. In today's UK-US public negotiating objectives

—only four pages of the total published today—there is limited reference to competition, labour and environment provision, nothing on subsidy or tax, and a single vague bullet point on dispute resolution that would enforce the level playing field and avoid the race to the bottom.

Apart from the environment, the Secretary of State mentioned none of those things in her statement. Let me ask her this: why are the UK Government giving the impression of abandoning level playing field provisions across so many aspects of modern trade deals? Why are they giving the impression that they are in favour of a wild west free-for-all in trade rather than a comprehensive rules-based system with a comprehensive dispute resolution mechanism? Why are they prepared to sacrifice so much in terms of global UK trade and GDP growth to secure what, by their own admission, are very, very modest gains indeed?

Elizabeth Truss: I have news for the hon. Gentleman: we have already left the European Union, although the news might not have reached him.

Scotland is one of the largest potential beneficiaries of a US-UK free trade agreement. The hon. Gentleman sniffs at the half a billion pound extra value added to the Scottish economy that is analysed, but a number of Scottish businesses are supportive, including the Scottish chamber of commerce. I suggest that he listens, as we have been doing, to businesses in Scotland about how they can see their businesses grow.

The hon. Gentleman specifically mentioned standards. In free trade agreements, including in the comprehensive and economic trade agreement, or CETA, there are often clauses saying that the parties will not deliberately lower standards for competitive advantage. That is what we are referring to in our US negotiating objectives and it is a perfectly proper and regular part of free trade agreements that we are happy to sign up to.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I intend to run this statement until about quarter past 6. I urge short questions and short replies. Anybody who was not here at the beginning should not be standing. I will prioritise people who did not get called during the previous urgent questions.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Is the Secretary of State able to promise that the Government will not remove current restrictions or tariffs on food imports unless those imports are produced to standards of animal welfare as tough as the ones that we expect our own farmers to meet?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my right hon. Friend for her question. As we make very clear in the negotiating objectives, we will not lower our standards. We will maintain our food safety and animal welfare standards and will not lower them as part of this free trade agreement. We decide which standards we abide by here in the UK. We have exceptionally high standards of animal welfare, and my right hon. Friend herself is a champion of that. We are not going to be told by the US what our standards should be; for that matter, we are not going to be told what our standards should be by the EU either.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Along with a majority of Labour MPs, I voted for the Canadian trade deal. The debate on that treaty was beset by disinformation campaigns by many non-governmental organisations, as was the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership deal. Frankly, the Government did precious little to rebut them.

Currently, one of the concerns is whether drug prices will rise in the UK; the Secretary of State touched on that. Is there not a great desire across the United States, in fact, to achieve the same excellent deal as the NHS has secured? I doubt whether, in election year, even Donald Trump will die in a ditch for big pharma. Will the Secretary of State see this as a political campaign and not just a narrow, dry trade negotiation?

Elizabeth Truss: The right hon. Gentleman is a great champion of free trade on the Labour Benches, and I hope that his views prevail and become more mainstream in Labour party opinion. He makes a good point. Of course, there are strong economics behind this trade deal as we have outlined today. But there are those who seek to undermine the proposals and the benefits for British businesses with various smears and scare stories about the NHS, animal welfare standards or other issues. Those people damage the potential for British businesses and our economy. We are determined to rebut the false stories that they are putting out and to make sure that we put across the positive case for the whole UK.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I do not share the Scottish National party's miserable analysis of the trade deal; I see great opportunities for Scotland from a deal. But there is a cloud on the horizon: the 25% duty currently applied to malt whisky. What confidence can the Secretary of State give us that at the end of this process there will be no duties on Scotch whisky of any kind in the United States and no duty on bourbon in the United Kingdom?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend is right that this is a major issue for our excellent Scotch whisky producers and other companies such as Walkers shortbread and cashmere producers. I raised the issue again with Ambassador Lighthizer when I saw him last week. I want there to be an urgent settlement of the Airbus-Boeing dispute so that retaliatory tariffs on things such as bourbon, Harley-Davidsons and Florida orange juice as well as on our excellent products here in the UK can be removed. I am urging, as an early part of these trade negotiations, the removal of existing tariffs to show good will towards the negotiations.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Any increase in trade is clearly to be welcomed, but in private the Secretary of State will be honest, I am sure, about recognising that the benefits of the deal to the UK economy will be relatively small: just a 0.16% increase in GDP, and then only after 15 years. Why does she not do two other things? She could try to persuade her Cabinet colleagues to seek a deal with the European Union more ambitious than the Canada-light deal currently being advocated and, for goodness' sake, to get behind a third runway at Heathrow.

Elizabeth Truss: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's agreement with me that removing barriers to trade is good for everybody—it is good internationally and

[*Elizabeth Truss*]

good here in the UK. One thing he fails to point out, though, is that there are huge benefits in regulatory freedom and flexibility. As the UK is able to decide its own rules and regulations, we can be more nimble and agile in the modern world—a key benefit of our leaving the European Union and having a Canada-style deal with the EU.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I agree with my right hon. Friend's comment that the US is very excited about this trade deal—not just Washington politics, but across the whole United States.

I want to press the food standards point. The US is the biggest exporter of agricultural products in the world. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it achieves that through selling products that the world wants and not through forcing unwanted products on unwilling consumers?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that good export champions are companies that suit the markets that they serve. We will maintain our standards about what we believe to be right for UK consumers in line with the values of the farmers and people of the UK. It will be up to those that supply us—the US, the EU or anybody else—to fit with those standards. That is the nature of trade agreements.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): In 2018, at the World Health Assembly, the US tried to modify a resolution on breastfeeding, allegedly threatening Ecuador, which was sponsoring the measure, with punitive trade and aid measures. What assurance can the Secretary of State give the House that the UK will protect, promote and support breastfeeding ahead of the commercial interests of global formula companies—particularly those in the US, which produce formula to lower standards of composition and nutrition than we have here in the UK and in the EU?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Member is right to highlight this issue. However, a free trade agreement is specifically about the rules around trade. There are other organisations that set global standards in other issues. The World Health Organisation will, of course, be taking a lead on the environment in terms of COP26. There is always a bit of a danger in trying to pile too many issues into free trade agreements. This free trade agreement is all about ensuring that British consumers and businesses benefit from increased trade with the UK.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I very much welcome this statement, particularly the opportunity for all four corners of the UK to benefit. May I ask my right hon. Friend to outline how a free trade deal with the United States will benefit mid Wales, and my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire in particular?

Elizabeth Truss: I am still to take up my hon. Friend's invitation to visit one of the sheep markets in her constituency, but I am looking forward to it because I believe that Welsh lamb is a prime product, and we want to get it into the US market. We also want to remove tariffs on Welsh dairy products going into the US. Our projection shows that agriculture overall—and specifically in Wales—will benefit from a US trade deal.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The section 232 tariffs imposed by President Trump have had a deeply damaging impact on our steel industry, leading to a 30% drop in UK steel exports to the US. Does the Secretary of State agree that all trade talks with the US should be suspended until such time as our steel industry has been exempted from these completely unacceptable and protectionist tariffs?

Elizabeth Truss: I want to get the trade talks started so that I can get those tariffs removed.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): In welcoming this statement, I note that the very substantial and comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations seemed to be distorted, by the media and many lobbying interests, into little more than one or two contentious policy areas. Are we going to learn the TTIP lessons, and in particular ensure that when deal information is released for review by the US Congress, Parliament consents to that at the same time—to minimise room for unhelpful or one-sided comment or speculation?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree that we need to make a clear case, and to ensure that Parliament is engaged.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am interested to hear the Minister say that she wants to ensure that Parliament is engaged because, unlike our counterparts in the US Congress and the EU Parliament, Members of this House do not get a vote on trade deals. Is she prepared to consider reversing that policy? If not, can she tell us in what way having no debate on the trade deal constitutes taking back control?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. and learned Member will be aware that the UK has a parliamentary system that is similar to those in Australia and New Zealand, and we are following a similar process to those Parliaments. It is a different structure from the separation of powers in the United States.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): It is worth noting that the UK would have concluded a better trade deal with the US if it had been a member of the EU—part of that stronger negotiating power. Can I ask the Secretary of State how this is going to work with regards to Northern Ireland? As a by-product of the protocol, Northern Ireland will be carved out of certain aspects of UK trade deals, while at the same time EU trade deals will not be rolled over for Northern Ireland. How are we going to benefit? Are we actually in danger of being marginalised in both respects?

Elizabeth Truss: We are very clear that we are negotiating on behalf of the entire UK, including Northern Ireland. The Minister of State, Department for International Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Executive.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): The Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill are going through Parliament at the moment, and require our food producers to meet the very highest environmental and food standards. I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment that no compromise will be made regarding environmental protections, and animal welfare and food standards, but

what reassurance can she give to food producers in my constituency who do not believe that they will be faced with a level playing field once the trade deal is done?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure my hon. Friend that it is written very clearly in our document that we will not be compromising on our food standards. I highlight to him the opportunities for agriculture in the west country of lowering barriers into the US and being able to export more of its fantastic products.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): There is a lot of disquiet being expressed about digital services and tech companies, and their use of personal data. I note from the larger document that was published today that a lot of the public consultation also expressed concerns about personal data being used by US firms. What guarantees can the Secretary of State give to the House that the personal data of UK consumers will not be subject to any fewer protections than they currently enjoy under the general data protection regulation?

Elizabeth Truss: We are committed to protecting personal data. There are huge opportunities in striking an advanced digital and data chapter on the flows of data between the UK and the US—ensuring that those flows are properly underwritten and giving software companies opportunities. There are huge advantages, but we will always ensure that we are protecting people online and personal data.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Free trade is the greatest driver of global prosperity that the world has ever seen. Would the Secretary of State agree that in addition to the prospect of lowering prices for UK consumers, the high-tech businesses of West Oxfordshire can look forward to this massive global market being open to them—a market that also happens to be one of our closest friends?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right. Some 79% of all the services we provide are supplied remotely—many of them into the United States. Having this underwriting on digital and data will really help companies in areas such as robotics, artificial intelligence and computer gaming, and will provide a massive strategic advantage for the UK against our competitors.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): As we have heard, according to the Government's figures, the very best deal that they can do with the US will result in GDP growth of 0.16%—leaving aside the concerns over reduced standards, especially in food. With the Secretary of State's Government once again raising the spectre of no deal with the EU, which Government figures show would see growth of around minus 8%, put simply, would not no deal with the EU and this deal with the US be at best like losing £8 and finding a 20p piece?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very interesting that half a billion pounds in extra economic value does not mean anything to the hon. Member.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the prospects for more engagement with the dynamic US economy. The Conservatives are the party of free trade. Whenever protectionism has

been touted, such as in the elections of 1906 and 1923, it has not ended well for us. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is big scope for more marketing support for our high-quality produce, such as Somerset cheddar and brie, and that fear of imports does not take account of the ability to deal in zero-tariff quota opening, rather than complete tariff reduction up to any amount?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend has outlined a number of options; I will be interested to hear more as we go through the negotiations. He is right that we have great products that are currently facing tariffs of up to 18%, and that we could eliminate those and see more exports into the US market. We will be looking at our export strategy—the exports Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), is with me on the Front Bench—and ensuring that we turbocharge our exports as we go into this important year of being an independent trading nation.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The Secretary of State talks about removing barriers to trade and mentions the creative industries, which I welcome. Musicians and others currently tour the EU without any barriers whatever, or a need for visas or forms for their equipment and instruments; their experience with the US is completely the opposite. What reassurance can she give us that she will prioritise visa-free travel in the US for creatives, with form-free transportation of musical instruments and equipment?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Member will notice that we are very clear in our negotiating objectives about the protection of intellectual property for the creative industries, and about the opportunities for better visas and travel. We will be working on that throughout the process.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): US public procurement potentially offers exciting opportunities for British companies to access an enormous market. However, as my right hon. Friend will know, much public procurement in the United States is conducted at state and municipality level. How does she propose to reflect that state of affairs in any future free trade agreement?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend is right. There are issues that are dealt with at a federal level and a state level. We will be seeking an agreement that secures access to US Government procurement at a federal level. We will also be looking, in the first instance, at the major states as well to gain more access for British companies.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that if an agreement could not be reached to exclude the NHS from any trade deal, then we would walk away, but will she be clear on whether, if any trade deal was done, she would expect there to be explicit wording in it to exempt public services from any liberalisation measures?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure the hon. Lady that we will put in the wording necessary to deliver the commitments that I have laid out in the objectives—that is, no increases to drugs prices, no services put at risk, and also the NHS itself not being on the table. That will be clear.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): The fact of the matter is that our exports to the US are growing at a faster rate than they are to the EU. The west midlands has consistently had a trade surplus with the USA. Does the Secretary of State agree that a US trade deal would open up new markets for small and medium-sized businesses and herald many new opportunities for business and industry in the west midlands?

Elizabeth Truss: There are huge opportunities in the midlands for further trade with the US. The midlands is already a very strong exporter to the US. I believe that one in five goods from there goes to the US market, but we can do more to remove tariffs and also to get rid of some of the testing procedures and non-tariff barriers that are stopping our car industry exporters so much.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State state her commitment to protecting UK citizens from online harms. She will know that the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement required the insertion of the section 230 provisions of the United States' Communications Decency Act, which give immunity from liability to the big social media companies. If an approach like that were incorporated in a UK-US deal, it would be impossible for us to bring forward the online harms regime and take action against social media companies for failing to act against harmful content. Will she confirm that the British Government would not accept a move in this country equivalent to section 230 in the US-Mexico-Canada agreement?

Elizabeth Truss: I can confirm that we stand by our online harms commitment, and nothing in the US trade deal will affect that.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I particularly thank the Secretary of State for mentioning the ceramics industry in Stoke-on-Trent. Does she agree that this has huge potential to give access to markets in the US for a number of ceramics firms, but also for a number of other industries right across Stoke-on-Trent, and to help to level up the opportunities for the people I represent in Stoke-on-Trent South?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend. I enjoyed visiting his constituency and meeting some of the fantastic companies there, including Walker's Nonsuch Toffee, for which I also want to secure a tariff reduction.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): I am sure that the Secretary of State is just as chuffed as I am to learn that Milton Keynes has been voted the best place outside London to do business, not least because of our thriving digital and data sector. What more will this US trade deal do for our digital and data sector?

Elizabeth Truss: We want to achieve a world-leading data and digital agreement, underwriting data flows but also dealing with issues like blockchain and artificial intelligence, thereby making sure that we and the US are leading the world and able to share these economic opportunities.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I very much welcome this statement, but I know that the Secretary of State is aware of the very negative

impact that US tariffs are having, particularly in my constituency, on textiles and cashmere. I am pleased to hear what she is doing to address that, but can she reassure me that there will be some sort of restriction in the trade deal on the US imposing these arbitrary tariffs in future on whisky and other sectors within the Scottish economy?

Elizabeth Truss: As has been pointed out, Scotch whisky has been hit by retaliatory tariffs between the US and the EU. Of course we want to see that settled. We also want to see resolution on the Airbus-Boeing dispute. In future, I would be seeking to avoid such tit-for-tat tariffs, making sure that we have agreement on both sides.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The truth is that these negotiations and those with the EU are vital for business, growth and jobs across the UK. Does my right hon. Friend believe that the timing of the US presidential elections may give a fair wind to the urgency of resolution of her negotiations?

Elizabeth Truss: We are pushing our full complement of resources into these negotiations, and so is the United States. I am not going to set a deadline on the negotiations but I certainly hope that the prevailing political wind will help us to conclude as early as we can.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): I really welcome the visits by my right hon. Friend and by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) to Stoke-on-Trent. I think that my right hon. Friend is very well aware of the particular issues facing the ceramics industry. Within this ambitious trade deal, we certainly want punitive tariffs removed from the ceramics industry, and I hope that that will be part of any negotiations.

Elizabeth Truss: That certainly will be part of our trade negotiations. There are many industries across the UK that face high tariffs and high barriers. We want those removed so that we can see every part of the UK thrive.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): May I heartily congratulate my right hon. Friend on bringing this statement forward on the same day that the talks begin with the EU? She followed me at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and she knows perfectly well the tremendous opportunities in the States for UK food, agricultural and drink products, particularly Scotch whisky. Does she agree also, going the other way, that this gives a massive advantage to every family and every business in this country, who will now have access to goods produced to world standards at world prices, forcing European producers hitherto protected by the tariff wall to sell here at world prices?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend makes a typically Ricardian case for lower tariffs and lower barriers. He is right. It will help our British citizens to lower their cost of living, which is good for us all.

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): Ever since King George III accepted John Adams's credentials as ambassador to the United States, both states respectively

have regarded each other as sovereign equals and worked ceaselessly towards fostering ever closer diplomatic, military, cultural and commercial ties. Does the Secretary of State agree that a future free trade agreement should be seen as part of this story? I am a proud Yorkshireman, and like many of those who come from God's own country, we love the USA. Any agreement that makes it easier for my American friends to more easily and affordably buy Harrogate's world-famous Yorkshire Tea is to be welcomed.

Elizabeth Truss: I do agree. I know the Americans have an affinity both for Yorkshire tea and Yorkshire beer.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the removal of the tariff of 19.8 cents on every litre of English sparkling wine represents a great opportunity?

Elizabeth Truss: My friend is absolutely right. We have seen the growth of sparkling wine exports, which now, I think, total more than £100 million a year. I see huge opportunities in removing those tariffs and getting more of our excellent sparkling wine into the United States.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): North-east Lincolnshire is a major centre for the renewable energy sector, and a number of US delegations have already visited to look at opportunities. Would the Secretary of State give an assurance that her Department will support the small and medium-sized companies that want to get into the supply chain in this sector?

Elizabeth Truss: One of our key asks from the US trade deal is a dedicated chapter to make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises by removing some of the customs red tape, being able to do more things online, and being able to get better information. I will certainly look at my hon. Friend's specific businesses in Cleethorpes in that regard.

Point of Order

6.18 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On Thursday last week, the UK Government held a drugs summit at the Scottish Event Campus in my constituency. The Minister for Crime and Policing, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care—the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who is responsible for prevention, public health and primary care—and the Secretary of State for State for Scotland were all in attendance at this event, and none of them had the courtesy to tell me formally that they were going to be in my constituency. Indeed, the latter two, I have discovered, were there because of social media. This comes on the back of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is responsible for welfare delivery, attending events in Glasgow and again not notifying a number of local elected Members.

What might I do, Madam Deputy Speaker, to ensure that the Government give notifications in future? Particularly with regard to the drugs summit, this is an issue of huge importance to me and to my constituents in Glasgow Central, and I was not even afforded an invite to go there and make representations on behalf of my constituents. Can you advise me on what I might be able to do to address this situation?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. Obviously I am not responsible for whom Ministers might invite to events, but it is absolutely essential that hon. and right hon. Members are informed if a Minister is to be in their constituency. I hope that those on the Treasury Bench will take away the point that she has made and perhaps ensure that she gets a bit of an explanation or apology as to why she was not informed.

Medicines and Medical Devices Bill

Second Reading

6.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

While the world grapples with the challenge of coronavirus, it is vital that we do not lose sight of the important long-term reforms that we must make. Medicines and medical devices are evolving faster than ever. Not long ago, we could only record an ECG with hospital-grade equipment; now we can do it at home with a cheap device linked to our phone. Already, artificial intelligence is being used to discover new drug compounds. Now that we have left the European Union, we need a regulatory system that is nimble enough to keep up with those developments while maintaining and enhancing patient safety. That is what this Bill will achieve.

The aims of the Bill are fourfold. First, it gives us the means to depart from EU rules and regulations in future, moving at a faster pace, if that is what we choose to do as an independent, self-governing nation. Secondly, it ensures that we can easily amend regulation through secondary legislation without having to bring a new Bill before the House every time we need to revise the rules. That means our system of regulation will be flexible and responsive, quick to adapt to innovation and quick to respond when a safety issue emerges. Thirdly, the Bill will strengthen patient safety by strengthening the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, our world-class medicines and medical devices regulator. That includes giving it powers that were not available under the EU, including over registration of devices and disclosure. Fourthly, the Bill will ensure that we strike the right balance between capturing the benefits of innovation without compromising patient safety.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): All those objectives of the Bill require a level of investment to bring about the innovations that we seek. The Prime Minister made a commitment of £200 million in September. How much private sector money does the Secretary of State expect that to leverage? What is our ambition?

Matt Hancock: We do not have a figure for medicines and medical devices specifically. As a nation, we have a goal that we should reach 2.4% of GDP spent on research. We are increasing the medical research budget; for instance, we are doubling the budget for research into dementia. As my right hon. Friend rightly points out, the public budget for research is only one part of it. There is huge private sector and charitable sector investment—for instance, from the Wellcome Trust. The Bill will allow research money—whether it comes from the public sector, private sector or third sector—to go further and get medicines and medical devices to NHS patients faster, as well as supporting our life sciences sector.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I recognise the Secretary of State's support for innovative medical technology. I am interested in the registers to which he referred, covered in section 13 of the Bill, and in particular the need to ensure that we get the maximum benefit without their being too onerous. Will he give an assurance that there will be some kind of consolidation where there are multiple registers in the same field and that we will only collect information that is specific to the subject stated for the registers?

Matt Hancock: It is almost as though the hon. Gentleman has read my speech. That is the broad intent of that part of the Bill. I will come to it in more detail in a moment, and I am glad about the constructive tone that has been adopted across the House when discussing the Bill.

As I said, the fourth purpose of the Bill is to get innovation while not compromising patient safety—indeed, I would argue that we will enhance patient safety by being able to use modern techniques. It will do that by requiring the Secretary of State to have regard to the safety of medicines and medical devices; to the availability of medicines and devices, because sometimes getting availability as fast as possible is crucial for both innovation and patient safety; and to the attractiveness of the UK as a place to conduct clinical trials and bring medicines and medical devices to market. I will come on to clinical trials in more detail.

Let me turn to the main parts of the Bill. The first part, covering clauses 1 to 7, gives us the ability to update the law relating to human medicines—for example, to reflect changes in manufacturing methods or new types of product. We need that ability because coming down the track are cutting-edge personalised medicines that a hospital might literally have to assemble at the patient's bedside. Those include gene therapies, medical gases and 3D-printed tablets—bespoke treatments so tailored to the individual that they will only be produced once, with a shelf life that might be measured in minutes. It is just not appropriate to regulate those kinds of treatment in the same way as a mass-produced factory drug, with mandatory batch numbers and packaging information. The Bill gives us the flexibility to respond to those developments. It also allows us to make changes to the regulation of clinical trials, ensuring that we are a globally attractive market to test new drugs and treatments.

But the Bill is not just about the latest science and innovation. It also means that we can update the rules on things such as labelling requirements—for instance, whether the leaflet in a pill packet should have a digital equivalent; rules on how online pharmacies ensure that medicines reach their intended customer; and rules on how the medicine brokerage market works.

We have said that we want to do more to boost the role of our brilliant community pharmacists, and the Bill helps us to do exactly that. It will allow us to remove the barriers to hub-and-spoke dispensing once EU rules no longer apply. Large companies such as Boots already do that, but the law as it stands prevents small, independent pharmacies from joining this kind of arrangement if the hub is not part of the same retail business as the spokes. That is an unnecessary barrier for smaller businesses in the pharmacy sector, and the Bill means that we can remove those barriers.

It also allows us to continue to add to the range of healthcare professionals who can prescribe medicines, which will relieve pressure on the frontline NHS, and it gives us the ability to make rapid changes to regulations to ensure the availability of and access to medicines in an emergency; I am sure we can all understand right now why that is important. Nothing in the Bill changes all the regulations immediately. Instead, it is about getting ahead of the game and giving us the power to make these changes as and when we need to, suitably scrutinised by Parliament.

The next part of the Bill concerns veterinary medicines. It broadly replicates the first part, giving us the ability to amend or supplement the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013. Changes could include, for instance, how veterinary medicines are supplied and the information that must be supplied with them. It sets out that, in making new regulations, we have an obligation to consider the safety of the medicines in relation to animals, humans and the environment. These are important matters, not least for me as the Newmarket MP. The Bill will ensure that we have a veterinary medicine system that is fit for purpose.

The third part of the Bill deals with the medical devices regulatory framework, covering everything from MRI scanners to embolisation coils and pacemakers to prophylactics. Like the first part, it allows us to fast-track a new diagnostic test in response to an emerging disease.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Is this not an example of how, having left the EU, we can now move at a much faster pace on a lot of regulatory things that are really important to our constituents?

Matt Hancock: Yes, that is right. This Bill empowers us to be able to move faster. Essentially, it empowers the UK to build a life sciences regulatory framework that is the best in the world—of course, working with EU partners, but also with partners from right around the world—and all with the intention of getting the most innovative products, as quickly as possible and as cost-effectively as possible, into the NHS. That is the goal of the entire Bill. It is a benefit of Brexit, but it is also worth doing in its own right.

The measures to strengthen innovation with respect to diagnostic tests again strengthen patient safety, because they strengthen the role of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. This includes, for instance, allowing us to legislate to create a comprehensive statutory register of medical devices in the UK. Such a register could be held by the MHRA, and we would make it compulsory to register a device along with information such as who manufactures and supplies it. This would mean that the MHRA could conduct post-market surveillance of devices in the UK, making it easier to trigger device recalls where a safety concern arises.

Indeed, we will enhance patient safety by giving the MHRA a new power to disclose to members of the public any safety concerns about a device. This was not possible while we were part of the EU. Previously, if an NHS trust raised a concern about a device and asked if similar reports had been received elsewhere, too often the MHRA was restricted in sharing that information; nor could it always routinely share information with the Care Quality Commission or other NHS national bodies. This Bill gives us the ability to share vital information about reporting patterns with the NHS family, and where necessary with the public, with enforcement powers that will be proportionate, transparent and suitably safeguarded.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I do not recognise the Secretary of State's description that it was not possible to inform NHS bodies of concerns about machinery or devices. In my 33 years on the

frontline, we received daily information about anything that was considered a danger or a failing, so I do not recognise that.

Matt Hancock: In some cases it was possible to share that information but not in all cases, and it will be possible now. I have no doubt that the hon. Member, like others on the frontline, will have received some information, but the MHRA is currently limited in the information that it can share with other NHS bodies. We are removing the limits on that information sharing, which of course needs to be done appropriately, but should not be set in primary legislation.

Our goal is this: we want the UK to be the best place in the world to design and trial the latest medical innovations. This Bill gives us the powers we need to make that happen. It will mean that the NHS has access to the most cutting-edge medicines and medical devices, with enhanced patient safety; it will help our life sciences seize the enormous opportunities of the 2020s, supported by a world-leading regulator; and it will help us pave our way as a self-governing independent nation. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.33 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): We do not intend to divide the House on the Bill this evening. We understand the need for the Bill because its purpose is for the UK Government to take the powers they need as a result of Brexit. In that respect, we broadly support the principles of the Bill, and we offer to work constructively with the Government on strengthening and improving aspects of it. I have a couple of remarks to make that are related to this, but not to the exact contents of the Bill.

May I start by saying that we all know, not least because of the coronavirus outbreak, that disease knows no borders and defeating disease cannot be done in isolation? International co-operation and research and development are vital and must be accelerated, not hindered. Will the Secretary of State—or indeed the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), in her winding-up speech—explain or comment on the press reports today suggesting that the UK is not seeking to participate in the EU pandemic preparedness measures, which may obviously help in relation to coronavirus and other future outbreaks?

I am of course talking about the early warning and response system. It was suggested in *The Daily Telegraph* today that No. 10 had overruled the Secretary of State. Since then, a former Minister, Baroness Blackwood, has told Sky News:

“My advice while I was in there was that I thought it was absolutely appropriate that we should stay engaged with that system... I think this is something that the EU would want to maintain and we as Britain should seek to maintain.”

I agree with her. I believe it would be foolhardy to pull out of something like this at the best of times, but to do so at the time of an outbreak such as this is surely putting narrow dogma before the public health of the country. I would be grateful if the Minister responded on that.

Secondly, we also learned at the weekend that the UK will not participate in the unified patent court, which will make developing medicines here in the UK more expensive, not cheaper and easier, and it may make doing

[Jonathan Ashworth]

clinical trials here less attractive. The Government have done lots of briefing on this Bill, but over the weekend they slipped it out while briefing trade magazines that the UK will not be seeking involvement in the unitary patent system. Again, that is disappointing, and I would welcome some remarks from the Minister on that front when she sums up.

However, this Bill is important, and we do not want to see anything that undermines what has been built up over many years in the United Kingdom. We do have much to be proud of in the field of medical innovation. We have a long history of taking a leading role in scientific advance and novel trial design. Indeed, the recent deal to give NHS patients early access to a new cholesterol treatment demonstrates that the UK is already a world-leading destination in which to develop cutting-edge treatments. We want to build on that, not undermine it.

Members across the House will be aware that our pharmaceutical industry is the single largest private sector investor in UK R&D and provides many jobs across the country for many of our constituents. We should be proud of that sector and of the contribution that life sciences make in providing access to the most cutting-edge treatments. We should be proud that they are vital to economic growth, enhance UK productivity and ensure prosperity for the future.

Yet while the opportunities before us to develop medicines and medical devices are transformative—both saving lives and radically improving the quality of life for those with the most debilitating of conditions—we also know that things can go wrong. There must never be any compromise on patient safety. Patients put their trust in practitioners, literally trusting them with their lives, and they rightly expect medicine and medical devices to be safe, yet too often in recent years the system has failed patients.

For many years, long before I acquired the health brief in my party, I worked closely with a constituent, Emma Friedmann, who has campaigned for justice for women whose children were impacted by sodium valproate. Members from across this House have spoken with passion and eloquence on behalf of women affected by Primodos. Equally, we have heard heartbreaking stories in this House about the surgical mesh scandal. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), the shadow Minister, has been one of the leading campaigners on this issue, along with colleagues across the House. We eagerly anticipate the Cumberlege independent medicines and medical devices review, but there have been other scandals too—breast implants, hip replacements—that are not necessarily covered. We would welcome an update from the Minister about that review and some remarks on whether the Government expect to implement its findings.

My point is that a robust regulatory framework for medical devices to protect patients and users is paramount. We will be testing this Bill to ensure that it provides the safety standards that our constituents deserve, while at the same time ensuring it is forward looking enough to be the correct framework to capture the fast pace of innovation in this field, which the Secretary of State mentioned. However, I believe that the existing regulatory framework has become complex and, arguably, unwieldy.

The House will be aware that much of the regulatory landscape derives from EU directives that have been implemented in domestic legislation. At the end of the transition period, these frameworks will be preserved as retained EU law, but as I understand the Bill, the Secretary of State is proposing to take delegated powers to allow these existing regulatory frameworks to be updated without the need for primary legislation. The Bill requires the Secretary of State, as he said, to have regard to the safety and availability of medicines and medical devices, as well as to the attractiveness of the relevant part of the UK with respect to the life sciences sector. We argue that that attractiveness clause could benefit from some definition, and it would allay concerns if the Government accepted an amendment in Committee to indicate that the Secretary of State, or some other appropriate authority, would always prioritise safety.

The overall effect of the provisions is to confer on the Secretary of State an extensive range of delegated powers to make regulations that span the manufacture of medicines, marketing and supply, falsified medicines, clinical trials, fees, information and offences, and emergencies. That extensive range of powers risks inadequate scrutiny of what will become major policy decisions, and in Committee Labour will press Ministers to support time-limiting those delegated powers.

Matt Hancock: I am sure that this debate will continue in Committee, but for clarity, those delegated powers existed under the European Communities Act 1972. The Bill proposes to replace existing delegated powers from the 1972 Act with new powers to make such regulations under the new Act. This is not a new set of delegated powers; it replaces one set with another—indeed, the Bill replaces those powers with clearer safeguards on those matters to which the Secretary of State must have regard.

Jonathan Ashworth: That is a welcome clarification, but I am sure the Secretary of State will agree that it is important that decisions made in this field are properly scrutinised through the usual procedures. We are keen to ensure that by tabling an appropriate amendment in Committee.

We are leaving the EU, but Labour Members consider it essential that we stay closely aligned with it on medicine regulation. With that in mind, the Government should clarify their attitude to new EU regulations such as the in vitro diagnostic medical devices regulation, which is due to be implemented in 2022. As I understand it, that regulation will not automatically apply to the UK. Is it the Government's intention to align with it? The EU tissue and cells directive is being reviewed. Do the Government intend us to align with it? To ensure that the UK remains a world leader in scientific research and discovery, it is vital that we align with guidelines on clinical trials. Otherwise, patients could miss out on participating in trials and the UK could find it harder to access funding.

Effective joint working with our European partners has been vital for the NHS over recent years on everything from infectious disease control to the licensing, sale and regulation of medicines. Patients in the UK can access EU-wide trials for new treatments and the UK has the highest number of phase 1 clinical trials across the EU, as well as the highest number of trials for rare and

childhood diseases. It is vital for improving health outcomes in the UK and EU that the UK continues to access those networks. Otherwise, we run the high risk of patients with rare diseases being adversely impacted.

The Bill contains provisions to extend the range of professions that can prescribe medicines, thereby allowing additional health care practitioners such as paramedics and midwives to be given restricted prescribing rights. We welcome those provisions and, assuming that their competencies have been assessed in the same way as those of other prescribers and that equal safeguards are in place, we support that sensible and timely reform. Will there also be plans for a consultation on the future prescribing rights of physician associates and surgical care practitioners?

I will not say too much about part 2 of the Bill, other than to confirm that any measures that help in the battle against anti-microbial resistance have Labour's support. Part 3 is about medical devices. I have already commented on the use of delegated powers, and as I said at the outset, patient safety must be the priority and we will look to strengthen regulation in that area. Unlike medicines and drugs, many surgical innovations can be introduced without clinical trial data or centrally held evidence. That is a clear risk to patient safety, and it undermines public confidence. Manufacturers are often in charge of testing their own products after faults have developed and they can shop around for approval to market their products without declaring any refusals.

Two years ago, freedom of information requests to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency revealed 62,000 adverse incident reports that were linked to medical devices between 2015 and 2018, and more than 1,000 had resulted in death. Most devices are cleared through a pathway that allows new products to inherit the approval status of "substantially equivalent" products already on the market. In some cases, after lengthy chains of equivalence-based approvals, the new devices scarcely resemble the original version. Indeed, a study in *The BMJ* in 2017 found that the family tree of 61 surgical mesh products related to two original devices that were approved in 1985 and 1996. Unless we fix that and put patient safety at the heart of the regulatory framework, patients will suffer and lack confidence.

We know the Secretary of State is a great champion of and has promoted many health-based apps. We need a robust and sophisticated mechanism to evaluate app-based healthcare for use in the NHS, and in Committee we will look to strengthen the regulation of that. We welcome what appear to be plans for a devices register, and I took note of what the Secretary of State said in his interaction with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe). We believe, however, that such a register must provide comprehensive data on who, where, how and why devices were implanted, and by whom, so that any recall could be quickly enacted.

To achieve that, we encourage Ministers to strengthen the Bill by reflecting provisions in existing EU regulation and to ensure there are unique device identifiers, such as serial numbers on medical devices that are labelled with tracking information, as well as the power to track the use of those devices, so that the NHS can find and notify affected patients if and when problems arise. By the same token, the Government must reassure us that with such a register it is practically possible to cover all

devices, including everything from implants to bone screws, software, apps, mesh, medical cannulas, pacemakers and so on. That is an extensive list of different devices, and I would be keen to hear how such a register could be implemented practically.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): The hon. Gentleman's point about "why?" is important. As a doctor, I know that things move on, and when someone leaves medical school 50% of what they have learned is out of date. With devices that are likely to exist for 10, 20, 30 or 40 years, looking back it can be difficult to work out exactly why something was implanted. I would like the Bill to request an explanation from the clinician at the time to say what the thinking was. In the future, that would inform people who needed to deal with someone who had something implanted in their heart 20 years ago, for example, by which time the history might be exactly that—history.

Jonathan Ashworth: It has taken me some time, but let me welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place, particularly as a fellow Leicestershire MP. His contribution is well made, and I look forward to working constructively with him on health matters, as well as on various Leicestershire matters. I hope the Minister will reflect on his contribution and answer it when responding to the debate.

The Opposition will not seek to divide the House. We want the Bill to proceed to Committee, and we will work constructively with the Government to improve and strengthen it. It is up to Ministers to allay concerns about patient safety and about the UK's ability to develop medicines rapidly for NHS patients in the future, and we look forward to a constructive debate on the Bill.

6.48 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) and to speak in this important debate. This is an immensely important subject of great national interest. In the context of leaving the European Union, the Bill will allow existing European Union regulations on medicines and medical devices to be transposed into UK law. The Bill is closely linked to the timings of the transition period as we leave the EU—and perhaps to any extension, which we hope to avoid.

I welcome the Bill's principal thrust, which is to remove unnecessary bureaucracy for the lowest risk clinical trials, to encourage the rapid introduction of new medicines, to ensure patient safety by combating counterfeit medicines, and to extend the UK's global lead in personalised medicines and artificial intelligence in health. Ultimately, all those concerns link up to what ought to be our principal focus in this debate: better patient outcomes and creating a healthier society.

Many people would be surprised to hear just what a contribution the life sciences sector makes to the UK economy. It encompasses pharmaceuticals, medical devices and medical technology, and it is worth over £74 billion per annum. The sector also employs close to 250,000 people in the UK. Many of those jobs are often secure, and are highly skilled and highly qualified. We will shortly introduce an immigration Bill. It is right that we focus on the skills and the contribution people can

[Chris Green]

make to the UK. Bringing more people to the UK with PhDs and STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—qualifications ought to complement and enhance the support of our life sciences sector. The more we hear about technicians, engineers and scientists who want to come to the UK, the more it will be a really positive thing not only for the sector but for immigration to the UK as a whole, and how people perceive it.

Dr Whitford: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that young graduates with a degree or a PhD, technologists and researchers often do not earn more than the threshold the Government have set for a visa?

Chris Green: That is a significant concern. The Government have reduced the starting point in the immigration Bill from £30,000 to about £25,000 and I believe the points-based system will have the flexibility we require, but those areas should be judged and reviewed as time goes on. Certainly in these sectors we want highly qualified, highly skilled and highly experienced people to come to the UK.

One big concern in medicine is data. A lot of what we do in medicine falls into the category of big data: the acquisition, transmission, storage and application of that data. This is a really interesting time for technology. The devices themselves are able to generate good quality data. As has been highlighted, it is now so much easier for personal devices to be worn not just for a few hours or a couple of days, but for a long period of time. People are now able to go about their daily lives in a normal way, whether they are exercising or doing something as basic as having a shower. Some devices could not previously cope with people taking exercise or having a shower, but increasingly, devices are able to cope. They can amass a vast amount of data. It is pretty much impossible for a clinician or a GP to judge such a huge wealth of data, so we are increasingly looking at how GPs and hospital consultants can use artificial intelligence and other methods to give them a helping hand in carrying out the assessments. They might end up with tens of thousands of pages of data and a consultant just will not have time to consider it all. Using artificial intelligence could help them to do the assessments and come to conclusions.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all Members, on both sides of the House, still have a big job of work to do with the public to inspire confidence in how their data is used in an appropriate and anonymised way? What he is saying is really important. Data saves lives and can improve outcomes, but there is, understandably given previous experiences, a great deal of suspicion among the public about how their medical data might be used.

Chris Green: That is an incredibly important point. We need confidence that when data is taken, it is secure, protected and anonymised in the appropriate way, and that only the right organisations have access to it. I believe that data is a key area for the NHS and what it ought to be able to deliver. The NHS should be a huge repository of data, and universities, charities and businesses, with the appropriate controls, ought to be able to use it. As we move on—perhaps a particular aspect relates to rare conditions—the size of population needed in order

to gather and analyse that data will increase. I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of this point and perhaps elaborate on it at the end of the debate. We need to ensure that our relationship with the EU will enable us to continue to collaborate on clinical trials and that data transmission across the European Union, and across Europe more widely, is efficient and effective.

Dr Luke Evans: My hon. Friend talks wisely about big data. Big data can be used to empower patients as individuals. Providing them with more data to understand and interpret, if it is provided in the right way, can empower them to make better choices. After all, the biggest under-utilised resource we have in healthcare is our patients. Healthcare is very doctor-heavy and nurse-heavy. Empowering patients helps them to make better choices. For example, patients with diabetes can monitor their own blood sugar. That has revolutionised the way in which people care for themselves. I would like my hon. Friend's thoughts on whether he thinks we should explore this area further.

Chris Green: That is a vital and well-made point. Data can empower the individual. They can have more detailed access to their own records and their own data. The data generated by someone wearing a device day in, day out, week in, week out can be transmitted to a consultant, who can call a patient more promptly if there is anything a little worrying. If there is a heart murmur or someone feels a bit dizzy, the person can register that concern at that moment. That is useful information for the clinician, who will be able to recognise when someone's lifestyle has aggravated a condition. There are many ways that the data can be used. I think we are in relatively early days. I am not sure I would include Fitbits and that kind of technology—there is far more interesting and advanced technology—but it is important that people are increasingly engaged.

There is a concern about the embrace of technology, devices and data, and the streamlining of processes in hospitals. The contribution of individuals, GPs and consultants provides an opportunity to consider a more engaged approach to hospital and GP services in a way that could reduce the number of appointments that are necessary. Some hospital trusts have a chief innovation officer on their board. I think there are about 20 across the country, which is a relatively small proportion. It may be worth considering what the Minister can do to promote that. Ideally, we need the early adoption of approved medicines in the system. This is where the register ought to help. If we can have people in hospital trusts leading and championing the adoption of new technologies, providing information and insight, perhaps we can give more confidence to chairmen and boards as a whole. We could then have more trusts adopting technologies. We could therefore support the industry and patients, and get them the medical treatment they need earlier.

Dr Whitford: That might well be the case with gadgets, devices or new digital apps, but with new drugs, it is usually the clinicians who are desperate to get their hands on them. Most new drugs, particularly for challenging conditions such as cancer, are expensive and it will be several years before they are passed by NICE in England or the Scottish Medicine Consortium. The delay is not the clinicians not wanting access; it is the cost of introducing them.

Chris Green: I agree—the hon. Lady makes a good point. What I was saying relates more to devices than drugs. Devices and drugs each have their own challenges and we will hopefully make some progress in resolving those concerns.

One of the concerns about the current system relates to the legal framework, which has been criticised for being complex and lacking in consistency and transparency, and it is somewhat difficult for it to respond quickly to problems, especially when patient safety is at risk. The Bill provides us with the perfect opportunity to streamline our approach to giving access to new and innovative treatments to patients, particularly those with rare diseases and conditions, while ensuring that we are fully committed to a system of regulation for medicines and medical devices that can respond to changes in technology and patient safety concerns as soon as possible. This is more relevant now than ever, given the dramatic expansion of digital health and artificial intelligence, and other rapid advances.

I have some questions about the Bill. Will the Minister provide clarification about the exact role that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency will play in constructing and maintaining a register of devices that have been approved for industry use? Industry has generally welcomed the idea of registries and their usage, but how will registry data be used in the future? Should the Bill not consider changing the way in which NICE prioritises data? NICE currently prioritises level one data—data gained through randomised clinical trials—ahead of real-world registry data. For medical devices, it is often impossible to conduct a blind, randomised clinical trial, so this level of data is unavailable, making it more difficult to get positive NICE guidance. Can we perhaps consider placing a higher weighting on registry data in decision-making processes and use it to inform outcome measures to assess the success of treatments? Registries could support the collection of data on longer-term outcomes—perhaps five to 10 years, for example, rather than the standard 12 months. There is a very significant concern relating to the contrast between drugs and devices. A drug will perhaps be more likely to have in-year savings or result in an in-year delivery, whereas it might take two, three, four, five or even 10 years to see the improvements, delivery or financial return from a device, or medical technology that has been purchased. It is not certain that the current financial landscape lends itself to longer-term planning.

Will the Minister clarify whether the Bill will include provisions on how countries and notified bodies might be considered competent to make an assessment on behalf of the United Kingdom? This would help to avoid duplication and having to seek approval for new devices and treatments from bodies in different countries that share very similar standards.

Much of industry has expressed the need for further clarification on how closely we will remain aligned with European Union regulations after the end of the transition period. That is particularly relevant to how we conduct clinical trials, particularly for rare diseases, where there are not a significant number of patients to test new ideas on. Maintaining easy access to patients and co-operation around data sharing has been cited as a top priority, so will the Minister clarify whether she intends for us to remain closely aligned with the EU

regulations where there is a mutual interest in doing so? The transition from the clinical trials directive to the clinical trials regulation is of particular interest. It has not yet been adopted across the EU and there has been a succession of delays. I understand that it should have been adopted in 2016, but it has been delayed and delayed, and there are plans for it to be adopted later this year if conditions work in its favour.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill and the framework that it seeks to create by ensuring that the UK remains a global player in the world of R&D. The powers in the Bill provide us with the perfect opportunity to significantly build on and improve aspects of medicine development processes in the UK—notably, by speeding up the approval process. The Bill has been generally welcomed by industry, but I would be grateful if the Minister, time permitting, took note of the questions I have asked and offered as much clarification as possible.

7.5 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The Bill is necessary because of Brexit, as the UK is losing the European Medicines Agency—one of the great advantages was working together to have a single licensing system that licensed new drugs right across Europe. As the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) described, it is about working with other countries to avoid duplication and to speed up getting new drugs from the laboratory to patients who need them.

The problem is that manufacturers will have to apply separately to the UK, which means extra processes and additional costs. It is important, therefore, that whatever system is adopted is as similar to the EU as possible and does not ask for a whole different set of work-up, investigation and paperwork, or that will put manufacturers off launching their drugs in the UK. The same issues apply to veterinary medicines, hence they are in the Bill.

The simple fact is that the EU is a market of 500 million people—a quarter of the world pharmaceutical market. The UK on its own is only 3%, which is why drugs tend to be launched in the US and Europe at the same time. In all my 33 years on the frontline, I saw an acceleration of drugs getting from the bench top to the patient, because of the EU and the European Medicines Agency. This means that there are likely to be delays for patients. Canada and Australia wait another six to 12 months before drugs are launched there, so how will the Government avoid a delay in patient access, particularly for new drugs from outside the UK and for conditions such as cancer, where patients are literally waiting for the drug?

Chris Green: I realise that this is a distinct area, but does the hon. Lady share my concern that sometimes the EU as a whole is quite slow at reform—for example, with the clinical trials directive and the clinical trials regulation? The CTD was first devised in 2001. We are now in 2020 and we have not yet updated it. Industry and wider sectors would like the update to happen, but it is taking a very long time.

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. When we are trying to collaborate and get a group of 28 countries—indeed, 31 countries, because the European economic area is involved—to all agree to such enormous changes, with legal ramifications for their drug and device producers, and so on, it takes time, but in the end, I think it will be worth it. Of course, I would have

[Dr Whitford]

liked it earlier. Having been involved in breast cancer trials, I know that the clinical trials directive was clunky and bureaucratic, but it is being changed.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank my hon. Friend for answering the extremely important points that have been raised. Does she agree that it is also extremely important that those with rare diseases still have access to the clinical trials that can perhaps only take place in the EU, because they need to have so many participants? The UK on its own might struggle to have those clinical trials for rare diseases.

Dr Whitford: That is an excellent point, which I will come on to shortly, and I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

The Bill puts attractiveness as a place to do trials and supply medicines almost on a par with safety and drug availability. What exactly does that mean? The shadow Health Secretary was right to seek a definition of that phrase. Is it about cutting red tape? If so, I would point out that one man's red tape is another man's life and limb. The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry says that the industry does not want divergence or lower standards, or standards that change all the time. Alignment with the EMA and the FDA in America keeps costs down, reduces delays and keeps bureaucracy down. The industry here will have to match EU standards for the bulk of its production and will not be keen on doing small-batch production for the UK only if that has a totally different set of standards.

It is important that the new measures on falsified and counterfeit medicines be taken. The unique identifier number, including barcode scanning, is important, as are tamper-proof containers. There is a whole market out there in counterfeit drugs and it endangers patient safety, which is vital in all of this. As part of that, we will have to negotiate data sharing with the EU and the EMA to enable pharmacovigilance on a bigger scale and make it possible to recognise much earlier patterns of side effects and complications.

How will the Government provide the extra funding and support to the MHRA, which is to take on an extensive area of extra work? How will it combine that with delivering quicker assessments and licensing so as to encourage companies to launch their devices or other drugs in the UK? As has been referred to, there is a need to replace the clinical trials directive, which in the original version was indeed very bureaucratic. As a clinical trialist within breast cancer, I found it to be often quite off-putting. The new clinical trials regulations create an EU-wide portal—a single point of digital registration of trials and collaboration on design, recruitment, data, entry and analysis. Unfortunately, UK-only regulations will not replace that when it finally goes live in 2022.

International collaboration is critical to research, and the European research network is the biggest in the world—bigger than China and bigger than the US. As mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) and the hon. Member for Bolton West, that collaboration is vital for rare diseases, where the number of patients in any one country is low. That is why we have made so

much progress in rare diseases, childhood diseases and childhood cancers in the past decade or so—because of funding from the EMA and collaboration on an extensive Europe-wide basis. As regards cancer, my own specialty, half of all UK cancer trials are international, and 28% of Cancer Research UK trials involve at least one other EU state. The BEACON trial for recurrent neuroblastoma involves 10 countries. It was designed in the UK, but the principal investigator is in Spain. Some of the original funding came from the UK, but the drug comes from Switzerland. Ten countries are contributing to trying to find hope for children and families suffering from this horrible disease, for which we are struggling to find a cure. There were 4,800 UK-EU trials between 2014 and 2016. How will the Government maintain that sort of collaboration and involvement?

Part 3 of the Bill relates to medical devices, and I totally agree it is not before time. The EU has also moved to bring in regulations regarding medical devices. It is important to apply similar rules to devices as are applied to drugs. Until now, it has been far too lax. As was mentioned, manufacturers pay for assessments, and I would suggest the same apply to digital health apps. At the moment, the companies that design them assess them themselves. We need instead a neutral and independent system of ensuring that they are safe. Just because something is AI or digital does not mean it will give patients good advice.

Registered clinical trials of devices should report all findings. It is far too common, where there are negative findings or findings of no advantage, that they are not published and that therefore in essence the information is hidden. As we have heard, there should be no tabletop licensing of devices whereby a device is simply migrated from one form to another without being retrialled. This was exactly the problem with vaginal mesh, where in essence the end operation, compared to the original operation in the trials, was unrecognisable. The Cumberlege review should give us food for thought and help us focus on safety and not market expediency. It is also important that there is a system to report complications to the MHRA, like the yellow card system with drugs, so that problems are spotted sooner. Again, across a bigger population that is likely to be quicker.

Implants should also have a unique identifier number that can be scanned as a barcode to the patient's electronic records, to the hospital episode system and to any registers. A register will be data that is just sitting there and which can be interrogated if someone needs to recall patients with certain implants because of a problem. Following the scandal around PIP implants, which did not have medical grade silicon in them, I remember having to wade through the case sheets of patients who had had breast reconstruction. It was not an implant we had ever used in our hospital, but we had to be 100% certain that no patient treated in the plastics unit in Glasgow had had the implants either. It is critical that we avoid such chaos in the future, and if a register has an expert steering committee, it can become a registry, a dynamic beast that can monitor practice and bring knowledge back to medical practitioners, researchers and so on. One of the earliest and biggest examples is the national joint registry.

The Bill includes provisions to extend low-risk drug prescribing to other healthcare professionals. We all recognise the changes in the workforce that have already

happened and which are coming in the future. There are processes for assessing competency and certifying that someone—an advanced nurse practitioner, for example—can prescribe in their own right. The Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians have raised the issue of physician associates and surgical care practitioners. They feel that if prescription powers are to be given to such individuals it is critical that they are registered and regulated, but while these new professions are developing they are not registered or regulated. If this is the future of the NHS workforce across the UK, it has to be dealt with—they need to be registered practitioners.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Member refers to physicians and others and to the shortage of doctors, but is there not also a role for pharmacies to play in diagnosing people early on? Is that not something that should be done as well?

Dr Whitford: In Scotland, we have had the community pharmacy system since 2005, which includes that, and the range of protocols for a pharmacist to prescribe against has been increased, but I agree it has further potential. One advantage is that pharmacies are usually open all day Saturday and often have longer hours. For people who are working who have a relatively minor condition, being able to get both advice and treatment from a pharmacist makes a big difference.

Jim Shannon: I forgot to mention that I also believe pharmacies could play a role in diagnosing sight loss, glaucoma and other things—small things that can be done in pharmacy. Is that something else that could be addressed?

Dr Whitford: In Scotland, we put a lot of effort into sweating the assets, if you like, within the community, so optometrists can carry out that job. They no longer refer through a GP. If they diagnose cataracts, for example, they refer directly, and they provide a lot of out-of-hours care for people with acute eye problems, foreign body inflammation, infection and so on, to the point that very few patients now go to A&E with an acute eye problem. We have all sorts of expertise in our communities, and we should use it, so I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

I welcome the Bill's reference to internet pharmacy provision, but I think that there should be a step up—a whole step change—in the form of stronger action to control internet pharmacy providers, especially in the context of what are described as prescription-only medicines. The son of a constituent who came to see me was able to obtain large quantities of dihydrocodeine, a fairly addictive painkiller, over the internet simply by filling in an online form, having not seen a GP and without producing a prescription. I asked the constituent to find out what the website was so that I could report the organisation, but the website had gone. That is the problem with the internet: it is ephemeral. Unfortunately, that young man has now become addicted to dihydrocodeine, and is trying to be weaned off it. As in the case of other versions of online harm, we need to deal with people who are hiding in the internet: we cannot allow the supply of counterfeit or addictive medicines to patients without any form of control.

I have some concerns about the Bill. For instance, I agree with the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) about the extensive delegated powers. The Secretary of State said that the same powers had been in place when the United Kingdom was in the European Union, but their purpose in the past was to enact EU directives which had been debated and consulted on in the European Council and the European Parliament. They had been worked out before agreement was reached, and were therefore purely about enacting something that had been hammered out and agreed within Europe. That is not the case here. Almost every clause in the Bill simply hands over a delegated power, but I think some of the major changes that are being introduced in the Bill are significant and should be in primary legislation. Of course regulations will flow from that and will be covered by delegated powers, but for radical changes to be made purely in relation to such powers represents a missed opportunity, and they should be limited.

Part 3 provides for the maximum sentences for offences against the Bill to be set at six months. In Scotland, the maximum sentence in a summary case is 12 months. Removing that sentencing power in Scotland with no consultation does not seem right, and a presumption against sentences below 12 months there would make custodial sentences less likely. What kind of prevention and what kind of warning will there be if it is clear to people that imprisonment is never going to happen? The civil penalties presided over by the Secretary of State prevent criminal prosecution if either the maximum or a lower sum is paid in advance. That fetters the operation of the Scottish criminal justice system, because those involved in it would lose the right to prosecute if they felt that the issue was serious enough. The Lord Advocate in Scotland should have been consulted on both issues, and I suggest that that should be corrected as the Bill proceeds.

Part 4 does indeed call for consultation prior to any new regulations, but there is no formal mention of Ministers in the devolved Governments, despite their responsibility for healthcare. In other Bills with which I have been involved, it has been normal for the Ministers of the devolved nations to be listed specifically. When legislation is to impinge on such a major devolved competency, it is important for them to take part in discussions. I also think it important to have a structure enabling medical bodies, experts and industry to contribute to the consultations, to ensure that all aspects have been considered.

There is no choice but for the Bill to go ahead because of the legislative gap that will result from our leaving Europe and the European Medicines Agency, particularly at the end of the transition period. We will therefore not force a vote, although I hope that we will be able to strengthen some aspects in Committee. Having to leave the EMA is just one example of what we are losing because of Brexit. Far from cutting red tape, Brexit will increase bureaucracy and costs for the pharmaceutical industry, the NHS and patients—and that is even before the possible impact of a United States trade deal on drug costs.

I am concerned by the threat to walk away from negotiations in June and move towards a no-deal outcome yet again. That would increase the risk to patients. Simply calling it an Australian deal does not cut it, because the Australians do not have a trade deal with

[Dr Whitford]

the EU. I should like to know whether the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State has somehow solved the problem of supplies of insulin and medical radioisotopes, not just for a couple of months around the transition point but in the long term. The UK does not produce insulin or medical radioisotopes, and any friction at the border—which at present looks inevitable—will increase costs and delay access.

I also find it concerning that despite covid-19, which initiated a Cobra meeting this morning, the UK apparently does not even want to remain in the PANDA—Protocol for the Assessment of Nonviolent Direct Action—early warning and response system of the EU post transition. Such isolationist policies are dangerous for everyone: for our constituents, and for our patients. We cannot get away from it: Brexit is a loss to healthcare and research, and the Bill cannot stop that. The principle of collaboration is central to the EMA, the European research network and, indeed, the EU itself, and it will be hard to replace that if we are throwing up barriers.

7.26 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who has made me feel rather nostalgic. Listening to her speech gave me a flashback to when I used to go to Grand Ronde and hear someone speak so eminently plausibly in many a debate of which I had very little understanding.

Let me make this declaration now: I am a simple GP. When I entered the House, I always said that I would speak about the coalface and what really affected me at that point, and that is why I felt that I needed to speak about the Bill today. I welcome it because I approve of the emphasis on the creation of a world-leading research-driven, standards-based clinical care framework that can drive the UK forward, but two aspects have struck me in particular. The first is prescribing, and the second is trials and tests.

Members on both sides of the House have broadly welcomed the provision for new prescribers, and the flexibility for that within the framework. As the workforce and the demand grow and as the roles change, that new prescription will be necessary. I agree about the importance of ensuring that those prescribers have the necessary due diligence, training and registration, which, after all, will provide the safeguards and the accountability that are needed when it comes to writing a prescription. However, I think that the Bill has missed the issue of prescription waste, or waste medication. On numerous home visits doctors see piles of unused medication, and that does not apply only to their patients: there is a crossover in hospitals and, of course, in care homes. Some of it is purely coincidental as people are taken into hospital or from hospital into a care home, but there is a huge amount of it, and, anecdotally, doctors see it all the time. I have seen patients hand in up to 100 boxes of, say, warfarin, and that cannot be right.

When I consulted the House of Commons Library, it came up with a figure of £300 million a year in losses from 2011 on the basis of only one study. That suggests to me that, over a decade, it is hard to find sufficient information. Last week I spoke in the debate on the Environment Bill, one of whose first principles is that any other legislation

should consider environmental impacts. I think that this Bill would do well to take account of prescription waste, which it could do in a couple of ways.

Pharmacies and, indeed, any dispensers could be asked to legally collect the statistics on returns. That would allow us to see how big the problem actually is, and allow us to create solutions. It might sound strange for someone who has worked in the workforce and had lots of paperwork to be suggesting more paperwork, but at least if we open up the statistics, I am confident that my medical colleagues would look at them and see a way to resolve this.

I would also argue that we should review the charitable donation of medications. I freely admit that there are issues over their storage and over how to check the safety of this practice. However, the problem is not insurmountable if the medications are returned in their original state. If the Government do not address the matter in this Bill, I suggest that they might want to consider it going forward. We could, however, consider a more severe statutory obligation on pharmacies, care homes and dispensers to be far more rigorous in the way in which they dispense their medications and follow up, particularly for repeat prescriptions. Things such as emollients, moisturisers and day-to-day painkillers often pile up and end up on repeat prescriptions, and it is quite hard to monitor them. As someone who has written hundreds of prescriptions in a day, I know that it is very easy to sign them off rather than check them, and if there is no obligation for me to check whether the patient actually needs the medication, who does that responsibility fall to? It is arguably the patient, but if that is not happening, and if there is as much waste as we think there is, I suggest that the Government might want to consider that issue.

Jim Shannon: I recognise the fact that the hon. Gentleman is a GP. I declare an interest, in that I am a type 2 diabetic. At my surgery, my doctors and those who are in charge check my prescription every time to make sure that I am not over-ordering or getting more than I should be getting. Some GPs are doing that already and thereby controlling what medications people get.

Dr Evans: Absolutely, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is exactly what a GP should be doing. However, when a GP is dealing with hundreds of requests for repeat prescriptions, it is unlikely that they will have time to phone every single one of those patients to say, “Is this what you need? Have you already got it?” That has been the role of clinical pharmacists, particularly in relation to people who have multiple prescriptions for four, five or six medications, at the time of their medication review, which I entirely agree with. A GP will indeed look at a medication review, but when someone asks for a repeat prescription, they usually do it either electronically or by making a simple mark or cross on a piece of paper that they take to the GP surgery. It is unlikely, if the prescription has already been set for six or 12 months, that there would be a review of the prescription each month. That is the whole idea of having an annual review. In the old days, people could be on medications for months, if not years, without ever being checked. The reason for doing that was convenience. If a patient had to come in to see their GP every month to justify why they wanted their medication when their condition, say diabetes, was stable, that system would not be sustainable, given the current pressures on the NHS.

My second point relates to trials and tests. For me, another element that is missing from the Bill is a duty of care. I would like to give an example of a patient who came to see me who had had her genome sequenced. She came in with a report, and she said, “Dr Evans, I have been told I have a 50% chance of having cardiovascular issues and an 80% chance of having Parkinson’s disease. Please can you help me out?” That was very difficult to deal with. First, there is as yet very little we can do to influence Parkinson’s. Secondly, at that point I had had no training on counselling someone who had had genomic testing. The cardiovascular side was easier: we know some remits, and we can make a difference with cholesterol, exercise and lifestyle advice. But this is just the tip of the iceberg, and as the tests become more advanced and more people have them, I would like to see emphasis being put on ensuring that those doing the tests have a duty of care to ensure that there is follow-up and comeback for the person who has the test.

Dr Whitford: Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that it was completely wrong last year when the NHS in England tried to offer genomic testing for £500 or £600, provided that people were willing to allow the data from their genomic testing to be used in research, without any thought of the outcome that that would generate for general practices right across the country?

Dr Evans: The hon. Lady makes a good point. I have no problem with that, provided that those doing the tests are also doing the follow-up and ensuring that the patient who has had the test has had counselling before, during and after it.

Dr Whitford: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that genomic testing for completely asymptomatic people without any family history is a benefit, does he then support the idea that it would only be the better-off people who could afford £500 or £600 who would have the test? Would that not widen health inequalities, which we will be debating on Wednesday?

Dr Evans: I am grateful for the hon. Lady’s point, but I would simply say that the NHS is going that way and will be providing those tests. My simple point is that whoever goes through such a test must have counselling afterwards to tell them what to do with the information. We could put that in law. It does not matter if the testing is done by the NHS or by a private testing facility. If an individual makes the choice to have the test, it must be incumbent on the person doing the test to inform them completely and counsel them throughout the test and of course afterwards when they are given the result. That duty should fall on the NHS, if the NHS has done the test, and on the private provider if the private provider has done it.

Ben Everitt: This is a brave new world for medical science and for the NHS, and we should not let ideology get in the way of getting the data that we need or of trialling things and accepting good ideas when they come our way, while of course taking on board what my hon. Friend is saying about getting it right at the GP end and ensuring that we look after the people who are involved in this pioneering work.

Dr Evans: Absolutely, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. As I said at the start of my speech, this is about creating a framework that can be built on, and that framework should have standards and safety, but I would argue that a third strand that is needed is communication. That is the angle that is missing at this point.

That leads me on to my final point. When it comes to some medical devices, I use the term “device” in a slightly quizzical manner. For example, is lip filler a medical device? I would argue that it is probably not, but in the context of this Bill it might well fall into that category, and it probably should. Many people have cosmetic surgery. They have lip fillers, and all too often, I as a GP have had to pick up the pieces when something has gone wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) is not here today, but she is bringing forward a private Member’s Bill to try to address some of these issues. This illustrates the point that now is the time to enshrine in legislation a duty of care to talk to people and to inform them, categorically, before, during and after any test or medical intervention. After all, that is the duty of a good health professional.

I support the Bill. I believe that it is about responsible research, medical provision and future-proofing medicines and medical devices, and I hope that in considering my points on prescribing, tests and trials, the Government will provide a framework that helps to strengthen our world-leading position on health.

7.39 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure and a privilege to follow the hon. Members for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and for Bosworth (Dr Evans). I agree with everything they said.

I welcome this Bill and the steps that will be taken to improve patient safety and the availability of medicines and medical devices. I will keep my comments short today, as I hope to be further involved in the Bill’s later stages. There are some key points to make on Second Reading, however, as the Bill has the potential to affect so many people’s lives, both domestically and abroad.

As we all know, patient safety is vital and should not be compromised. Sadly, we have seen patient safety standards disregarded in the cases of valproate, Primodos and surgical mesh, which shows a clear need for the legislation in this area to be tightened. The experience of those patients shows the life-changing effect that medicines and medical devices can have on people if they are not thoroughly tested—a medical intervention designed to drastically improve a patient’s quality of life can, instead, leave them in a more dire situation.

We not only need to be aware of, and have concern for, patients in our own nation when we look at the medicines entering our national health service; we must also ensure that due care is given to the patients involved in the development of those medicines. We cannot sacrifice the health, rights and dignity of other human beings just to gain medicines for people in our country.

When we look to China, for example, we see that the evidence supplied by the independent China tribunal, which was released in full yesterday, overwhelmingly shows that organs have been harvested from unwilling political prisoners and prisoners of conscience such as members of Falun Gong and the Uyghur Muslims.

Jim Shannon: It is important that is put on the record. There was a question in the other place today on this very issue of organ harvesting. The hon. Lady and I, like others in this House, recognise that commercial organ harvesting is happening in China. Is it not important for our Government, and for all responsible Ministers, to contact the Chinese authorities directly to ensure that organ harvesting does not take place? It is not just the Uyghur Muslims but Christians and those of other ethnic minorities, too. They are all being discriminated against for being alive.

Ms Rimmer: The China tribunal report was issued yesterday, and it clearly states that organ harvesting is being done in a commercial, business-like manner. It is absolutely horrendous. People are being taken into prison for nothing, and their DNA is taken. A doctor who now drives an Uber taxi in London was forced to remove the liver and kidneys of a Uyghur Muslim while he was still living, which is horrendous. I and a number of others intend to get this resolved. We must ensure that medicines entering the United Kingdom have not been tested on or developed using those organs or any other human rights abuses, and I am sure the Government are aligned with me on this issue.

If appointed to the Public Bill Committee, I hope to move an amendment on this issue, on which there is cross-party support in both Houses. In the light of this week's stories in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* about major companies profiting from Uyghur slave labour, it seems there is no indignity, no suffering, that those poor people are not forced to endure. The trade in their organs must surely be one of the most wicked crimes against humanity of the 21st century. This Bill will provide the House with one small opportunity to strike a blow on their behalf.

Domestically, we must ensure that regulators are properly equipped with the resources and financial support to take on the new responsibilities outlined in this Bill so that we do not place more stress on an already overstretched NHS system. We must also better understand how the Government intend to monitor the effectiveness of those regulations and regulatory bodies, as well as the nature of their role in doing so.

The NHS is one of our nation's greatest achievements, and any attempt to make it stronger is always to be welcomed. We must make sure that the United Kingdom's health industry and the NHS help to make the lives of our citizens and those abroad safer, healthier and more dignified.

7.45 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I welcome this Bill. It is crucial that we have an effective regulatory system in this country, so we should enable the Government to amend existing regulations post Brexit. We could be a little more ambitious, however. Government time is precious, and I doubt we will have many occasions to discuss medicines and medical devices, which I suspect is why many of my colleagues have raised things that are not covered in the current legislation.

In a world in which medicines and medical devices are changing fast, the Government need to take greater powers to meet those changes and take advantage of them post Brexit. They need to be able not just to amend but to create regulations. My real concern is that

the parameters of these new powers are drafted in such a way that they give power to the Government only to amend existing regulations—four sets of them. The Bill does not give the Government the power to do more, which is a missed opportunity.

Although I am conscious of the need to consider this at a European level, medicines and medical devices are, for most of us, a global issue. This Bill should not just be about ensuring we can cope after leaving Europe; it should be about the opportunity that can be created in the new global world we are entering.

A lot has been said, and rightly so, about the challenge of medical devices, which is a fast-growing area in which Britain is a leader, but it involves a huge variety of small and medium-sized enterprises, and innovation within devices is happening at a faster rate than within medicines. That is what we need to address, and I do not feel we achieve it with this Bill.

This legislation will not help with the challenges of breast implants, vaginal mesh and spinal implants that crumble, because the registry that is to be created is within the constraints and confines of existing registries that, by and large, collect information about devices. They do not collect information about the journey of those devices through the patient experience, from implant through to removal and replacement, including where the device may be defective. That information, properly recorded, would enable us not only to recall devices that we knew were faulty, but to go to patients in whom we knew a device had been implanted to expedite dealing with a medical emergency.

More importantly, medicine is about innovation and creativity. Unless we have a mechanism to evaluate the progress of medical devices implanted in individuals, how can we know which ones work and which ones do not? If a patient does not re-present, and if there is nothing added to the record, we will never know. Such a registry is mission critical.

The Government should be brave and consider a new clause to create such a registry, and they need to consider how we can consolidate the existing registries. There are many national, European and international registries for particular disease areas, and a lot of thought has been given to what best practice and the ideal registry look like. The International Medical Device Regulators Forum set out in 2016 exactly what it thought that should look like, and it seems to me that the Government would be well advised to consider that. It suggests collecting information not just about the device but about the journey through and in the patient. It seems to me that only through a change to the Bill will we achieve what we want to achieve.

Things probably go beyond that. Indeed, some of my hon. Friends have explained the complexity of understanding what a “device” is—does it include lip fillers, artificial intelligence and so on? The list of new innovations grows and will, to be honest, grow beyond current human imagination and we need a regulatory system that enables us to take advantage of that and regulate appropriately and quickly. We therefore need the capacity to change the definition of a device, and right now we do not have that because we are effectively adopting the definitions in the rules we adopted from Europe. We are giving ourselves the ability to fiddle, but not to change them fundamentally, and that is actually quite important.

We need to create an international search database so that we can deliver on some of the challenges of urgent harm, which we can prevent and deal with once a defective device is identified, and so that we can create something that gives us the opportunity to be world leaders in not only medical devices but medicines. It seems to me that that is the opportunity. Why do we constrain ourselves to being a follower? Why do we always talk about keeping up with Europe? Why not be the leaders? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence was always set out as the global standard that everybody looked to—as absolutely what we wanted in every country. Why not have exactly the right system, whatever the NICE or the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency of the future looks like? Why not set the standard that others then follow?

In the earlier part of the Bill, where it covers the regulation of medicine as opposed to medical devices, there are some changes that look to the future—that is certainly the case for the changes regarding medical trials. However, it seems to me that that is a missed opportunity not only to consider the sort of regulatory system we might want in the future, but—even though we have NICE, the MHRA and notified bodies for the lower levels of medical devices, which provide CE marks—to look at this all over again. As has been said, some things that seem to be harmless and very simple, and seem simply to merit a CE mark, can become very dangerous in how they are ultimately used by a practitioner. We might need to look at all this again, but the power to do that simply is not in the Bill.

There is also nothing in the medicines section, as far as I can see, about increasing the speed of access to new developments and new medicines. That has always been a mantra of this Government, but I cannot see any provision for it. If we had control to look at the MHRA and NICE, we could do that, but as the Minister well knows the reality is that she has no power. The power to deal with the regulatory system and the regulations set by the MHRA and NICE is in the gift of NHS England. Following the Lansley reforms, that power is not now in the gift of the Government and it seems to me that the Government, who have this proactive agenda, should be taking the initiative so that they can be more direct in ensuring that we have the regulatory system we need. At the moment, all we have is the ability to limit the money that is available.

For example, the Government have talked about an innovative medicines fund, but I see nothing in the Bill to provide for that. I understand that the idea is that it can be just an extension of the cancer drugs fund, but, I ask the Minister, is that actually right? There should be different criteria—there will be different tests and different needs. Simply extending the cancer drugs fund will muddy the water and not deliver what we are really looking for, which is something that looks specifically at innovative medicines, which need clearly defining and properly clarifying. If we are to cover both groups, we need to increase the pot, but there is no suggestion of doing so.

There is a lot still to be done. Earlier, one of my colleagues made the good point that if we are to be a global leader rather than just a follower, we ought perhaps to look at how our marketing authorisations could be adopted and accepted in other countries, effectively saving costs and getting medicines to market faster. The UK would therefore be seen as the place to come for

one's marketing authorisation, rather than Europe, despite the size differential, because we would be the market leader in the mechanism to develop that.

For me, the Government have made a good start, but there is much to do. I look forward very much to the Minister's closing remarks and, more importantly, to her confirmation that the Government have an ambitious vision and will be working hard during the following stages of the Bill's consideration, of which I would very much like to be part, to consider changes that will deliver opportunities that the as drafted Bill does not offer. That said, it is a good start and something we can build on.

7.56 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): The Bill is, of course, necessary to ensure that, in the absence of the European regulations under which we operate until the end of the implementation period, there are effective ways to regulate medicines and medical devices. Even under the current regulatory arrangements we have seen some patients face real difficulties, so it is vital that we get this right, as others have said.

The Minister will be aware that I and many hon. Members across the House have been working with the National Society for Phenylketonuria, or PKU, through the all-party group, to ensure that people with PKU have access to Kuvan, a drug widely available in many other countries. It feels like that has been a pretty hard slog at times, and we have not got there yet. I pay tribute to the NSPKU and, in particular, to Kate Learoyd and Caroline Graham, who have done such a lot of work to get the all-party group established and keep it very lively.

How much more difficult must it be for those people living with PKU—children and adults—to know that there is a drug that would help many of them, but to find that it is not available, than it is for us to see that situation for our constituents? In introducing the debate, the Secretary of State made a great deal of our new powers to act under these arrangements, and I hope very much that that means that Kuvan will become available very quickly. More broadly, I ask the Minister what this Bill will mean for patients with PKU who are hoping to have that drug made available, and how it will affect new therapies and drugs that are in development to treat PKU. How will they be licensed and made available?

Many rare diseases require a large pool of patients to have effective clinical trials of new treatments, and again I ask the Minister if she can say how she will ensure that UK patients can take part in those trials and benefit from innovative treatments. This will be important to the community of patients with rare diseases, not only those with PKU, and I know that there will be great anxiety about the issue of translating EU regulation into UK law and making sure that issues of access, safety and clinical trials are fully covered and regulated. UK patients with rare diseases must not be disadvantaged by separate licensing and trial arrangements, and I ask the Minister to comment on that.

Secondly, this legislation clearly impacts on the role of the MHRA. At this point, I want to mention the great work of Emma Murphy and Janet Williams, who have worked so hard on the issue of fetal valproate spectrum disorder, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) referred. They have found that,

[Liz Twist]

despite the devastating impact arising from women with epilepsy being prescribed the drug valproate during pregnancy and despite these problems being known about among the medical profession for many years, that drug is still being prescribed, sometimes in unmarked boxes, and is still causing damage to babies whose mothers have taken the drug. I hope that this new system will ensure that the regulations are strengthened to ensure that that cannot happen in any case in the future—the will is there to do it. This is happening even after advice to doctors and pharmacists had already been given as a result of the fetal valproate syndrome campaign, so we need action to resolve that straightaway.

Dr Whitford: I totally agree with the hon. Lady about the concerns and, we hope, the opportunity to ensure that any pack of sodium valproate that is dispensed carries the information. Does she share my concerns at the talk of having digital information, as many people are digitally excluded? Having actively to seek information about a drug is perhaps an additional barrier. We should be making this easier, simplifying the leaflets that are in with drugs, perhaps by having more infographics, to allow people with poor English or limited understanding to recognise what they should be doing around their medication.

Liz Twist: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I agree that there is a concern about that. All forms of communication are great, and digital, as an extra, is good, but it must not exclude people who do not have access to computers or the internet. It certainly must not replace those paper warnings on boxes of tablets—we need to strengthen that bit as well.

I would like to see a strengthening of this legislation to make sure that what I have described could never happen again. I would also like to see effective data sharing, so that issues such as this were identified and acted upon quickly. Data sharing with the EU will continue to be important, so I ask the Minister, how will such data be shared with EU countries to ensure that we share those experiences and warnings?

Finally, I am concerned at the use of Henry VIII powers to create pharmacy hubs. There is already a concern that some community pharmacies face challenges from prescription-by-post services, at the same time as we are encouraging people to seek advice from their local pharmacist first. It is really important that local pharmacies are not pushed out of communities as a result of these measures, because they are really valued by the people who use them. Will the Minister tell me how she will ensure that that does not happen as a result of the powers to create pharmacy hubs?

8.3 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I must start by declaring an interest: before arriving in this place, I spent some nine years working in the pharmaceutical industry for two European companies, and I continue to hold a small number of shares granted to me by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

Although I and my party support this legislation, clearly it is important that the UK should have the ability to regulate human medicines, veterinary medicines and medical devices following the end of the transition

period. It will not surprise Members to hear me say that we believe it is extremely regrettable that we are even in this position in the first place. Clearly, in terms of ensuring that British patients have safe and swift access to medicines and medical devices, and ensuring our life sciences industry continues to remain competitive, our interests would have been best served by staying in the EU. That is why we will continue to fight tooth and nail against a hard Tory Brexit, despite the reckless and threatening approach to negotiations being taken by this Government. A hard, no-deal Brexit at the end of this year could spell catastrophe for British patients and the life sciences industry.

My main concern is that the provisions of this Bill could allow for significant regulatory divergence for medicines and medical devices from the rest of the EU. The medical research community and manufacturers are united in their call for the UK to remain as close as possible to the EU, preferably through negotiating associate membership of the European Medicines Agency. Any divergence from European regulation should take account of three principles: patient safety; early access for British patients to the latest innovations; and the competitiveness of the UK life sciences sector. In using the powers of this Bill to seek any divergence from the European regulatory framework, the No. 1 consideration should always be protecting patient safety. Any bid to make a UK stand-alone regulatory system more competitive than Europe must not seek to undercut the EU in safety standards, be that in terms of clinical trial regulation or the hurdles a new medicine, vaccine or device must clear to secure marketing authorisation or accreditation in the UK.

I would also take this opportunity to urge Ministers to consider, as they enter into negotiations with the EU, the critical and indeed life-saving importance of remaining part of the EMA's pharmacovigilance network. By collecting and sharing real-time data on approved medicines, the EMA is able to identify trends and quickly take actions to inform patients and health professionals about safety concerns. By remaining part of a network across 28 countries rather than just the UK on its own, our network would have far wider coverage, with a far greater number of patients using a drug, thus increasing the likelihood of the data collected being more accurate, and concerns being picked up at an earlier stage. Related to that point, I wish to highlight the shocking and wanton disregard for public health and safety that we have heard from the Government about wanting to withdraw from the EU's early warning system on pandemics, given the serious global challenge we face on coronavirus. Even the Government's former Minister Baroness Blackwood has been saying in the media today that that is not the way forward to ensure that we protect patient safety. We all know that disease knows no borders, so it is ridiculous and isolationist, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has said, to withdraw from that system.

The second principle to consider when using the powers within this Bill to diverge from European regulation is ensuring that British patients continue to have swift and early access to the latest innovations. I welcome the Government's intention to use these provisions to ensure that NHS hospitals are able to manufacture and trial the most innovative new personalised and short-life medicines. The UK should be at the cutting edge of

supporting those pioneering new treatments to be made available to British patients. However, we must not forget that the vast majority of medicines, and indeed devices, coming through the pipeline are not in that category. Any significant divergence from the EU regulatory framework will inevitably lead to delays in new technologies being made available to British patients.

As has been mentioned, the maths is obvious: the EMA covers 25% of global medicines sales, whereas the UK on its own makes up only 3%. Companies are likely to submit applications for new drugs to the EMA before the MHRA, meaning that UK patients risk having slower access to the latest medicines—we see this with Switzerland, Canada and Australia already. How will the Government ensure that the MHRA's processes remain among the fastest in the world, while maintaining patient safety? The hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) implores us to be a leader in that regard, not a follower, but it makes no commercial sense for us to be outside the European regulatory framework. I know that from my personal experience of working on the dreaded Brexit taskforce when I was in industry. My European regulatory colleagues were not in the slightest bit interested in helping me and British colleagues define, and then represent to Government, what a competitive new divergent system might look like. Understandably, commercially their priority was and remains the 445 million inhabitants of the other EU27, as opposed to the 66 million or so in the lone ranger that is the UK. That point is not lost on Cancer Research UK, which has specifically called for clause 2(1) in part 1 of the Bill to be used to facilitate UK recognition of and participation in the EMA's medicines licensing processes.

One of the earliest ways that patients gain access to the latest innovations is through clinical trials. The Bill could be used to amend the regulations that govern clinical trials in the UK. It is worth noting that the number of trials conducted in the UK has fallen since 2016, with the UK falling behind the USA, Germany, Canada and Spain for phase 3 commercial clinical trials. Although there is an opportunity to make the UK more attractive for clinical trials, any such opportunity must not come at the cost of patient safety, and high standards should be maintained. Any stimulation of the clinical trial environment must include continued UK-EU collaboration on trials, which is critical for trials involving medicines for rare diseases or children, in respect of which the population in any one country is not sufficiently large for a trial. Furthermore, the EU's clinical trials regulation, which is due to be implemented in 2022, should accelerate trial setup times, improve safety reporting and facilitate collaborative research, because of the digital infrastructure that underpins it. The UK played a pivotal role in developing the CTR and our patients would benefit greatly from it being implemented here.

My third point is closely connected to my previous point: any divergence from European regulation should take account of the competitiveness of the life sciences sector, which successive Governments have often described as a “jewel in the crown” of UK plc. Our remaining an early launch market by keeping in step with the EMA is key to our continuing to attract high levels of foreign direct investment into the UK from pharmaceutical companies. Any additional burden on applying for marketing authorisation for medicines, or a separate

system for the accreditation of medical devices in the UK, away from the CE marking scheme, will make the industries less competitive. Also key to competitiveness is the securing of frictionless and tariff-free trade as part of the negotiations with the EU. That is critical given the integrated and complex cross-border supply chains in the manufacture of medicines and medical devices.

To summarise, the Bill is necessary in view of the UK's unfortunate decision to leave the EU. However, I urge caution on Ministers in respect of how the powers in the Bill are used. British patients must be kept safe, they must be able to access the latest medicines and technologies at the earliest opportunity, and we must not undermine the thriving life sciences industry in the UK. The Government's quest to make the UK a Singapore-style regulation-light country must not see us undercutting safety standards in a bid to improve our competitiveness. As the Government seek to negotiate a trade deal with the EU, the way to safely ensure that British patients can access the medicines and technologies that they need, and the way to keep attracting industry investment into the UK, is by remaining as close as possible to the European regulatory regime.

8.12 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate—and we seem to have plenty of time left for winding up. I thank all Members from all parties who have taken part, and particularly my hon. Friends for their excellent speeches: my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) made the case for Kuvan for sufferers of PKU, which I shall mention again in a moment, and my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) made a powerful speech about organ harvesting that I am sure we will discuss in more detail in Committee.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) raised an issue that is not currently on the face of the Bill but perhaps should be. It is something that I have discussed with Health Secretaries for well over a decade now—probably around 12 years—starting with the then Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle when Labour was in government, and I raised it with the Minister only last week. The issue is the waste of prescription medication. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a possible figure of £300 million a year from the House of Commons Library, and that did not surprise me. I can well believe that that could be the figure and agree that there has to be a way to reduce that waste. As the hon. Gentleman said, we should start by measuring it, and perhaps consider the active, safe charitable donation of such medicines, because £300 million-worth of perfectly good medicines being put into an incinerator every year cannot be the best outcome. There has to be a better way. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue, which the Minister will remember we discussed just last week.

I thank the Minister and her officials, who have taken the time last week and since to brief me and my team on the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) said in his opening remarks, the Opposition support the principle of the Bill, but we have some concerns that I shall briefly outline and to which I hope the Minister will respond, if not now then perhaps at a later stage in the Bill's progress through the House. The Bill deals with both human and animal health, and I shall start with human health.

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

Patient safety is of the utmost importance and I recognise that with the Bill the Government are taking steps to improve both patient safety and the availability of medicines and medical devices to patients in the UK after the transition period is over on 31 December this year. However, as the Minister knows, in the cases of valproate, Primodos and surgical mesh, which we have heard about already in the debate, patient safety and patients' experiences in the past—sometimes even now, in respect of mesh—have sometimes been disregarded when they have reported issues to their GP. The independent medicines and medical devices safety review has been looking into that, and I very much look forward to seeing Baroness Cumberlege's recommendations later this month.

I should also mention that there are questions of patient safety in respect of other devices, such as breast implants and metal-on-metal hip implants. There are a host of examples of patient safety having been compromised. We must ensure that that does not happen again.

Medical devices are not subject to the same strict regulations as medicines. Faulty washing machines are treated with far more caution than a medical device that goes wrong. A case in point is that we will all have been written to recently by Whirlpool. Regulations must be tightened for both medicines and medical devices. I am sure that the Government will consider seriously the forthcoming recommendations from Baroness Cumberlege in the review.

One mechanism in the Bill to increase patient safety is the provision to establish a database for medical devices and provide the Secretary of State with new powers to share information about medical devices in limited circumstances. However, there are approximately 80,000 different medical devices on the UK market. Will every device be entered into the database? What steps have been taken to establish such a database? Will the Minister please provide some more information about the point at which the Secretary of State will be mandated to share the information held on a medical device with the public? I wholeheartedly agree that there should be a database of this nature, but it must be fit for purpose and healthcare professionals must be able to access an updated database to make sure that they can provide the best treatment and care for their patients that is safe. I hope that the database would go further and become a register or even a registry, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) suggested. A barcode could be included on each device that is scanned into a patient's records so that a register or registry is created.

As I have mentioned, the Bill makes provisions for access to medicines and medical devices after 31 December. However, it is causing concern for some patients who are currently participating in EU-wide clinical trials and for patients who fear that they may miss out on future trials. Can the Minister provide any assurances today about access to EU-wide clinical trials, especially for those patients who are already on them? Access to such clinical trials would especially benefit patients with rare diseases, who have a small patient group here in the UK. Will the Minister please set out what provisions will be made for patients with rare diseases who could benefit from participating in a clinical trial?

As this Bill comes into force on 1 January 2021, will the Minister reassure the House that the supply of medicines and medical devices will be maintained in the run-up to the end of the transition period? This Bill could enhance access to medicines, but what does that mean for patients with rare diseases? For example, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon, who spoke so passionately about PKU, patients have been waiting for more than 10 years for the drug Kuvan to be made available on the NHS. We know that Kuvan works for patients with PKU, because some have raised funds for it and been paying for it privately. Although it is expensive, the cost is not outwith the reach of some patients, but patients in the UK should not have to go without effective drugs. I am sure that we have all had constituents who have brought these cases to us. I therefore hope that provisions will be made to improve access to medicines, particularly for those people with rare diseases.

I welcome the Government's announcement today about faster access to cannabis-based medicines, and I would be very grateful if the Minister could please expand on that announcement and how that relates to this Bill in particular. I also welcome the provisions in the Bill that allow for prescription powers to be granted to some bodies within the healthcare system—for example, to physiotherapists. Will the Minister set out what she envisages this system will look like, who will be able to prescribe, and what they will be able to prescribe and under what circumstances? Will these new prescribers be trained sufficiently to fulfil this role? Where will they get their information from about medicines and medical devices that they are prescribing, especially if there are new warnings on them, as we have seen, for instance, with valproate.

The Bill also allows for pharmacy hubs to be established under a Henry VIII power, so will the Minister give the House a timescale for this power to be used? I would also be grateful if she outlined how these pharmacy hubs will work in practice, as I am concerned that this could open up an Amazon-style prescription service.

Let me move on to animal health and veterinary medicine. Although this subject is more likely to come under a DEFRA brief, I know that there is a link between human health and animal health, not least when it comes to antimicrobial resistance. Keeping our animals fit and healthy and ensuring that vets have the medicines that they need to provide treatment and care for animals is, of course, crucially important to many of us. Will the Minister please assure the House that the supply of veterinary medicines in the UK will be maintained in the run-up to the end of the transition period and that standards for veterinary medicines will be upheld to ensure that animals are given the best possible treatment after the transition period.

The Bill gives powers to relevant bodies to amend regulations as necessary, so will the Minister assure the House that the regulators are equipped with the right finance and resources to take on these new responsibilities? I am pleased that, in non-urgent cases, there will be consultations held before any regulations are changed, but can the Minister outline how long these consultations will run for and how soon after the consultation closes the new regulation will be implemented? What formal processes will be put in place to ensure that industry is involved in these consultations and, finally, how will the

Government monitor the effectiveness of the regulations? What bodies will be able to scrutinise the performance and delivery of the regulators?

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, we do not want to find ourselves in several years' time with news that a medical device or medicine is causing serious harm to patients—more than we have already, given what Baroness Cumberlege is looking into. Regulators must be held to account on this as much as the manufacturing industry and healthcare system.

In closing, human and animal safety is of the utmost importance, which is why we on the Labour Benches welcome this Bill, but I would be grateful if the Minister could answer these questions. If that is not possible in the time available tonight, especially given the rate at which I have put these questions to her, then perhaps in writing or indeed, during the passage of the Bill in Committee.

8.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): First, let me thank all hon. Members for their support in discussing this enabling legislation. It is a pleasure to close this debate on the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill. The Bill is both a piece of legislation to future-proof our regulatory regime going forward and an opportunity to clarify and improve the one that we have now.

I am gratified that hon. Members have approached this debate with thoughtful consideration. Obviously, there is a lot more to discuss in Committee, because several themes came up during the course of this afternoon's debate on which I can only touch now. I will take up the request of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and write to her. I have not had the chance thus far to have a specific briefing with the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), so perhaps we could do so to enable us all to understand our direction of travel.

Patient safety is not a partisan issue; it is paramount. It is what drives us to do what we do. It does not matter which side of the House we sit on, the patient is at the centre of our concern. We hope that, in going forward, we can enhance and strengthen that view and show ourselves as an exemplar to the world in the way that we conduct trials and in the way that the life science and pharmaceutical industries work. We hope to assist the whole industry in making sure that we never compromise on patient safety.

This will be the first opportunity in 40 years for the UK to make choices regarding how we regulate medicines, veterinary medicines and medical devices in the best interests of the UK now that we have left the EU. This is all part of our making sure that we transition smoothly on 1 January next year. Members from all parts of the House feel passionately about the outcome of negotiations on the future relationship. I would like to assure hon. Members that the Bill allows us, in the future, to set rules that are best for the UK, whatever the outcome of those negotiations. The Bill is important, as it makes clear the Government's commitment to the life science sector, which is worth over £75 billion to our economy and which contributes almost 250,000 jobs to the UK. We are rightly proud of that sector, but innovations and advancement must be matched by rigorous standards to

protect patients. I very much take on board the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), which were particularly pertinent to the experience that she brings to this House. I hope to enjoy more of that debate when we are in Committee.

The Bill sets out clear principles: ensuring patient safety; ensuring their continued access to medicines and devices; and maintaining the attractiveness of the UK as a market and a place for clinical trials. There is a delicate balance there that we must continue to strike, and the debate today demonstrates the paramount importance of all those principles. On that point, I will move on to the comments of hon. Members.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The provisions on veterinary medicines are essentially a straight lift from the human medicines part of the Bill. There is one significant difference, of course: animals that have been prescribed and administered medicines are put into the food chain. With regard to withdrawal periods, that, in turn, can have a significant impact on the access to markets of exported meats. Will the Minister consider later an amendment to clause 8(2), to provide at least some regard to the commercial position of the end meat products?

Jo Churchill: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am always happy to have a discussion to see whether any accommodation can be made. As far as veterinary medicines go, I should say that, unlike with human medicines, we pay attention to the environmental impact as they go through.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I should declare an interest as a veterinary surgeon. I want to bang the drum for part 2 of the Bill and the importance of the way in which it addresses veterinary medicines. The Bill will go some way towards providing assurances to the UK veterinary profession that there will be continuity in its ability to prescribe for and treat a group of patients that have not been discussed much tonight: animal patients in our country.

Jo Churchill: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that there will be that continuity. That is precisely the aim of the Bill.

The shadow Secretary of State asked me to comment on reports that he had read in the papers today about health security. The UK is open to exploring co-operation between the EU and other specific narrowly defined areas when it is in the interests of both sides—and on matters of health security, it would be foolish not to.

Several Members discussed clinical trials, with a particular eye to the rare diseases cohort, which is obviously, by its nature, small. It is only sensible to ensure that we have the ability to collaborate across Europe to determine that we have the best environment for the development of drugs. I would caution people to breathe before we go forward. We are committed to ensuring that we remain the best place for those on rare disease trials.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency has taken steps to ensure that there is absolutely no disruption to clinical trials and that they can continue seamlessly. It is important that we are tempered in tone to ensure that people's clinical trials carry on. We want a world-leading regulatory system for clinical trials that

[Jo Churchill]

allows us to collaborate effectively—not only across Europe, but globally. We have one of the best life sciences industries in the world, for which effective collaboration is important.

Now that we have left the European Union, it is important to make it clear that UK sponsors will still be able to run multi-state trials across the world. We want a regulatory system that maintains and enhances the attractiveness of the UK as a site for global co-operation in research.

I move on. We will extend prescribing rights to physician associates through other means. We are discussing the extension of physician associates' rights for prescribing in the context of the increase in clinical professionals who will be working in the health service. The broader ability of the Bill to ensure prescribing rights will be carried through only in collaboration with the appropriate regulatory oversight, whether from the General Medical Council or the Health & Care Professions Council, depending on whether allied health professionals or physician associates are involved.

The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) asked whether clinical trials data would include those forced to participate. I assure her that clinical data used to support regulatory activity in the UK needs to comply with international good clinical practice standards, including ethical considerations such as the critical principle of informed consent. That means that the appalling cases to which she alluded could not be involved in clinical trials.

Ms Rimmer: There are signs up in Chinese airports saying “Organ transplants this way” in English; there is a clear path through. I am not saying that it is the English who are going, but the system is international. People are going out. France is already taking steps to stop organ tourism.

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention.

Let me point out to the shadow Secretary of State that it is possible that the use of artificial intelligence—to determine what treatment to give a patient, for example—would fall within the scope of the regulation-making powers in the future. It is right that we have the tools to respond to this kind of technology in the years ahead. I was most interested by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) about better patient outcomes. I could not agree with him more about the importance of the life sciences sector, and about using data to inform as we go forward. The MHRA will be able to conduct inspections for manufacturing, distributions, clinical trials, laboratories and pharmacovigilance, and it is important that that continues to ensure that we uphold standards.

There were numerous other comments, particularly about the medicines and medical devices lists and register. I look forward to ensuring that we have a robust debate in Committee about what is best for the patient and the clinician. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) made an important point about clinicians perhaps annotating patients' notes with information about why they used a particular medicine or device.

We have spoken about medical devices perhaps being manufactured at a patient's bedside. The shadow Minister mentioned having a barcode on each device. It would be quite hard to barcode a device when it was manufactured in order to put it on to a register. I hope that having this discussion in later stages will inform us all how best to do this.

I hope that the spirit of this debate—one in which we are all in support of a common purpose—carries through to the examination of the Bill. This legislation offers an opportunity for the UK to protect patients, support the development of an exciting and important sector, and do what is best in the UK for the UK's interests. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill:

Committal

- (1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

- (2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 23 April 2020.

- (3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

- (4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

- (5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

- (6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

- (7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*James Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

- (1) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown, a government department, a person holding office under Her Majesty or any other public authority by virtue of the Act; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—(*James Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees, or other charges, arising by virtue of the Act.—(*James Morris.*)

High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill: Revival

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the Minister to move the motion, I should inform the House that Mr Speaker has not selected any amendments.

8.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): I beg to move,

That if a Bill is presented to this House in this session in the same terms as those in which the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill stood at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the 2019 session—

(a) the Bill so presented shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House, and

(b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in the 2019 session, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in this session.

That the above Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

I am delighted to be here this evening to undertake my first piece of parliamentary business as the new Minister for high-speed rail. I have been given specific oversight of this hugely significant project.

The High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, also known as the phase 2a Bill, concerns a section of HS2 that will extend the railway from the end of phase 1, just north of Birmingham, to Crewe. Hybrid Bills are unusual and relatively rare. A hybrid Bill is both a public Bill and a private Bill in one—hence, hybrid. The Bill could be characterised as an alternative planning consent process.

The Bill was introduced into this House in July 2017. It passed its Second Reading in January 2018 and moved into its Select Committee stage. Over 300 petitions were received. In response, two additional provisions were promoted that made changes to the Bill to resolve those petitions. That process took over a year. Hearings finished in the spring of 2019, and the amendments were agreed. The Bill then completed its stages in this place and moved to the House of Lords, where it had its Second Reading last September.

It is normal for a Bill like this to carry over from one parliamentary Session to another. The previous Parliament did not make time available to secure carry-over motions, so I am bringing the Bill back today with this revival motion. Private Bills that are not carried over are often revived. Revival has been used before for a hybrid Bill. For those who may be geeky and interested, the process is set out in “Erskine May”, in paragraph 37 of chapter 45 on page 1,162.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): This is indeed very geeky and technical, and all very interesting, but can I urge the Minister, particularly when he responds to the debate, to talk about the benefits of HS2 and how we can bring those benefits online now? May I particularly commend to him the new Siemens rail factory that is coming to Goole, with £250 million of investment, and our excellent steelworks at Scunthorpe, which already supplies Network Rail with all of its railways, thereby demonstrating the benefit to the whole of the country of this Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman asks the Minister whether he can make certain commendations. He can try, but I am afraid he cannot, really, because this is a very, very narrow motion on procedure; it is not a debate on the merits or otherwise of the Government's railway policy.

Andrew Stephenson: Thank you for that guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can, however, assure my hon. Friend, who is a doughty champion of the Brigg and Goole constituency, that 98% of businesses involved in HS2 are British, and approximately 70% of the contracts already awarded are going to small and medium-sized enterprises. I am sure he will continue to champion the businesses in his constituency to ensure that they get the maximum benefit from this scheme.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On a procedural point, my hon. Friend will be aware that there are some experienced politicians who could use various tactics to delay this measure. I would not like to join those people. Can I just mention, though, that if we are spending £100 billion on this, my constituents are very keen on the Government giving £1 million only to London North Eastern Railway for our through train to Grimsby and Cleethorpes via Market Rasen? I would very much hope that the Minister, in terms of procedure and ensuring a smooth passage and support for this measure, could perhaps give a gentle green light to my through train for just £1 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No, the right hon. Gentleman cannot talk about Grimsby. I call the Minister.

Andrew Stephenson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Once again, I am tempted to talk about a very laudable proposal from my right hon. Friend. I know that the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), who is sitting next to me, sees significant merit in that proposal and will hopefully be looking at it in due course.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): As my hon. Friend may know, the amendment that I proposed, which has not been selected—I do not complain about that, or rather I complain about the principle but not about the action—says that these Standing Orders would contradict fundamental constitutional principles. Bills come to an end in the Session in which they were introduced unless a carry-over motion is passed before Prorogation or Dissolution. It is extremely rare, and almost unique, for the process that we are now witnessing to take place. I just put that on the record; I have further points that I am sure the Minister is expecting me to make later.

Andrew Stephenson: I note my hon. Friend's concern. My direct reference to "Erskine May" would, I hope, have put his mind to rest as to why we are using this procedure in this rather unique circumstance.

Since the Government have decided that HS2 should go ahead and that phase 2a should be built, we now need to take the next step, which is to revive the Bill. This motion has the same effect as a carry-over motion, and if Members agree it today, the Bill will resume in the same place that it stopped. That means it will pass to the House of Lords, where it would resume its Select Committee stage. Passing this motion therefore allows

the progress already made to be kept. It allows those directly affected to continue with the legal processes they still have to complete, safe in the knowledge that the changes they requested to the Bill and previously received will be kept.

8.44 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his place. The Labour party is supportive of the motion—as can be seen from the massed ranks of the Opposition behind me right now!—because we see HS2 as key to boosting regional economies and reducing climate emissions. It is essential for increasing rail capacity and freeing up other lines for freight use. I rather think that some of the troubles we have had with High Speed 2 might have been avoided had we come up with another name for it, but that is by the by.

Successive Conservative Transport Ministers have shown themselves lacking in competence and unable to oversee the finances and governance of HS2, among other infrastructure projects. In recent years, the Government have presented inaccurate information to both Parliament and the public about the cost of HS2. The public need to have confidence in the project, but sadly the Government have undermined that with their failure to exercise any control over not only costs but redundancy payments. There is real concern that the true costs of the project were known to be much higher than the figures that the Government continually promoted. As the project progresses, it is essential that there is much greater transparency.

In addition, when the contracts for phase 1 were being granted, despite hedge fund managers making a packet out of the inevitable demise of Carillion, this Tory Government crashed on regardless, awarding the doomed organisation a valuable HS2 contract.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I am curious. The hon. Gentleman says that he does not believe the figures for the cost of HS2 reflect reality. He may well be right. What does he think HS2 will cost?

Andy McDonald: We are told that the cost has risen from £57 billion to £80 billion, and rumour has it that it is now more than £100 billion. I am not in a position to make an informed judgment because I am not in possession of the information that Ministers have, but people are understandably concerned about costs increasing at such a rate.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In fact, the Carillion collapse meant that all the Carillion liabilities for the contract were transferred to the two other contractors. Where was the harm in that? Was that not a rather skilfully let triple contract?

Andy McDonald: On the contrary, it was one of the most cataclysmic episodes of the HS2 story. When everybody and his dog knew that Carillion was in difficulties, and hedge fund managers were making millions on the demise of Carillion, this Government ploughed on with it, regardless of the information that was in the public domain. It was clear evidence of utter incompetence.

The Oakervee review was correct to say that HS2 must be a fully integrated part of the modern railway system and must extend to the great cities of the north, linking

up with Crossrail for the north and on to Scotland, to curtail the demand for domestic flying in this country at the earliest opportunity.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): One issue that many people like me on the south coast have, which I hope Ministers will look at, is that the average speed from London to Portsmouth and Southampton has not changed since the 1920s. At the moment, we are seeing vast amounts of money going into a project of mixed popularity, to put it mildly, while people in Southampton, Portsmouth and my constituency of the Isle of Wight will be struggling with speeds—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We are not talking about the Isle of Wight. We are talking about a procedural motion.

Andy McDonald: I take that admonishment, Madam Deputy Speaker, and simply satisfy my hon. Friend by saying that the Labour party entered the last general election with a fully costed regional plan that would have served his area adequately.

The dividends in reduced emissions are immense, and I encourage the Government to articulate that argument better at every opportunity. We are concerned that the links to Manchester and Leeds are now under review and could even be downgraded. The Government have repeatedly broken their promises of investment in the north, with the region set to receive just a fraction of the investment to be made in London, and a northern powerhouse simply has to be much more than a slogan.

HS2 must be developed with more sensitivity to local communities and much more sensitivity to the environmental impact, particularly on modern and ancient woodlands across the country.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Andy McDonald: I will give way, save that I may incur your wrath, Madam Deputy Speaker.

David Simmonds: I have a very specific point on this issue. One of the lessons from my constituency about the first phase of HS2 is that commitments given to this House on earlier phases have simply not been honoured by HS2 Ltd. I would encourage us, and ask the Minister, to consider how we can hold it robustly to account on this second phase to ensure that, when commitments and promises are made to this House about how local communities and individual families will be treated and supported sensitively and they are not honoured, there must be consequences.

Andy McDonald: I think the hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point. The issues of governance and communication have to be improved, and I think everybody in the House would agree with that.

On modern and ancient woodlands, I just make the point that the commitment to the speed of this project may have to be reviewed. I think the commitment to going in straight lines at 250 mph has to be taken into consideration. If we look at the TGV in France, the average speed of that high-speed link is 187 mph, and that does not impact on its efficiency.

If the project is to have full public support, the fares on HS2 must be affordable and comparable with the rest of the fare system on the rail network. It has previously been intimated that for HS2 to gain the confidence of the public, it cannot be a premium service. If HS2 is successfully to replace so many long-distance journeys, it has to be an integral part of an affordable and accessible railway.

The Transport Secretary should ensure that the procurement of HS2's rolling stock is conducted in a way that makes sure the trains will be manufactured in the UK and will benefit the UK supply chain. Could the Minister inform the House of what steps the Secretary of State is going to take to ensure that the delivery of HS2 is closely co-ordinated with Network Rail's ongoing work programme and the development of Northern Powerhouse Rail?

Given the amount of public money that is to be spent on delivering HS2, it is essential that the Government ensure that HS2 services are run under public ownership, so that British taxpayers can see a return on their investment in supporting the UK economy, rather than in enriching private companies or foreign state-owned companies. Her Majesty's Opposition are indeed supportive, and we look forward to the progress of the project.

8.53 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): In a nutshell, I am seeking an assurance from the Minister, which I hope I will be able to get before the end of these proceedings, that phase 2a should be reviewed by Sir John Armitt at the same time as phase 2b, for which he has already been given terms of reference. Basically, it boils down to this: it is being suggested that the construction of phase 2a should follow quickly after phase 1—this view has been reinforced by the Oakervee review, which concluded that the Government should consider merging the construction of phase 2a with phase 1—but this is not only an unnecessary but an undesirable idea, and furthermore it is unrealistic.

I refer now to the actual motion before the House, which says that the Bill

“if...presented to this House in this session in the same terms as those in which the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill stood at the last stage of its proceedings...the Bill...shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this House, and...the Standing Orders”

adjusted accordingly. Given this motion and the arguments I am presenting, that means that we are bound to have regard to what the Bill says, and the extent to which it will be dealt with under the procedures that follow these novel and unique changes to the Standing Orders.

As we heard from the Minister, phase 1 of HS2 received Royal Assent in February 2017. It has not progressed because the main works civil contractors have been unable to come up with a design that can be delivered for the budget available. Phase 2a has not yet received Royal Assent, so we are at least a couple of years away from all this happening. Given the proposed changes to the Standing Orders, and the manner in which it is deemed that the Bill is being carried forward, it is important to note that phase 2a is required only if phase 2b west is constructed according to current proposals. Crucially, those proposals could be changed by the Armitt review, and all that phase 2a would effectively achieve would be to connect HS2 to the west coast main

[Sir William Cash]

line approximately 58 km further north—at Blakenhall, south of Crewe—rather than at the Handsacre link. With the estimated cost of phase 2a now rising to £6.6 billion, it is not wise—this is the crucial point—to commit to phase 2a without knowing what Sir John Armitt might conclude regarding phase 2b.

This project will cause immense damage to my constituents, although I will not expand on that at this juncture as that point is related to ground conditions and matters that I could go into in more detail only if I had more time. In a nutshell it comes to this: HS2 Ltd produced a report in 2019, and it is clear that it faces a shortfall of fill along the entire length of phase 2a. Such fundamental questions can be taken into account under the proposed changes to the Standing Orders now being discussed only if realism prevails.

Will the Minister use this opportunity to give an assurance on the Floor of the House that phase 2a will be treated, in some shape or form, in the context of what Sir John Armitt will consider with regard to phase 2b? The two things are interlinked, and as this is a railway that goes from north to south, it is essential that it all fits together. If phase 2b is to be reviewed by Sir John Armitt, for the reasons I have already given it is essential that phase 2a is also considered in the review by Sir John Armitt. Otherwise—I say this with a great generosity of heart—the Minister may find that if he does not do what I am suggesting, they will get to phase 2b and find that phase 2a does not work. If that does not work, we will end up with a railway that is not capable of being constructed.

In light of the changes to the Standing Orders, I am offering a realistic appraisal that will make possible a proper review not only of phase 2b, but of phase 2a, which is what the Bill is about. I do not need to expand on that any more. I am concerned about compensation for my constituents, and about a range of other matters that lie outside the motion before us. In a nutshell, it is essential that phase 2a and phase 2b are somehow brought within the framework of the terms of reference issued by the Government for Sir John Armitt to consider. If we get that, we will at least be able to have a proper consultation, and on that I rest my case.

8.59 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The most interesting speeches in this place are always given when one does not expect to make them. I am sure that what I am about to say will not find favour with a lot of my colleagues, but sometimes one has to stand up in this place for what is right. I spent over a year on the phase 1 hybrid Bill Committee. We delved into that railway in enormous detail. I am sure that my colleagues who served on the phase 2a Committee, which also took nearly a year, delved into that in huge detail as well. I commend the motion to the House. This resurrection motion is the correct thing to do.

I started my service on that Committee opposed to the railway on the grounds that it was high-speed rail. However, it is nothing to do with high-speed rail; it is all about capacity. Unless we take passengers and freight off the east coast and west coast main lines, our roads will clog up, journey times will become completely untenable and we will fail to meet our carbon targets

in 2050. The revival motion is therefore right and we need to build this railway. We need to build not only phase 1, but phase 2 and phase 2b.

As deputy Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I want absolute value for money. I have already seen, in the phase 1 Committee, some of the horrors that took place. The evidence before us was, in many cases, disingenuous. The things we were doing were not fully costed. Nor was it fully understood how they could be delivered. I would be very concerned if the motion led to the same things on phase 2a.

Let me, with a little bit of latitude, give the Chamber some examples of what we found. The chief finance officer for HS2 Ltd asked permission in writing to pay enhanced redundancy payments. He was told not to, but he went ahead and did it anyway. That cost the taxpayer nearly £2 million. On Wednesday, the Public Accounts Committee will examine the costs. We will consider why £2 billion of savings—most of this is expected to come from phase 1 and phase 2a, which is what we are negotiating tonight—are probably undeliverable. Whatever the costs at the moment, they will be higher than whatever anybody says.

We need to build this railway. We need to increase capacity on our railways. We need to get cars and freight off our roads, otherwise they will clog up. That is why I support the motion.

9.2 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, because this matter is hugely important to my constituency. I welcome the revival of the Bill, and hopefully its imminent passage, as evidence of the Government backing Crewe and backing the north. If you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to explain why I support the revival of the Bill.

I was glad to have had the opportunity to host the Minister at Crewe station just last week, where he got to hear at first hand about what is already happening locally: businesses opening up in Crewe and the plans Cheshire East Council has to create a new economic hub around the station. The revival of the Bill will accelerate the positive changes we see locally.

Sir William Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that originally the railhead was going to be in Crewe? It was only frustrated by decisions on housing grounds taken by the district council. In fact, it was dumped on Stone in my constituency without any notice.

Dr Mullan: I cannot pretend, as a new Member, to have my hon. Friend's knowledge of the intricate detail and the history of the development of the railway line. However, whether we support or oppose it, we all have a duty, when decisions on individual stations are looked at in detail, always to be open-minded to change if things are undergoing scrutiny. Ultimately, as I will come on to say, if we are building a major new railway it is inevitable that some people will face a negative environmental impact and some will have some part of the railway deposited on their patch, which they are not happy with. If we allowed that to, in effect, put a moratorium on the development of major infrastructure, that would not be the right decision for this country, even if individual Members were unhappy with it.

On what does work for my constituents, they are not very interested in getting to London 30 minutes quicker; they really are not very interested in that. What they are interested in, and what we must remind them of in terms of what we get from HS2, is that it opens up capacity as we shift inter-city traffic on to HS2 so there are more routes and journeys available to them. Faster routes tend to push the local services off the track. They welcome HS2 because it means we can transport more freight by rail. Local businesses in my area cannot get freight on to rail. When they can do that, they will be more competitive and we will move congestion off the roads. If you drive around the A roads in Crewe at night, you will see lorry after lorry after lorry parked up. That is how things are moved around and we need to switch back to the railway.

Michael Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend not realise that there is a danger that for constituencies such as mine that are not directly served by HS2—of which there are many along the west coast main line—moving freight on to the west coast main line could result in a diminution of passenger services to cities such as Lichfield?

Dr Mullan: I go back to my original point: at the moment, those more local services are hampered by the use of the west coast main line for freight and inter-city services. We will see an opening up of local routes if we move ahead with HS2, not a diminution of them.

On passengers and peak-time travel, at the moment price control is used to control peak-time travel. People cannot come down to London at 8 o'clock because the tickets are extortionate, primarily because that is the only way that we can manage the over-capacity at peak times. If we move the inter-city journeys at peak times on to HS2, there will be more, cheaper, accessible peak-time travel on the west coast main line and it will still get people to London in an hour and a half.

Another thing that my constituents will welcome is the link to the northern regions through Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): Many people have framed this argument as being between having only HS2 or Northern Powerhouse Rail. Does my hon. Friend agree that we can have both, and both can work together?

Dr Mullan: Absolutely. It is not either/or; it is about working together. High Speed North is a rebranding and a new way of organising this—we should firmly hammer that point home—and it is about making this project one that is led in the northern regions by the northern regions, for the northern regions. I welcome that change in the governance.

Robert Lorgan (High Peak) (Con): Further to what my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) pointed out, people in London were not forced to choose between Crossrail and Crossrail 2. It is completely wrong to try to force people in the north to choose between HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and other key infrastructure projects.

Dr Mullan: Absolutely. Inevitably, projects overrun. That is unfortunate and not something that we welcome, but they do, and the fact that this has overrun should not mean that we therefore cancel it, because other people have not had to make the same choice in the south.

HS2 is a fantastic opportunity for Crewe. We have an amazing heritage and enormous local expertise in the rail industry. Crewe is and has always been a fantastic railway town. Passing the Bill and the delivery of the railway will create thousands of skilled jobs in Crewe for people helping to build the railway line.

I understand the concerns about the natural environment and I commend colleagues from constituencies where the impact will be greatest for speaking up on behalf of their residents. That is absolutely the right thing for them to do, but as I mentioned, any new major railway line connecting our cities and towns will have some degree of environmental impact. That is inevitable. We must be realistic about whether some of the strongest critics—they are not all in this House; some are outside this place—will ever really be satisfied. If we listen too closely to the voices of opposition in terms of trees and the environment, we will put a moratorium on creating major new rail and road infrastructure in this country, and that cannot be the right decision.

It is simply not feasible to suggest that we can deliver significant new capacity on our railway networks through a piecemeal approach. Network Rail estimates that it would take almost 30 years of weekend closures for even less of a result in terms of increased capacity. When this was last done on the west coast main line, the budget exploded. It might be harder to track and there might be fewer newspaper-worthy headline figures, but hundreds of smaller projects are at just as big a risk of overrunning and overspending. We need to get better at controlling costs when building infrastructure, full stop. The answer is not to halt the big-ticket items where the failings are most easily seen, because they are there on small projects, too. It is just not so easy for a journalist to add up the figures over 100 different projects and put that in a newspaper. We should not listen to that kind of criticism; it is not valid.

I recognise the significant costs involved, but this is being spent across two decades. It will work out as approximately £4.4 billion a year. The context of the timescales is too often lost when we use the headline figure. Network Rail spends around £6 billion a year on maintaining and making much smaller upgrades to our rail network, and we are planning to spend £40 billion over the next five years on other projects outside HS2. The idea that we could build a brand-new major railway line for much less than the £6 billion a year already being spent is fantasy. Let's be ambitious for our nation. Let us look forward, not down at our feet, get on with delivering this project and send the message to the world that the UK is open for business.

9.9 pm

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I note with interest that the motion talks about revival. To me, it is the revival of a corpse; it's like a Hammer movie. We talk about connectivity. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) talked about the need for additional capacity, and I agree, but let us at least do it properly. The aim was to get people off aircraft—people who want to fly to Paris from Manchester, for example—but that is not going to happen, is it? Instead of going to St Pancras, connecting with HS1 and going straight through to Paris, people will have to change in London. It will not replace air travel. Yes, it will provide extra connectivity, as far as Crewe and London are concerned, but it will not meet the guidelines of what was originally intended for HS2.

[Michael Fabricant]

Why is it going in straight lines? It is going in straight lines because it was intended to go at 220 mph, but the Oakervee review says it will not go at that speed; to save money, it will go at about 150 or 160 mph instead, in which case it could have gone alongside the M40 or the M1, as Arup originally proposed, which would have saved at least £20 billion of taxpayers' money and been less environmentally damaging.

When it comes to a vote, if it does come to a vote this evening, I will vote against revival, but not because I am against extra capacity. Of course I want extra capacity and of course I recognise that the west coast main line is working at near 100% capacity, but I totally disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, who completely misunderstands the situation. It is fine for Crewe, but not for all those towns, such as Stone and others, along the west coast main line; extra freight on that line will mean less passenger traffic. Anyone with an ounce of mathematical or engineering skill can see that.

I am very angry about this. When I see a project that could have been done so well destroyed by people such as Lord Adonis and then rather stupidly adopted by a Conservative Government, when we could have had an HS2 based on the Arup plan, which would have been cheaper, connected better and been environmentally less damaging, I ask: has the House lost its mind? When I see the Labour party supporting the Government, I know the House has lost its mind, because whenever there is agreement between both sides of the House we know something is wrong.

Some might call this a revival, but for me it is a dead, rotten corpse that we are trying to bring to life. Despite the Government's support—and despite the fact that the former Mayor of London said that Euston was not capable of moving traffic away from it now, let alone with HS2, because there is not enough capacity on tube trains or for buses for all the people coming down now—I am afraid I have to oppose it, not just for the sake of the people of Lichfield, but in the hope that maybe some day someone in this House will say, “Enough is enough. If we are going to do something, let's at least do it properly”.

9.14 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I am pleased that the Government have finally made a decision on HS2, and I welcome the fact that the uncertainty over the project is now at an end. Many of my constituents who are directly affected disagree with the project but have told me over the last few weeks that the overwhelming feeling now is that if we are going to do it, we should get on with it but do it properly. However, throughout my constituency, compensation claims remain unresolved, house purchases have entered another year of limbo, and farms and local businesses have been left wondering whether they can prevent themselves from becoming insolvent before HS2 will agree to a settlement.

Let me give some specific examples. Mr and Mrs Tabernor have told me that their farmhouse may be demolished, and they have been told by HS2 Ltd that they cannot retire and move to their farm cottage, allowing their son to live in the farmhouse, because that would invalidate their blight notice. They have already

been waiting for years for a resolution, and that, in my view, is simply unacceptable. After five years or more of negotiation, Ingestre Park Golf Club is also still waiting for HS2 to come to the table and finally thrash out a reasonable agreement, and that too is not acceptable.

Residents of Hopton, Marston and Yarlet, whose house sales remain in limbo, have told me that they cannot make an offer for a new home because some Stafford estate agents now refuse to deal with anyone selling to HS2. It concerns me that they view HS2 as either too unresponsive or too difficult to deal with: that hardly gives confidence to me or my constituents.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: May I tactfully suggest to my hon. Friend—my friend, indeed, whom I congratulate on winning her seat—that this may be the moment of maximum leverage for her to secure a settlement on behalf of her constituents, and that she should send all the details to the Minister and ask him to look at them carefully?

Theo Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I shall be doing that.

On a general note, when it comes to negotiating, let me make something clear. When people from HS2 visit the homes of my constituents, say that they are there to listen to their concerns, sit there having a cup of and a biscuit, and then tell them that they are being over-optimistic to expect to be paid the price at which their house or business has been valued and give them the silent treatment when they do not agree, that is not a negotiation; it is a bullying tactic. I was pleased when the Prime Minister, responding to my recent question to him in the Chamber, acknowledged that compensation needed to be paid, and I agree with him that we need an overhaul of HS2 Ltd, which, in my opinion, has managed the project poorly.

I was devastated to learn from so many of my constituents that they had agreed to sell their homes—in some cases, their long-standing family homes, where they had raised their children—for less than the market value, and that their mental health could not cope with the pressure that they felt they were being put under by HS2. If I sound angry, it is because I am. Let me provide some context for that.

My very first piece of constituency casework on HS2 involved a member of my team who was counselling, and helping to secure mental health support for, one of my constituents who had told me that he could no longer cope with the pressure he was under. He said that everything was going to the wall because HS2 had refused to finalise negotiations. After lengthy and protracted work in an attempt to reach an agreement to move his family business, he was told by HS2 that it would prefer to “extinguish” the business. If a private company were operating in that way, it would be featured on the BBC's “Watchdog” programme. HS2 must be held to account for its actions.

Let me be very clear. If my constituents are forced to take the strain of this project, they should also reap the rewards. I am pleased that the Government have finally committed themselves to the Handsacre link, which is vital now that the project is going ahead in Staffordshire.

Michael Fabricant: I fully understand my hon. Friend's stance on the Handsacre link, but, given that it is in my constituency, does she understand the distress that it is causing people in Armitage with Handsacre?

Theo Clarke: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

When people in my constituency say that they are opposed to HS2, it is not because they are nimbys—as some have accused them of being—and I have not met a single resident who has not told me that that they want more investment in the north, and specifically in the west midlands. However, those residents are opposed to being treated as an inconvenience because their homes happen to be in the way of a railway that the Government want to build. They shudder when they hear that savings need to be found, because if past experience is anything to go by, it will not be HS2 salaries that go down; it will be the purchase prices and compensation paid to my constituents. However, I hope I am proved wrong.

Let me be clear: HS2 is going to happen, and if there is a vote tonight, I will reluctantly support the Government, but if HS2 is going to hang over the heads of my constituents, we must get on with it as soon as we can. Our first priority must be to finalise all the negotiations that are taking place and let my constituents get on with their lives. The advert once said “Let the train take the strain”, and I hope it does, because at present the strain that it is putting on my constituents is unacceptable. I support the Government in building national infrastructure, but the lack of adequate compensation for my constituents and the delays by HS2 are simply unacceptable. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his assurances on compensation, but I would like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister for clarity on when it will be delivered. I also want to ask the Minister and his departmental officials to sit down with me to go through every single outstanding case in Stafford to ensure that my constituents are no longer left in HS2 limbo. They deserve that from the Government.

9.20 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I will be brief, because I am sure that others want to speak. I remember hearing the news about this when I was in the Cabinet. In 2010, we were told that the project was going to cost a little over £30 billion, that it would give a direct link from the north straight to HS1, opening up all the opportunities of the continent, that it was going to go directly to Heathrow, with all the advantages that that would bring, and that it would cut out short flights from Manchester and Liverpool down to Heathrow. That is not going to happen. Instead, we are going to go to somewhere called Old Oak Common. This might be a very charming place. It might have many attractions, but my constituents do not want to go to Old Oak Common. They want a direct link to HS1 and the continent, or they want to go to Heathrow.

And what has happened to the money? The money is absolutely out of control. It was £30 billion. Then we were told it was £80 billion. The latest estimate is £100 billion. The very worst figure I saw in a Sunday paper was £230 billion. Put brutally, this is Victorian technology: rolling around the country in steel boxes on steel wheels on steel track is Victorian technology. It was revolutionary at the time, but now we have broadband. The chief executive of Openreach has said that for £30 billion, the original cost of HS2, we could provide superfast fibre to every single one of the 30 million properties in the country. That would deliver far greater social, educational and economic benefits than spending this titanic sum.

It is with some regret that I have seen this project slip and slip. I have seen it with my own eyes, locally, in the village of Woore. It is effectively a salient of Shropshire sticking out into Cheshire and Staffordshire—a village of 1,200 people, a large primary school and an already busy main road, quite a lot of which has no pavements. This means that small people go to school without a pavement to walk on. HS2 announced suddenly—notice were put up in Woore, and we were told this at a meeting—that there would be 600 vehicles a day passing through the village during the construction phase. At 24 vehicles a day, a project has to get permission under section 17 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, but we are talking about 600. We have had numerous meetings with HS2. I give all credit to HS2: it has always come along, but it has not budged an inch. All that we have done is double the time of the construction phase, so that instead of 600 vehicles a day, there will be 300 a day—

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Paterson: I will not, because we are getting very short of time.

So on that local issue, I have got absolutely not an inch out of HS2. It has been completely inflexible. It is insisting on taking traffic round three sides of a rectangle, with a journey of about 14 miles, although it could have used a direct route of 6 miles. I am completely disillusioned with this project at national level, and I cannot see how we can justify this titanic sum of money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) said, the original plan was for the track to go up the M40. We were going to have very fast trains that would deliver a substitute for flight times, which is not going to happen.

Sir William Cash: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the fact that Lord Berkeley has sent a letter to the Chancellor of Exchequer giving full details of the £231 billion to which he has referred?

Mr Paterson: I am aware of that, and what is so worrying about the review is that it was totally split. Someone who is hopefully very respected by the Labour party, Lord Berkeley, is obviously strongly opposed to this.

Looking at the clock, I will finish quickly. At local level, I am totally opposed to this, and I have not had a single bit of flexibility out of HS2. This is a real threat to my constituents in Woore and, on their behalf alone, I will vote against it. At national level, I cannot possibly vote for this titanic expenditure on what is now a very flawed project, so I will vote against it tonight.

9.25 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): As someone who worked in the railway industry for 20 years, I come to this debate from the opposite direction to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). I was a firm supporter of HS2 and believed it was the right thing to do, but I am afraid I have become much more sceptical of the project.

That said, the Government's decision has been made, and so has the strategy for HS2. West Dorset has one of the worst rail frequencies in the country—the line between

[Chris Loder]

Yeovil, Dorchester and Weymouth has one of the worst frequencies—and, for those of us in the wider south-west, it is important that the Government Front Bench understands we have great concerns that HS2, and particularly phase 2a, should not deflect the Government's attention and their requirement to deliver the infrastructure projects we require in the south-west.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): Warm words for the south-west are welcome, but cold, hard cash is what is needed. The south-west voted for this Government en masse, and it is time we also saw the chequebook.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. There is very little time left, and I made it clear at the beginning that this is not about other constituencies. The hon. Gentleman can refer to his constituency, but this is about a very specific matter.

Chris Loder: I equally want to make sure that we are as supportive of the Government as possible. Those of us who are moving in this debate need to be absolutely assured so, in his summing up, I would like to hear the Minister give us the confirmation and assurance that HS2, particularly phase 2a, will not affect the Government's previous commitments to deliver schemes such as the A303 and Great Western diversion resilience for the people who supported them.

9.28 pm

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): My brief contribution will not be about the merits or disbenefits of HS2 but about the novel motion before us. I have not seen anything like it in my 15 years in this House, and I therefore seek two points of clarification from the Minister in his summing up.

First, will passing this motion today, irrespective of the effect on the Standing Orders of the House, pass the budget for HS2, or will there be a further opportunity to vote for or against and to contribute to a debate on the budget and the cost of HS2?

Secondly, have contracts been signed at the figures we have seen thus far? If they have not been signed, does this measure enable the signing of contracts? Will this House have an opportunity to examine those contracts and the amount of money assigned to them before this goes any further?

This is a novel motion, and it is important that the House understands the implications of proceeding via this route rather than the more traditional route for bringing legislation back to the House.

9.30 pm

Andrew Stephenson: I should like to reply to as many of the issues raised today as I can while discussing the motion. First, I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate this evening. In his speech, the Prime Minister made it clear that things at HS2 need to change, and decisive action is being taken to restore discipline to the programme. I have been appointed to oversee High Speed 2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and the trans-Pennine route upgrade, ensuring that there is one Minister dedicated to focusing on this project, allowing many of the other issues that

have been raised in the debate, such as the issues in the south-west, to be focused on by my ministerial colleagues in the Department.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): In his remarks, the Prime Minister also alluded to the fact that the Beeching line fund would be £1.5 billion. Can the Minister confirm that, and, if so, will he be able to suggest that more money can be levelled up across the entire United Kingdom, not just in relation to the HS2 line?

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He will be aware that we have officially launched our £500 million Beeching reversal fund and details about additional funding will of course be made available in due course, but the Prime Minister has been crystal clear about our intention to invest heavily in bringing back rail routes and stations and to level up all parts of our country.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does not the short debate this evening show that the project is very different from the one that the previous Parliament approved, and that the Opposition have invented a magical railway that is very different from the one that the Bill actually captures? That shows that we need to debate this again properly, rather than rushing the thing through and regarding it as settled. It is clearly not settled and is a highly contentious project.

Andrew Stephenson: I appreciate that my right hon. Friend has been a long-term opponent of the scheme, but I would say that the motion before the House tonight is very limited. There will be many future occasions to debate the issue, I am sure.

There are about six minutes left, so, Mr Speaker, if you will allow me, I must make some progress in responding to some of the comments made by right hon. and hon. Members. The Prime Minister has made a firm commitment that we will get hold of this project and have a firm grip on it. It goes alongside a programme of wider transport investment. The Prime Minister outlined a vision for a revolution in local transport to ensure that our towns and cities in every region have the modern joined-up network needed to fire up economic growth.

Let me turn to the points raised in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has been a vocal opponent of HS2 for many years, speaking frequently and eloquently on behalf of his constituents, and I understand the concerns he has expressed tonight. He asks whether I would consider not providing phase 2a until the phase 2b review has been completed, so that phase 2a can be looked at again in the light of the integrated rail plan. What I would say to him is that in giving his go-ahead to HS2 in this House on 11 February, the Prime Minister committed the Government to getting on with building phase 2a immediately and this has been reflected in the terms of reference set out for the integrated rail plan. However, I appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns, and although I cannot change the terms of that review I am keen to work with him to ensure that the views of his constituents are heard throughout this process. I am therefore happy to commit to working with him and facilitating meetings with HS2 Ltd to address the deep concerns that I know he still holds as the Bill completes its passage.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew Stephenson: I am sorry, but we are perilously close to running out of time. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) spoke eloquently in support of the motion. He is right on capacity and he is right in what he said on carbon. I want to reassure him that the Government are taking decisive action to restore discipline to the programme and I welcome the oversight that will be brought by the Public Accounts Committee to that project.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Andrew Stephenson *indicated assent.*

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend. The Public Accounts Committee has had two inquiries and we are about to have another. There is universal agreement on this side of the House tonight that we need to get control of the governance of the thing and we need to get control of the cost. Will my hon. Friend give an absolute assurance to the House tonight that he will redouble his efforts to get control of the costs?

Andrew Stephenson: Yes.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Andrew Stephenson: No.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) talked eloquently about the benefits to his constituency, and it was great to visit his patch last week. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) has been consistent in his opposition to High Speed 2, but I am afraid that I agree with his good friend Andy Street; this scheme has huge benefits for every part of the west midlands and we need to move forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Theo Clarke), despite being elected only in December, has already raised with me the concerns of her constituents by phone, text, WhatsApp and letter, in face-to-face meetings and again in the Chamber today. I have been left in no doubt about the strength of feeling in her constituency and about the fact that she will work tirelessly to represent all those directly affected by this section of the line. I share her concern about the way some people and communities have been treated by HS2 Ltd, and it must improve, as the Prime Minister said on 11 February. She asked about a timeline for compensation. As she will know, HS2 Ltd is required to pay landowners 90% of HS2 Ltd's valuation within three months of receiving a claim or the date of possession, whichever is the later. The time taken to agree a settlement will often depend on the time parties take to negotiate and agree a property's valuation and other statutory compensation. However, this is an area where I want to see real improvement, and I will be happy to meet her to discuss specific constituency cases and what more can be done to end the uncertainty that has hung over people for far too long. I thank her for the tone of her remarks tonight.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) raised his concerns about cost. We have made it clear that we are committed to drawing a line under the past problems of cost control, and the Government recognise that things must change going forward. The latest cost estimate, as outlined in the Oakervee review, indicates that the full network cost will be between £72 billion and £98 billion, at 2019 prices. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) raised issues relating to the south-west. I can reassure him that we will not take our focus off other issues, particularly those he raises. That is why the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), is here with me tonight, and it is why the Government are spending £48 billion between 2019 and 2024 on the conventional rail network. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) asked a few questions, on which I may come back to him, but this measure does not pass the budget—there will be many more debates.

Finally, I wish to remind the House of the reasons for bringing forward this motion to revive the Bill. By reviving the Bill, we allow those who are directly and specifically affected by the building of this section of HS2 to get the earliest possible resolution to their petitions. We prevent the need to restart this Bill, saving time and money for those who have already petitioned and protecting the investment already made by the taxpayer. This Government want to get on and provide certainty to those affected by phase 2a, the west midlands to Crewe section of the line. By reviving this Bill tonight, we provide that certainty to people as quickly as possible. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That if a Bill is presented to this House in this session in the same terms as those in which the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill stood at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the 2019 session—

(a) the Bill so presented shall be deemed to have passed through all its stages in this

House, and

(b) the Standing Orders and practice of the House applicable to the Bill, so far as complied with or dispensed with in the 2019 session, shall be deemed to have been complied with or (as the case may be) dispensed with in this session.

That the above Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

Business without Debate

The Speaker put forthwith the Questions on the Estimates (Standing Order No. 55 and Order, 26 February).

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put motions 6, 7 and 8 together.

ESTIMATES 2020-21 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2021, a number not exceeding 37,700 all ranks be maintained for Naval and Marine Service and that numbers in the Reserve Naval and Marines Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4, and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2020-21, HC 33.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

ESTIMATES 2020-21 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2021, a number not exceeding 107,850 all ranks be maintained for Army Service and that numbers in the Reserve Land Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2020-21, HC 33.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

ESTIMATES 2020-21 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2021, a number not exceeding 35,400 all ranks be maintained for Air Force Service and that numbers in the Reserve Air Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2020-21, HC 33.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put motions 9 and 10 together.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2019-20

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2020:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £113,468,618,000, be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 64, HC 71, and HC 82,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £3,480,249,000, be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £13,648,628,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

ESTIMATES, VOTE ON ACCOUNT 2020-21

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2021:

(1) resources, not exceeding £255,878,997,000, be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 62, HC 65, HC 72, HC 74, HC 76, HC 78, and HC 92,

(2) resources, not exceeding £42,149,073,000, be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a sum, not exceeding £249,103,066,000, be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sorry that I did not have a chance to give you forewarning; I did speak to the Chairman of Ways and Means.

We have just passed the estimates—up to motion 10 on the Order Paper—which represent the approval of several billion pounds of public expenditure. I wonder how we can get on the record, Mr Speaker, our disappointment that the motions were not subject to any kind of debate. I recognise that in some respects it is nobody's fault—the Backbench Business Committee and the Liaison Committee were not appointed in time to allow topics to be decided for the debates—but the effect is that there has been absolutely no scrutiny of the estimates whatsoever.

When the English votes for English laws procedures were introduced, we on the SNP Benches were told that our opportunity for scrutiny of spending that had consequential as a result of EVEL legislation would be

in the estimates process. Through you, Mr Speaker, may we communicate to the new Chair and the new Procedure Committee, who are about to be appointed, that they might want to make this a matter of priority in their ongoing inquiries?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman wanted to make his point and has got it on the record. He has absolutely done that, as he well knows, and the record will show tomorrow that he has made his objection known.

Ordered, That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Steve Barclay, Jesse Norman, John Glen and Kemi Badenoch bring in the Bill.

SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (ANTICIPATION AND ADJUSTMENTS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading*

Jesse Norman accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources for the years ending with 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2021; to authorise the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for those years; and to appropriate the supply authorised by this Act for the year ending with 31 March 2020.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 95).

STANDING ORDERS ETC. (COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION)

Ordered,

That the following Orders shall have effect:

(1) the Order of the House of 16 January (Standing Orders etc. (Committee on Exiting the European Union)) is amended as follows:

- (a) leave out “Committee on Exiting the European Union” in each place it occurs and insert “Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union”;
- (b) in paragraph (1), leave out “the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Exiting the European Union and related matters falling within the responsibilities of associated public bodies” and insert “matters relating to the negotiations on the future relationship with the European Union”;
- (c) leave out subparagraph (11)(b); and
- (d) leave out the heading “E: Public Bodies: Draft Orders” and the subsequent paragraph (13);

(2) the Order of the House of 16 January 2020 (Select Committees (Allocation of Chairs)) is amended, in the Table, by leaving out “Committee on Exiting the European Union” and inserting “Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union”;

(3) the proceedings of the House in this Parliament relating to the election of the chair of the Committee on Exiting the European Union are to be read and have effect as if they related to the election of the chair of the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

Ordered,

That Andy Carter, Alberto Costa, Mark Fletcher, Sir Bernard Jenkin, Anne McLaughlin and Bridget Phillipson be members of the Committee on Standards.—*(Leo Docherty.)*

COMMITTEE ON PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Andy Carter, Alberto Costa, Mark Fletcher, Kate Green, Sir Bernard Jenkin, Anne McLaughlin and Bridget Phillipson be members of the Committee of Privileges.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

COMMITTEES

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 14 and 15 together.

Ordered,

EUROPEAN STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS COMMITTEE

That Amanda Solloway be discharged from the European Statutory Instruments Committee and Mr Richard Holden be added.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

That Eddie Hughes be discharged from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Paul Holmes be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 16 to 41 together.

Ordered,

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

That John Cryer, Marion Fellows, Michael Fabricant, Colleen Fletcher, Sir Greg Knight, Mrs Pauline Latham, Mrs Maria Miller, Jessica Morden, Mark Tami, Sir Charles Walker and Giles Watling be members of the Administration Committee.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

That Nickie Aiken, Bob Blackman, Fiona Bruce, Patricia Gibson, Nigel Mills, Lia Nici and Claudia Webbe be members of the Backbench Business Committee.

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE

That Alan Brown, Richard Fuller, Ms Nusrat Ghani, John Howell, Mark Jenkinson, Peter Kyle, Pat McFadden, Anna McMorrin, Mark Pawsey and Alexander Stafford be members of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

DEFENCE COMMITTEE

That Stuart Anderson, Sarah Atherton, Wayne David, Richard Drax, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, Mr Mark Francois, Martin Docherty-Hughes, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Gavin Robinson and John Spellar be members of the Defence Committee.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

That Kevin Brennan, Steve Brine, Philip Davies, Clive Efford, Julie Elliott, Damian Green, Damian Hinds, John Nicolson, Jo Stevens and Giles Watling be members of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

That Fleur Anderson, Apsana Begum, Jonathan Gullis, Tom Hunt, Dr Caroline Johnson, David Johnston, Ian Mearns, Lucy Powell, David Simmonds and Christian Wakeford be members of the Education Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

That Duncan Baker, Feryal Clark, Sir Christopher Chope, Mr Robert Goodwill, Ian Levy, Marco Longhi, Caroline Lucas, Jerome Mayhew, Kerry McCarthy, John McNally, Dr Matthew Offord, Alex Sobel, Mr Shailesh Vara, Claudia Webbe and Nadia Whittome be members of the Environmental Audit Committee.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Geraint Davies, Dave Doogan, Rosie Duffield, Mary Glendon, Dr Neil Hudson, Robbie Moore, Mrs Sheryll Murray, Toby Perkins, Julian Sturdy and Derek Thomas be members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

That Tahir Ali, Sir William Cash, Jon Cruddas, Allan Dorans, Richard Drax, Mr Marcus Fysh, Stephen Kinnock, Mrs Andrea Jenkyns, Mr David Jones, Mr David Lammy, Marco Longhi, Craig Mackinlay, Anne Marie Morris, Charlotte Nichols and Greg Smith be members of the European Scrutiny Committee.

FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMITTEE

That Mr Peter Bone, Joanna Cherry, Sir Christopher Chope, Mark Eastwood, Florence Eshalomi, Mark Fletcher, Sally-Ann Hart, Anthony Higginbotham, Stephen Kinnock, Dr Rupa Huq, Seema Malhotra, Nigel Mills, Matthew Pennycook, Nicola Richards, Gary Sambrook, Wes Streeting, Jane Stevenson, Matt Vickers, Dr Jamie Wallis and Dr Philippa Whitford be members of the Future Relationship with the European Union Committee.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

That Harriett Baldwin, Mr Clive Betts, Felicity Buchan, Gareth Davies, Lilian Greenwood, Nigel Mills, David Simmonds, Sir Robert Syms, Mark Tami and Dame Rosie Winterton be members of the Finance Committee.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Chris Bryant, Chris Elmore, Alicia Kearns, Stewart Malcolm McDonald, Ian Murray, Andrew Rosindell, Bob Seely, Henry Smith, Royston Smith and Graham Stringer be members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE

That Paul Bristow, Amy Callaghan, Rosie Cooper, Dr James Davies, Dr Luke Evans, James Murray, Taiwo Owatemi, Sarah Owen, Dean Russell and Laura Trott be members of the Health and Social Care Committee.

HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Janet Daby, Dehenna Davidson, Stephen Doughty, Ruth Edwards, Laura Farris, Simon Fell, Adam Holloway, Tim Loughton, Holly Lynch and Stuart C McDonald be members of the Home Affairs Committee.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

That Bob Blackman, Ian Byrne, Brendan Clarke-Smith, Ben Everitt, Paul Holmes, Rachel Hopkins, Daniel Kawczynski, Abena Oppong-Asare, Mary Robinson and Mohammad Yasin be members of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

That Fiona Bruce, Ms Karen Buck, Joanna Cherry, Ms Harriet Harman, Mrs Pauline Latham and Dean Russell be members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

That Mr Richard Bacon, Brendan Clarke-Smith, Theo Clarke, Mrs Pauline Latham, Chris Law, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Navendu Mishra, Kate Osamor, Dr Dan Poulter and Mr Virendra Sharma be members of the International Development Committee.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMITTEE

That Robert Courts, Mark Garnier, Paul Girvan, Sir Mark Hendrick, Mark Menzies, Gareth Thomas, Martin Vickers, Matt Western, Mick Whitley and Craig Williams be members of the International Trade Committee.

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

That Robert Butler, James Daly, Miss Sarah Dines, Maria Eagle, John Howell, Kenny MacAskill, Dr Kieran Mullan, Ellie Reeves, Ms Marie Rimmer and Andy Slaughter be members of the Justice Committee.

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Caroline Ansell, Scott Benton, Mr Robert Goodwill, Stephen Farry, Claire Hanna, Conor McGinn, Karin Smyth, Bob Stewart, Mr Gregory Campbell and Ian Paisley be members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

That Elliot Colburn, Martyn Day, Steve Double, Chris Evans, Katherine Fletcher, Nick Fletcher, Mike Hill, Tom Hunt, Kerry McCarthy and Theresa Villiers be members of the Petitions Committee.

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

That Kirsty Blackman, Jack Brereton, Bambos Charalambous, Sir Christopher Chope, Chris Elmore, Andrew Griffith, Kate Hollern, Nigel Mills, Dr Kieran Mullan, Alex Norris, Rob Roberts, Gary Sambrook, James Sunderland, Owen Thompson, Liz Twist and Suzanne Webb be members of the Procedure Committee.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

That Gareth Bacon, Kemi Badenoch, Olivia Blake, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Dame Cheryl Gillan, Peter Grant, Mr Richard Holden, Sir Bernard Jenkin, Craig Mackinlay, Shabana Mahmood, Gagan Mohindra, Sarah Olney, Bridget Phillipson, Nick Smith and James Wild be members of the Public Accounts Committee.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Ronnie Cowan, Jackie Doyle-Price, Chris Evans, Rachel Hopkins, Mr David Jones, David Mundell, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Tom Randall, Karin Smyth and John Stevenson be members of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

REGULATORY REFORM COMMITTEE

That Chris Clarkson, Jackie Doyle-Price, Mark Eastwood, Julie Elliott, Mark Garnier, Sir Oliver Heald, Mr Kevan Jones, Conor McGinn, Stephen McPartland, Anthony Mangnall, Gary Sambrook and Karl Turner be members of the Regulatory Reform Committee.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

That Aaron Bell, Chris Clarkson, Katherine Fletcher, Andrew Griffith, Darren Jones, Mark Logan, Carol Monaghan, Chi Onwurah, Graham Stringer and Zarah Sultana be members of the Science and Technology Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Scottish Affairs Committee

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mhairi Black, Andrew Bowie, Deidre Brock, Wendy Chamberlain, Alberto Costa, Jon Cruddas, David Duguid, Sally-Ann Hart, John Lamont and Liz Twist be members of the Scottish Affairs Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

9.43 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): May I start by thanking the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) for moving the motion and congratulate him on his reappointment to the Committee of Selection? I had the privilege of serving with him for a couple of years, but that has now fallen to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson). I wish them all the very best.

There is a little time for a short debate on the appointment of the Scottish Affairs Committee, and we could not let this opportunity pass by without noting the concern and disappointment that many of us on the Opposition Benches share about its proposed composition. Given that the voice of the north has just been heard in such great style in the debate on the revival of the High Speed 2 motion, I would have thought that the Government would want to make northern parts more visible and audible in the House, but that does not seem to be the way of it.

Since 2015, the membership of the Scottish Affairs Committee—like that of its counterparts for Wales and Northern Ireland—has been drawn entirely from Members representing constituents in that relevant nation. Over the years, it has consistently reflected, broadly, the outcome of the general election and political balance in Scotland. But that is not the case with the composition being proposed this evening.

In 2015, there were four SNP Members on the Committee, including the Chair, my hon. Friend—he should be my right hon. Friend—the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), four from the Government Benches and three from the Labour party. The SNP, as we all know, held 56 of 59 Scottish constituencies.

In 2017, there were once again four Members from the Conservative Benches, three from the Labour party, one from the Liberal Democrats, and three from the SNP—again including the Chair. That was fair enough. In the 2017 election, the SNP representation fell, although we were still by far the largest party in Scotland and, indeed, the third largest party in this House, but some of the other parties made up some ground, so fair enough—their representation on the Committee increased.

For the record, in 2010 when the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in coalition, the SNP, then with six seats in the House—a number that might now be familiar to Conservative Members from seats in Scotland—had one seat on the Committee, the Liberal Democrats also had one seat, and the Labour party, which had 41 seats in Scotland, had five seats on the Committee, including the Chair. Just for completeness, in 2005 the figures were Labour six, Conservatives three, SNP one and the Liberal Democrats one.

Tonight we are being asked to approve two Labour Members, one Liberal Democrat Member, three SNP Members, again including the Chair, and five Conservative Members. That is five Conservative Members

on a Committee for a party that only has six members in the country in which the Committee is interested—*[Interruption.]* No, they are not all from Scotland. That is an increase in the number of places from four to five, even though the Conservatives lost more than half of their Members of Parliament in December's election. It will be the largest number of seats held by a single party on this Committee since the 2010 Parliament, and the largest number of seats that a governing party has had since the 2005 Parliament. That seems an awful lot like rewarding the failure of the Conservative party in Scotland at the last election.

Meanwhile, the Scottish National party, which has increased our share of the votes and our number of seats—we now have more seats in Scotland than Labour did in 2010—is left with two places on the Committee in addition to the Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire.

I take this opportunity to gently ask the Government to think again. We have for a long time had a very constructive relationship through the usual channels. That means that it is a bit disappointing when these matters end up on the Floor of the House. The Government need to think very seriously about the message they are sending to voters in Scotland. How does the make-up of this Committee reflect the precious Union and the respect agenda? Where is the partnership of equals when the Government are taking more places on the Committee than they have had for the past 10 years?

I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire for the role that he has played in the Chair over the past five years, because he has worked to try to find consensus and areas of concern for the Committee to work on.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I thank him for that tribute. I do not think it is to do with the way that the Committee is chaired. Why the Committee has been so effective—it is probably the most effective of all the parliamentary Committees, whether in the Scottish Parliament or the Westminster Parliament—is that we are the most reported Committee anywhere in Scotland, and we are the best attended Committee. That is because it sort of reflects the Scotland that we all represent. To do this job effectively, we have to try to look like the nation that we represent, and feel like the representation in this House so that we can do our important job. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees with this, and I am sure that he is already making representations to the Government through the usual channels to try to have this matter addressed so that we, as a Committee, can do our job properly.

Patrick Grady: Yes, it is important that the Committee has that opportunity. The composition of the Committee being proposed tonight is completely out of balance with political reality in Scotland—the political geography and the views of the population as a whole. We are not asking for an SNP majority on the Committee, although that is the kind of thing we would experience under the d'Hondt system used in the Scottish Parliament. The Committee will still have a Unionist majority; it will not, alas, produce a report supporting independence for Scotland, unless with his charisma, alacrity, charm and wit my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire is able to persuade it to do so.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I have had the privilege of serving on the Scottish Affairs Committee for the past couple of years. I agree with my hon. Friend's kind words about our hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and how good he is at bringing our Committee together. Does it not say something about the Government's nervousness about his ability that they are preparing to stuff the Committee in this way?

Patrick Grady: What is surprising is that things have not been like that. We have reached arrangements and worked well together. My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire has been the acting Chief Whip on a number of occasions for the Scottish National party since 2015, and we were able to come to these arrangements, so it is disappointing that this has ended up coming to the Floor of the House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) says, it has been a very effective Committee—so effective that my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire has already been on the front page of *The National* about this precise issue. If Government Front Benchers had read that publication at the weekend, they would have seen this coming and could have avoided this debate on the Floor of the House and the issue of whether we will get to the moment of interruption without a Division.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The SNP won more than 80% of seats in Scotland in the recent general election. The make-up proposed for the Committee does not go even halfway to realising that representation and giving the people of Scotland the voice they should have as a result of that outstanding win.

Patrick Grady: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Scottish National party increased our number of seats in the House—our representation here—by more than a third, yet our representation on the Committee is going to remain static. Meanwhile, the Conservative party's number of seats in Scotland has gone down by more than 50% and its representation is going to increase. That simply denies and defies democracy and absolutely gives the lie to the notion that Scotland has a valuable role and that its voice is going to be heard.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that on the Government Benches there appears to be almost a wilful denial about what happened during the election in December? The Conservative and Unionist party is trying to airbrush away the tremendous gains made by the SNP at its direct cost. Nowhere is that more the case than in the appointments being made to the Committee. Is it respectful to the electorate in Scotland to do such a thing? As I have picked up during more than one debate here, Government Members have a tendency to talk about the SNP as though we are something that happens to Scotland, rather than being people elected by Scotland.

Patrick Grady: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, the Conservative and Unionist parties are over-represented. That is the thing: we are not trying to deny the Unionist parties a majority on the Committee. For the time being at least, this remains a Parliament of the Union. But we have to question what the purpose behind all this is.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Perhaps the non-Scottish members proposed for the Committee have a particular interest in the affairs of Scotland. Is he aware of any particular interest that they have expressed over the past few years of Parliament?

Patrick Grady: Perhaps they have. Looking back at the history of the Committee's membership, it is not completely unusual for the Conservative party in particular to have to populate its spaces on the Committee with Members from outwith Scotland, and we mean absolutely no disrespect to any of those Members from outwith Scotland who have chosen to put their names forward. We are not objecting in any way to any of the individual Members who are being appointed. We are objecting to the proportions—the way in which the numbers have been divvied up—and the fact that the Conservative Government are helping themselves, in a sense.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I was very pleased to have been able to serve on the Committee in the last Parliament, and I am pleased to be nominated to be a Member in the Committee in this Parliament. The hon. Member has made much of the SNP's electoral success and cited the proportion of Members you have as a case for why you should have more Members on the Scottish Affairs Committee. Do you apply the same argument for Committees on devolved policy areas—that is, do you think we should be reducing the number of SNP Members on those Committees on the basis that you do not represent those policy areas here at Westminster?

Mr Speaker: Order. We are in danger of this turning into a private debate. All comments should be directed through the Chair.

Patrick Grady: If the hon. Member looks very carefully, he will see that there are no Scottish National party Members nominated to either the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee or the Education Committee. But there are other Committees, as we have seen through the EVEL process—and as he would have seen if he was present for the grand meeting of the English Parliament within these four hallowed walls just a couple of weeks ago, as we all were, when we were cut out of being able to express our views in the Lobby—which discuss issues that transcend borders; I thought that was part of the point of Union anyway. I do not think it unreasonable for one Member of the third largest party in this House and the third largest party by membership in the United Kingdom to have a say on Select Committees across the House.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an interesting point about participation in the Committees of the House. I served on the Communities and Local Government Committee between 2015 and 2017, and that was useful because of the contribution that Scotland's experience could bring to policy in England. The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) is putting forward a strange kind of Unionism if he would deny Scottish MPs of all types, and Members of the third largest party, a place on these Committees.

Patrick Grady: Precisely; my hon. Friend makes the point for me.

Pete Wishart: I just want to reinforce a point. This has nothing to do with or to say about English Members of Parliament being on the Scottish Affairs Committee; I am looking around the Chamber, and I recognise a couple of English Members who served very diligently on the Committee. The point is that we know that Members of Parliament have pressing concerns locally, and in the course of the past few years the Scottish Affairs Committee has tried to ensure that it meets as much as possible in Scotland to make it accessible, and to ensure that people can come along to experience and listen to its hearings. That is difficult if you represent a constituency based in England where there are other constraints and pressures. I am sure my hon. Friend recognises that.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that comments should be directed through the Chair, and that they should not be having a personal debate.

Patrick Grady: Mr Speaker, I would never dream of doing anything other than speaking through the Chair. One of the advantages of sitting in this position in the Chamber is that there is always direct eye contact as well.

My hon. Friend's comments were exactly right. I pay tribute to him for taking the Scottish Affairs Committee out on the road, and for discussing issues and producing largely consensual reports on important topics of the day—for example, on the post-study work visa, on the oil and gas industry, on agriculture and on digital provision. That is the kind of thing the Scottish Affairs Committee has done over the past five years, since 2015. Compare that with the Scottish Affairs Committee in the 2010-15 Parliament, whose work I have had a look at. I think my favourite report is from 2012 and is entitled, without even a hint of irony, "The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: Do you agree this is a biased question?" That is House of Commons paper No. 1942, published on 8 May 2012. That was what the Scottish Affairs Committee was doing at that time—absolutely demonstrable partisan bashing, politicising the issues of the day and trying to narrow down a proposition that, at the end of the day, 45% of people in Scotland voted for: independence. The Committee could not even bring itself to use that word. What we have had since then is consistent, grown-up, sensible politics under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire.

The Government really do have to consider what they are doing tonight. There are 59 Members from Scotland and 11 members of this Committee. It ought to be possible to compose it in such a way that respects the election result in Scotland and takes into account the make-up of this House, which is what the other Committees for the devolved areas of Wales and Northern Ireland do. Otherwise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire has said previously, the Government will continue to give the impression of doing the SNP's job for us. They cut out Members from Scotland through their farcical EVEL procedures, they refuse to listen to the Scottish Parliament on matters of legislative consent, and now they seek to hijack the Committee in the House that is supposed to consider matters—

10 pm

The debate stood adjourned(Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 43 to 47 together.

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Ruth Cadbury, Lilian Greenwood, Simon Jupp, Robert Largan, Chris Loder, Karl McCartney, Grahame Morris, Gavin Newlands, Greg Smith and Sam Tarry be members of the Transport Committee.

TREASURY COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Rushanara Ali, Mr Steve Baker, Harriett Baldwin, Anthony Browne, Felicity Buchan, Ms Angela Eagle, Liz Kendall, Julie Marson, Alison McGovern and Alison Thewliss be members of the Treasury Committee.

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Tonia Antoniazzi, Simon Baynes, Virginia Crosbie, Geraint Davies, Ben Lake, Anna McMorrin, Robin Millar, Rob Roberts, Dr Jamie Wallis and Beth Winter be members of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Nickie Aiken, Sara Britcliffe, Angela Crawley, Virginia Crosbie, Alex Davies-Jones, Rosie Duffield, Peter Gibson, Kim Johnson, Kate Osborne and Nicola Richards be members of the Women and Equalities Committee.

WORK AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Debbie Abrahams, Shaun Bailey, Siobhan Baillie, Neil Coyle, Steve McCabe, Nigel Mills, Selaine Saxby, Dr Ben Spencer, Chris Stephens and Sir Desmond Swayne be members of the Work and Pensions Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Elgin Marbles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

10 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to debate a subject that has long been of historical interest but has taken on new significance in the current political climate.

The Elgin, or Parthenon, marbles are one of the British Museum's most notorious artefacts. In the early 1800s, Thomas Bruce, the seventh Earl of Elgin, gained access to the temple of the Parthenon and other buildings that comprise the Acropolis in Athens. With a team of assistants, Thomas Bruce removed many items of significant cultural interest, including 57 slabs from the frieze of the Parthenon. The excavation was completed in 1812, and the marbles were eventually sold to the British Government in 1816 and placed in the British Museum.

The legality of the excavations that Elgin performed remains fraught with controversy to this day. At the time of the excavations, Greece was ruled by the Ottoman empire, and the Parthenon itself was used as a military fort by the Ottomans. The vulnerable position that that imperial occupation placed on Greece, coupled with Elgin's privileged position, made it easier for him to take the action that he took in removing the figures, metopes and frieze panels from the Parthenon. Elgin claim to have obtained a firman, or written permit, from the sultan to access the Acropolis in carrying out the removal of sections of the Parthenon frieze, as well as other parts of the Acropolis. Some allege that Elgin bribed the Turkish authorities to obtain permission to enter the Acropolis, while others suggest that the exchange of gifts between Elgin and the sultan was customary at the time, given Elgin's position as British ambassador to Constantinople.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way; I asked before the debate for her permission to intervene. Does she not agree that the significance of having the Elgin marbles in situ in the British Museum is that that gives a taste of, and indeed encourages people to make the journey to, historically and culturally rich Greece, particularly Athens, to see more, and that this must be part of any discussions regarding any return of the Elgin marbles to the people there?

Margaret Ferrier: I agree that many visitors will have enjoyed a visit to the British Museum and marvelled at these fantastic sculptures, but the hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to discover that I believe they should actually be repatriated to Athens where they could be appreciated in full in their original context. However, I thank him for his intervention.

The only record of the firman that we have is an Italian translation of the document, and the veracity of the document remains heavily disputed. Although a Select Committee of the House of Commons eventually voted to purchase the marbles from Elgin in 1816, the stand-out feature of the Committee's questioning of Elgin was the vagueness of his responses regarding the permission given to take the Parthenon sculptures. According to Geoffrey Robertson QC's excellent book

[Margaret Ferrier]

“Who Owns History?” Elgin was unable to produce the firman during the Committee’s consideration of the purchase of the marbles and, astonishingly, told the Committee that he never kept his own personal copy of the permissions he was given.

Those admissions by Elgin himself led many people to denounce his actions in taking the marbles, even among those who supported their purchase by the British Government. Lord Byron was one of the most vociferous critics of Elgin, denouncing his actions in the strongest terms:

“Dull is the eye that will not weep to see

Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed

By British hands, which it had best behaved

To guard those relics ne’er to be restored”.

Elgin’s actions were not the only source of controversy at the time of the sale of the marbles to the British Government. The public’s reaction to Elgin receiving £35,000 from the Government—around £3.5 million in today’s money—was understandably angry. In the same year that the British Government purchased the marbles, a cartoon by George Cruikshank depicted a satirical figure of John Bull purchasing the marbles while his children cried out for bread. That is not the first time that the House of Commons has made decisions that benefit the privileged few at the expense of the many.

Whether or not the firman is authentic and the means used to obtain it were dubious or illegal, the legal position on the marbles has, to date, favoured their retention in the UK. The British Museum Act 1963 is the primary piece of legislation here, and it makes it clear that the objects and collections of the British Museum are held by its trustees. Disposal or selling of objects in the British Museum collection is forbidden except in limited circumstances, which include printed materials where duplicates exist or objects that were illegally looted by the Nazis.

The general principle of that legislation and subsequent amendments to it is designed to protect cultural assets and provide the proper independence between Government and museum trustees. Because the legislation is drawn up in that manner, the Greek Government have been disinclined to put the legal position to the test in international courts. However, there is scope for the British Museum Act to be amended to cover the specific circumstances of the repatriation of the Parthenon marbles. I believe that potential amendments to legislation should form part of a process of mediation and dialogue between the Greek Government and the UK Government regarding the future of the Parthenon sculptures.

I turn to some of the other arguments that are often used to justify the Elgin marbles staying in Britain. Those who argue for retention of the marbles use cultural preservation as a key support. Their argument, encapsulated in the universal museum declaration, effectively places immediate cultural preservation above considerations of the circumstances in which treasures and other artefacts of major cultural significance were acquired. Some go as far as to suggest that Elgin’s actions were heroic and that the marbles would have been destroyed had he not acted in the way that he did by bringing them to Britain.

I have some sympathy with the idea that, had they not been acquired by museums outwith their countries of origin, many of the world’s cultural treasures would have been lost. Sadly, we have seen some despicable acts of cultural vandalism in recent years. In Syria, we have seen Daesh’s wanton destruction of parts of Palmyra, the great mosque of Aleppo and the old city of Damascus, which are just a few of the culturally significant sites that have suffered in that brutal conflict. But to compare what has happened in Syria with the proposed repatriation of the Elgin marbles would be to compare apples and oranges. The parts of the Parthenon frieze that have been retained in Greece have survived two world wars, a civil war, a military dictatorship and bankruptcy of the Greek state.

Regardless of views on whether the marbles should be returned to Greece or remain in Britain, it is reasonable to suggest that they would be preserved and secured for many years to come. Both Greece and the UK can offer outstanding museum facilities to showcase the marbles, and the new Acropolis Museum has already demonstrated how that would work in practice. The argument on cultural preservation comes down to one question: artistically, does it make sense for the Parthenon marbles to be reunited, placing them in one location where they could be appreciated and admired the world over? That is not only the right thing to do; it would enable the marbles to be appreciated in the original context in which they were sculpted.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am enjoying the history lesson, 204 years after the Select Committee of this House thoroughly investigated the acquisition and found it to be totally legal. However, the hon. Lady says the marbles could be better appreciated in Athens. Why does she think they could be better appreciated in Athens? Last year, the British Museum had over 6 million visitors, viewing 50,000 items, including the Elgin marbles, out of a total collection of 8 million objects, for free, while the Parthenon Museum in Athens, which destroyed many layers of archaeology in its construction, attracted 1.8 million visitors at a cost. Those marbles are seen in an international, classical, archaic Hellenistic context in the British Museum that is just not available in Greece. They are possessions of the world, and the British Museum, as a world museum, is the best place for everyone to appreciate them, rather than this petty nationalism about sending them back to a city state that does not exist any more.

Mr Speaker: Order. That is taking complete advantage, Mr Loughton, and you should know better, given how many years you have been here.

Margaret Ferrier: I think the only answer to that is, how arrogant! How arrogant to feel that we are the only ones who can house the Parthenon sculptures. I am sure many Greeks will be listening to that this evening.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Margaret Ferrier: I am sorry, but I need to make some progress.

As I said, this would enable the marbles to be appreciated in the original context in which they were sculpted. That is perhaps best summed up in the poetry of Constantine Cavafy:

“It is not dignified in a great nation to reap profit from half-truths and half-rights;

Honesty is the best policy, and honesty in the case of the Elgin Marbles means restitution.”

Campaigns to return the Elgin marbles to Greece have been a feature of the cultural landscape for many years, with many celebrities backing the campaign. Most memorably, the original host of “Fifteen to One”, the late William G. Stewart, delivered a speech in favour of their return in a 2001 episode, after all the contestants were eliminated in the first round of the competition. Although a popular daytime quiz show might not have been the best place to air his views, William G. Stewart’s actions highlighted people’s strength of feeling towards the acquisition of these incredible sculptures.

When public opinion on the return of the marbles has been tested, there has been consistent support for returning them to Greece. The most recent opinion poll by YouGov showed that more people in Britain favoured the return of the marbles than opposed it—by a margin of 37% to 23%. Proponents of the reunification of the marbles have rightly pointed out that there is a moral case for their return. In an Intelligence Squared television debate, which is available on YouTube for any hon. Members interested in the subject, both sides of the debate acknowledged that the circumstances in which the Elgin marbles were returned to Greece would be emblematic of Britain’s status in the world.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): This is ever so slightly tangential, but my hon. Friend mentioned Intelligence Squared, and it famously hosted a debate between Professor Mary Beard and the man who is now Prime Minister. Is my hon. Friend as perturbed as I am, given the important role that the British Museum has in this debate, by reports at the weekend that the Government are trying to keep Professor Beard off the board of the British Museum, perhaps because of her remain views? Does she agree that the Minister might want to respond to that in her closing remarks?

Margaret Ferrier: It is very disappointing to hear of the treatment of Professor Mary Beard. It reveals a crucial flaw in the argument against the return of the marbles, but it would be entirely within the UK Government’s power to appoint trustees who supported repatriation. However, I understand that the British Museum is going to take matters into its own hands and appoint her anyway.

Those in favour of repatriation of the marbles suggested that returning the marbles to Greece would portray Britain as a benign influence in the world, keen to do right by others. Those in favour of retention said that their return would mark the decline of Britain’s status as a global power. Either way, repatriating them would mark a sea change in how Britain was viewed in the world, but handled correctly, it could demonstrate that Britain was willing to ditch the colonial mindset for good. For me, the most prescient comment in the debate came from the former Liberal Democrat Member for St Ives, Andrew George, who remarked:

“We can persist in clinging on to the Greek marbles, as excuses wear thin, until we’re forced in some kind of cringe-making and rather shameful climbdown to hand them over in some decades to come.”

That brings us to the twin questions, why hold this debate and why raise this issue now? Last week, the UK Government published their much-awaited mandate for trade negotiations with the EU. Like many of my colleagues on the SNP Benches, I fear the economic impact on my constituents of a future trade deal with the EU.

Brexit also reveals this Tory Government’s delusions of grandeur, as it will expose the power imbalance that we face in negotiations with the EU²⁷. The EU’s negotiating mandate contains an additional clause that calls on both parties in the negotiations to

“address issues relating to the return or restitution of unlawfully removed cultural objects to their country of origin”.

It is utterly apparent to me that Brexit will fuel demands for Britain to return the Elgin marbles to Greece. Greece’s Culture Minister has left us in no doubt about their position on the marbles, saying that the

“right conditions have been created for their permanent return”.

Next year marks 200 years since the Greek uprising against Ottoman rule, so it should be of no surprise to Ministers that Athens will be stepping up its demands for the return of the marbles. No doubt the Minister will boast of the strength of the UK’s negotiating position in the talks to come with the EU. I also expect her to repeat the same intransigent rhetoric that has been a hallmark of the Government’s position on the status of the Parthenon sculptures. As we have seen from this Tory Government throughout the Brexit process, however, that novel imperialist mindset is akin to the emperor’s new clothes.

I fear that the UK Government are in for a nasty surprise when we get down to the nitty-gritty of trade talks, and calls for the Elgin marbles to return to Greece may prove irresistible as negotiations drag on throughout this year. Whether by intention or by accident, the UK Government might well lose their marbles much sooner than any of us anticipated.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): I thank the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) for securing this debate on an important topic. She has made a passionate case—I never anticipated for a second that the story of the Parthenon sculptures would take us as far as “Fifteen to One” and YouTube, and I congratulate her on the scope of her argument. The underlying question about where cultural objects belong is not only important but a highly complex issue.

In the UK, museums have a legal responsibility to care for their collections, and they operate independently from Government. It is therefore up to individual museums and their trustees how they respond to restitution claims. Legislation prevents our national museums from removing objects from the national collection, although as the hon. Lady articulated, there are two exceptions to that legal position. One such exemption is Nazi-looted art. In 2000, the Government established the Spoliation Advisory Panel to consider claims for the return of cultural objects lost during the Nazi era, and since then 13 cultural objects have been returned to families. In 2009, legislation was introduced to allow national museums to return items in that way.

[*Caroline Dinéage*]

We also have legal measures in place so that human remains under 1,000 years old can be returned to their ancestors around the world. Since the introduction of that measure, there have been a number of successful repatriations of human remains from our national museums, notably from the Natural History Museum, which is in the process of returning the remains of 442 individuals to Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. Recently, museums have explored other circumstances in which it may be necessary to return objects in their care. For example, at the end of last year, Manchester Museum, which is not subject to primary legislation on its collection, chose to return 43 sacred aboriginal objects to Australia.

I stress, however, that in all those cases, the long-standing principle and legal position in the UK, which has been supported by successive Governments, is that politicians do not interfere in the management of museum collections. That means that in the UK, all decisions related to the collection and the deaccessioning or restitution of artefacts are for each museum and its trustees, within their legal obligations.

We are none the less committed to supporting our museums across the sector in delivering their duties. For example, to further support museums on this particular matter, our national development agency for museums and cultural property, Arts Council England—it is sponsored by my Department—is working to refresh sector guidelines on the restitution of cultural property. It will create a comprehensive and practical resource for museums to support them in dealing confidently and proactively with all aspects of restitution. It will also provide a signpost for support where necessary.

In the particular case of the Parthenon sculptures, which the hon. Lady raises today, I recognise the very strong desire of some, including the Greek Government, to see the sculptures reunified in the Acropolis Museum in Athens. There are extremely passionate views on both sides of the debate—we have seen examples of that in the Chamber this evening—and that demonstrates the cultural importance of these sculptures. They are currently on display in the British Museum. They were legally acquired under the laws pertaining at the time. As per the situation I have just set out, the trustees of the museum are legally responsible for managing the collections in their care. The Government have great faith in their ability to do so.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Does the Minister not agree that, notwithstanding the helpful context about how these decisions are taken and, crucially, without the interference of Government, that it was a black mark and a dark day when the British Museum refused to engage with UNESCO over a possible mediation on a location for these artefacts? Would it not be better, if such an opportunity arose again, for the museum to take a much more proactive and co-operative approach to any discussion?

Caroline Dinéage: As I have set out, it is very much the responsibility of the museum to manage its collections as it sees fit. We have faith in its ability to do so and the trustees believe very strongly that the museum is the very best place for the sculptures to be seen. That is

based on the context of their rich contribution to the history of humanity. The Government fully support the position they have taken.

The hon. Lady raised the speculation that the future of the Parthenon sculptures is implicated in our discussion with the EU on our future trade agreement. The UK's position remains unchanged: the Parthenon sculptures are the legal responsibility of the British Museum. That is not up for discussion as part of our trade negotiations.

We are very proud of the achievements of our world-class national museums. They do a fantastic job of caring for their collections on behalf of the nation, and they ensure that they are seen by a wide and diverse audience for free. Four of our national museums are in the top 10 most visited in the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned, the British Museum alone welcomes over 6 million visitors a year. Those 6 million people see the Parthenon sculptures in an unparalleled world history context.

The public also benefit from the national collections beyond the walls of these historic institutions. In 2017-18, the UK's national museums lent over 69,000 objects to over 2,000 venues around the world for exhibitions and displays. Those loans were seen by over 32 million people. Technology has also revolutionised the way in which the museum sector engages with the public. Through digitisation projects, much of our national collection is now available online, making it more widely accessible to communities everywhere. Our museums are dedicated to making their collections accessible, so that as many people as possible can experience and engage with them.

These collections are also the focus of scholarship and research, and the national museums are internationally recognised as leaders in their academic fields. They partner with experts from universities, museums and other organisations to advance our knowledge of history and science. In 2017-18, the national museums collaborated with over 1,000 UK and international academic and research institutions. It is not an exaggeration to say that this work can change the world, from significant scientific breakthroughs to conferences and exhibitions that share new knowledge. Much of that research is rightly focused on the provenance of museum collections. Some individual items have incredibly complicated histories and it is important that we do everything we can to understand that. Museums have rightly committed a lot of time to this type of research, and they take their due diligence in regard to their collections seriously.

The question of provenance, as the hon. Lady says, can be very complicated, but the Government take it very seriously and work with the police and relevant authorities to ensure that stolen or looted cultural objects do not enter the country in the first place. We are committed to combating the illicit trade of cultural property and to ensuring that objects of dubious provenance do not find their way into our museum collections. This is demonstrated through our international efforts to protect cultural heritage as a signatory of several international conventions.

The UK is a world leader in the fields of culture and heritage. Our museums co-operate extensively with partner institutions around the world on the promotion, protection and circulation of their collections. This sharing of

knowledge and collections has enabled them to be proactive in international engagement and lead programmes that promote collaborative training, research and dialogue.

In the case of the British Museum and its wider relationship with its Greek counterparts, it continues a long tradition of fruitful collaboration. A curator from the Thessaloniki museum will join the museum's annual global training programme this summer, and the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens will borrow a 15th-century print for an exhibition next year to mark the bicentenary of the Greek war of independence in 2021. Prior to that, the museum has lent several objects to an exhibition in the Acropolis Museum and presented a newly commissioned replica of a lion-head water spout from the Parthenon to the Acropolis Restoration Service. The museum has worked with Greek colleagues to research the Parthenon frieze, including through the use of 3D image scanning.

Visually impaired visitors to the British Museum can now enjoy a new touch-tour using casts of the Parthenon sculptures, and from March 2021 the museum will hold

a free exhibition of historic drawings from its collection that illustrate the long and complex history of the Parthenon as a church, temple and mosque. The trustees have never been asked for a loan of the Parthenon sculptures by the Greek Government, only for their permanent transfer to Athens. As the museum has stated publicly, the trustees would of course consider any request for any part of the collection to be borrowed and then returned, provided that the borrowing institution acknowledges the British Museum's ownership and that the normal loan conditions are satisfied.

The Government support the position that the Parthenon sculptures should remain in the British Museum, where they are accessible to millions of people for free in the context of world history.

Question put and agreed to.

10.26 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 2 March 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Contracts for Difference

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Minister for COP26 (Alok Sharma): I am today confirming details of the next round of the contracts for difference scheme, which opens in 2021. The latest round will be open to renewable technologies including onshore wind and solar, with proposals to introduce floating offshore wind. This could see millions more homes powered by clean energy by the end of the decade, and a boost for the supply chain, adding to the 20,600 jobs and the £628 million of exports each year already supported by the renewables industry.

Today my Department is publishing a consultation on proposed changes to the contracts for difference scheme. We have made huge strides to decarbonise our energy system, moving the power sector away from its reliance on fossil fuels towards a cleaner, greener future. In 2018 the collective share of UK electricity generation from renewable sources was 33%. Our target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050 requires the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

Delivering net zero will require change across the whole of society, and I am therefore more mindful than ever of the importance of meaningful engagement with local communities on the measures in this transition that affect them the most. Local communities will have a more effective voice on developments that impact them, through proposals for tough new guidance on community engagement for developers of onshore wind across Great Britain, also announced today. They will have a definitive say on whether projects are allowed to proceed. It will remain the case that no English onshore wind project can proceed without the consent of the local community.

This challenge means we will need to make the most of multiple technologies available. 2020 is the year of climate action and this decision is a crucial part of the Government plans to go further and faster in tackling climate change. In the same manner I will be encouraging other countries to increase their own ambition ahead of COP26 later this year.

Today's consultation outlines proposals to ensure the contracts for difference scheme can support the increased ambition required, including proposals to build on our world-leading position on offshore wind by introducing floating offshore wind into the scheme as well as proposals to support our renewable supply chain to enhance productivity and increase competitiveness.

I will place in the Libraries of both Houses, copies of the "Contracts for Difference for Low Carbon Electricity Generation - Consultation on Proposed Amendments to the Scheme" which sets out further information on proposals for engaging communities.

[HCWS139]

TREASURY

Van Benefit and Car and Van Fuel Benefit Order 2020

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

The van benefit charge and fuel benefit charges for cars and vans will be uprated by the consumer prices index from 6 April 2020. The uprate will take effect as follows:

Van benefit charge will uprate from £3,430 to £3,490.

Car fuel benefit charge multiplier will uprate from £24,100 to £24,500.

Van fuel benefit charge will uprate from £655 to £666.

This measure is being announced outside of the normal fiscal process to ensure employers and HMRC are given enough time to prepare for the uprate, ahead of the 2020-21 tax year.

The Government will lay the statutory instrument to uprate these charges before the House today. A tax information and impact note (TIIN) will be published at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/tax-information-and-impact-notes-tiins.

[HCWS137]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Health and Disability Assessment Services

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):

I would like to update the House on the Department's plans, under the health transformation programme, to reform assessment services for employment and support allowance, universal credit (UC) and personal independence payment (PIP). In March 2019, we announced that we would transition towards an integrated assessment service, with a single digital platform developed by DWP. Today I am pleased to announce the next steps in these plans, which are a key part of this Government's commitment to transform how we support disabled people.

Our claimants include some of the most vulnerable in society and so our approach is based on delivering this complex and important transformation safely and carefully. To that end, we will initially develop the new service on a small scale in a defined part of the country, a transformation area.

For claimants in this transformation area, assessments will be conducted by the DWP, rather than outsourced to providers. This will give us the flexibility to explore new ideas including:

trialling better ways of carrying out face-to-face assessments;

how to triage more effectively so that only those people who need a face-to-face assessment will have to undergo one;

how to make it easier for claimants to understand the evidence they need to provide and why;

how to remove the need for claimants to give the same information twice;

how to ensure that claimants are aware of the whole range of support available to them both from DWP and more widely.

Our ambition in developing the new service is that it captures the experience and insights of those who use the service or who represent users of the service. We have already acted on this and will continue to drive forward engagement on the future of the health and disability agenda through our upcoming Green Paper.

I can also inform the House that today we will be issuing two prior information notices to advise the market that the Department is seeking to procure contracts to deliver PIP and WCA assessments from 1 August 2021 to ensure continuity of service when the current contracts end on 31 July. The transformation area will start in

autumn 2021 and operate alongside these contracts. We will work with the successful providers to ensure continuous improvement in their service, including how developments in the transformation area can benefit delivery by contracted providers.

[HCWS138]

Petition

Monday 2 March 2020

OBSERVATION

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Chineham Post Office

The petition of residents of Basingstoke,

Declares that action must be taken concerning the recent closure of Chineham Post Office Branch and the loss of vital services for local residents as a result of the Old Basing PO operator also withdrawing in recent years.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to urge Post Office Ltd, Telson Capital LLP and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council to ensure that Chineham residents have access to vital Post Office services and priority is given to opening a branch as part of the new development at Chineham Shopping Centre.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mrs Maria Miller, Official Report, 15 January 2020; Vol. 669, c. 1120.]

[P002549]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):

The Government value and recognise the important role that the Post Office plays for communities such as Basingstoke and across the UK. This is why we are committed to safeguarding the Post Office network and

protecting existing rural services. Since 2010, the number of branches in the network has been at its most stable for decades, at over 11,500.

While the Post Office is publicly owned, it is a commercial business. The Government set the strategic direction for the Post Office—to maintain a national network accessible to all and to do so more sustainably for the taxpayer—and allows the company the commercial freedom to deliver this strategy as an independent business.

In relation to Chineham Post Office, my officials have sought insight from Post Office Limited (POL). They have informed me that this branch was closed in August 2019 following the resignation of the operator (McColl's) and withdrawal of premises for Post Office use.

As this is beyond the control of POL, they have assured us that they are continuing to seek a solution for the area and are committed to providing services in Chineham. POL's local teams continue to look at options which will enable them to restore permanent services to the area. POL explained that some of the steps that they have taken include advertising the opportunity following the resignation of the previous operator. However, POL informed officials that there has been little interest from local retailers. POL continue to engage with potential operators in order to restore services.

Let me assure you that POL is committed to ensuring that the community has access to the services that post office provides. They have informed officials that their External Relations Manager contacted your MP, the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller) on 16 January to confirm that they are seeking a solution and are engaged with a potential new operator. POL will continue to communicate with your MP and the community in relation to any changes as they continue to work to find an alternative operator.

The sustainability and future success of the Post Office network continues to remain of the utmost importance to this Government. We will continue to honour our commitments so that Post Offices' can thrive and remain at the heart of our rural and urban communities for years to come.

Ministerial Correction

Monday 2 March 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Maternity Services: East Kent

The following is an extract from the urgent question on Maternity Services: East Kent on 13 February 2020.

Victoria Prentis: All too often when a baby dies, the shutters come down in a trust and we cannot get the answers that we need. Will the Minister—who is providing great leadership in this area—meet members of the all-party group on baby loss to discuss how best we can use MBRRACE-UK, HSIB and other investigators to get to the bottom of what happens? Will she also think about making maternal deaths a never event?

Ms Dorries: I fear that you will shout at me again, Mr Speaker, if I try to answer my hon. Friend's question fully, because I agree with everything that she has said. Maternal deaths absolutely must become a never event, and we must focus on making pre-eclampsia and post-partum haemorrhage, which lead to such deaths, never

events. I went to the first meeting of the APPG on baby loss and, as my hon. Friend knows, I am always happy to go and hear anything that anyone has to say about this issue that will help our work in trying to improve maternity standards.

[Official Report, 13 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 988.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis).

The correct response should have been:

Ms Dorries: I fear that you will shout at me again, Mr Speaker, if I try to answer my hon. Friend's question fully, because I agree with everything that she has said. **I will look into whether maternal deaths can become a never event, and, if possible,** we must focus on making pre-eclampsia and post-partum haemorrhage, which lead to such deaths, never events. I went to the first meeting of the APPG on baby loss and, as my hon. Friend knows, I am always happy to go and hear anything that anyone has to say about this issue that will help our work in trying to improve maternity standards.

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Monday 2 March 2020

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